

INNOVATIONS IN TEACHER EDUCATION:
THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

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During the meeting of the ICET Board of Directors last year in Washington, D.C., after STOU had agreed to act as host of the Thirty-First World Assembly, there was considerable discussion about the theme of the 1984 Assembly. As host of this Assembly, I was asked by ICET to take part in these deliberations. Choosing a theme for an annual academic conference such as the ICET World Assembly is clearly not an easy matter. In fact, it seems to be harder than serving as host of the conference itself. This is because ICET has a World Assembly each year. The subject matter that is chosen as the theme must be in the nature of a global problem since ICET has members in every region of the world. It must be a topic which has never before been used as a theme, or, if it has been previously used, it must be sufficiently removed in time from the theme of that previous Assembly. It must be concerned with education for teaching which is the target area of ICET. And most important of all, it must be a topic which ICET members are interested in. Otherwise there won't be enough participants for the conference to live up to its name of a World Assembly. After considering many possible themes in accord with the criteria just mentioned, we finally decided on "Innovations in Teacher Education: The Pursuit of Excellence." Both ICET and the host were satisfied with this theme because there were two words -- the key words of the theme -- that we liked very much, even though we weren't quite sure exactly what they meant. These words are "innovations" and "excellence."

When we had finally agreed on the theme for the Thirty-First ICET World Assembly, the next step was selecting the topics for five days of discussion that would conform to the theme. Before doing this, however, we spent considerable time trying to define the word "innovations." Finally, we agreed that we would use the following working definition of "innovation" for this World Assembly.

Innovation is taken to mean an ongoing activity or practice which is new and which is being implemented in a teacher education system, having a potential for transfer to other settings.

Within the framework of this definition five innovative areas were chosen as topics for the Assembly, namely:

1. Innovations in Preservice Teacher Education
2. Innovations in Inservice Teacher Education

INTRODUCTION

3. Innovations in Educational Technology
4. Innovations in Distance Teaching
5. Innovations in Regional and International Cooperation

This past decade could be considered the decade of educational reform. The provision of education in various countries throughout the world was criticized for failing to respond to the needs of societies that were rapidly changing. It was attacked as inefficient, inferior in quality, and not sufficiently development oriented for the modern world. Commissions were set up to seriously study, analyze, and offer guidelines for educational reform. Reports dealing with educational reform appeared at both the national and the regional level, the latter of course dealing with matters international in scope. In this region, Southeast Asia, major educational reforms took place in such countries as Singapore and Thailand. At the regional level, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) initiated a cooperative project to make education more development oriented. Whenever there is educational reform, the matter of teacher education is inevitably an important component and there are always proposals for reform in this area. One clear example of this appears in the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education of the United States of America entitled, "A Nation at Risk," which points out the following:

The Commission found that not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement Too many teachers are being drawn from the bottom quarter of graduating high school and college students. . . . The teacher preparation curriculum is weighted heavily with courses in educational methods, at the expense of subjects to be taught.(1, p. 22)

This Commission proposed reform in teacher training, emphasizing the following:

Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria.(1, p. 30)

Regardless of whether this analysis is valid, at the very least it does call our attention to the critical problem of teacher education and illustrates how the same problem exists in many different countries.

Another example of education reform is the cooperative project known as the ASEAN Development Education Project (ADEP). One of the five components of this Project concerns teacher education reform. The five ASEAN countries -- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand -- agree on the following points:

1. Teacher education has a key role to play in improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels. Changes in curricula in accordance with the needs of development education cannot be successfully implemented without appropriately trained and competent teachers to adapt to new challenges. At present all five ASEAN member countries expend tremendous resources on inservice teacher education programmes with somewhat uncertain effectiveness, and with little end in sight of teachers that need to be retrained or updated.
2. This situation demands a closer look into preservice teacher education to find out if anything could be done to ensure that teachers will continue to learn and grow in professional competency in accordance with the new economic and social changes of the times.
3. It is realized that very little attention has been given to the preparation of teacher educators or to reorient existing teacher educators to redirect their efforts to improve their training capabilities. There is now an urgent need to review existing teacher education programmes and seek better and more efficient methods and strategies relevant to ASEAN educational values and goals.(2)

It is generally accepted that the quality of the people is an important factor in the development of a country. And the quality of the people depends on the quality and effectiveness of the education provided. This, in turn, is likely to depend on the quality of the teachers and the innovations employed in educational reform. Thus reform in teacher education must be emphasized, with importance attached both to the system and the process. In an age such as the present, in which there has been considerable progress both in the academic and the technological realms, more innovation and technological advance have been applied to the field of education than in any previous era. Thus it is most heartening that ICET has selected innovations in teacher education as the theme of this World Assembly. I firmly believe that the exchange of views and experiences related to the five areas of innovation that will be featured in this Thirty-First ICET World Assembly will lead to the educational excellence that we are all so earnestly pursuing.

References

1. A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.
2. Report of the First Meeting of ASEAN Ministers of Education, Manila, Philippines, December 1977.