

In-Service Teacher Training

Rights And Obligations

THE world as a whole is now evolving so rapidly that teacher, like their counterparts in most other professions, have to face the fact that their initial training is no longer sufficient. Throughout their careers, they will need to update and improve their knowledge and their techniques. They also need to develop in their students the attitudes and skills these require to build up their knowledge.

It is not easy nowadays to avoid having to adapt to different life cycles, where study, work and leisure are no longer separate but intermingled, and where life-long-education will be the norm. The traditional role of the teacher is therefore changing in character. Nowadays he is expected to play the role of a moral and educational guide who can help students find their way in a constantly changing society. The later need to be made more independent by acquiring the intellectual tools they need to "learn to learn". Teachers were probably not prepared by their initial training, however, to take up this new challenge.

According to one of the nine recommendations produced by the 45th International Conference on Education, which was held last October, in-service training should be considered both as a right and as an obligation for all educational staff. Further training is also a way of enhancing and increasing respect for this profession, which UNESCO considers to be the most important in the world.

Continuing training in the process of modernization

The quality of teaching is determined just as much if not more by the continuing training of teachers as by their initial training. The traditional continuing training scenario, whereby teachers follow courses outside their establishment, has proved to be only to a certain extent. It is time in fact to encourage teachers to organize their own further programmes within their institutions on the basis of requirements or give themselves identified social approach certainly the industrialized countries are gaining ground in complex countries. It has thus become a place for teachers to gain training at their places

of work in a number of far eastern countries as well as in some African and Latin American countries.

In the developing countries, the subjects of these programmes are often selected in the light of the gaps left in initial training and they tend to lay the emphasis on teaching techniques. There is a growing tendency in many regions, however, to experiment with new methods of in-service training. This policy reflects the new concerns of educational systems in such areas as the environment, health, international relations, information technology and the search for a solution to other so-called global problems.

The tendency is to develop continuing training programmes as part of school reforms, especially in developing countries, where school-based in-service programmes are often restricted to rural areas or to urban schools for underprivileged sectors of the population.

In the industrialized countries, further training courses are held on a regular and extended basis (for instance, twice a week throughout the school year), whereas in developing countries, training is often concentrated in a few days only. In this case, participants are expected to pass on their newly acquired knowledge to their colleagues. One advantage of this method is that it is less costly.

More creative methods, such as simulation, brainstorming and role play have mostly been restricted to industrialized countries, whereas the teachers in developing countries generally attend seminars, which are organized beforehand and which are followed by discussions among the teachers. In order to encourage more creative practices in developing countries, UNESCO has launched strategies such as supplying kits of ideas and teaching material.

Distance teaching has also emerged as a significant method of training teachers, especially in developing countries, where distance education is already used to improve professional skills. In this respect, UNESCO might extend its cooperation in the field with governmental and non-governmental international organizations. The participants at the 45th International Conference on Education considered that UNESCO should give priority to the interna-

tional distance training network.

In order to improve the quality of primary school teachers, the National Continuing Training Centre of the Central African Republic has launched a distance training programme by radio. This training is intended especially for teachers who have received no (or little) initial or continuing training. These teachers, who have been left to themselves for too long are exposed to atrophy on a personal level and to obsolescence of their knowledge and skills. Training can also prepare teachers in these categories for professional examinations and competitions, which will improve their career prospects in the longer term.

An obstacle race

Although in-service training is generally seen as an effective tool for reforming the education system, countries are not all equally equipped to put this ideal into practice.

What is striking is that the professional attitude of teachers is often extremely sceptical with regard to any innovation in the educational sector. And yet needless to say without the active participation of teachers any such innovation is doomed to failure.

Economic factors are also an obstacle in many cases, in both developing and the more industrialized countries. Education budgets have diminished considerably in the 1980s and 1990s and further training programmes on a national scale are costly, at least in the short term.

Furthermore, democratic systems tend to be more inclined to launch training programmes locally, in so far as these are related to a decentralization of the educational system, since they delegate authority to individual schools and their teachers. In Brazil, for instance, the first school-based continuing training programmes were created in the 1980s, by the first administration to be democratically elected by the State of Rio de Janeiro.

A further problem is that school systems, regardless of where they are situated, are no longer in tune with current realities. Student groups are much more diversified than they used to be. New difficulties have appeared related to cultural, ethnic and social integration. The role of

the family has declined and with the increase in unemployment and poverty, students are unable to acquire the books and equipment they need to improve their schooling.

After spending five years in one of the most troublesome and poverty-stricken suburbs of Paris, in a school where social tensions have led to an explosive situation, 34-year old Isabelle is now discouraged. Many students go about armed and attacks on teacher occur daily. Isabelle teaches French to younger aged 11 and 12, many of whom cannot read or write and have a poor command of the language. They come from very different cultural backgrounds (some 30 nationalities are represented in the school). Isabelle sees no solution: "I do what I can, but I am a modern language teacher, not a psychologist or a sociologist..." And she adds that her training had in no way prepared her for such tough classes, nor for the social tragedy which lies at the root of the problems.

In many countries, moreover, teachers have to exercise their calling among specific population groups (such as refugees, street children, delinquents, women from traditional societies, etc.) or they have to work in difficult conditions (for instance, in remote, mountainous or rural areas). In this respect, armed conflicts constitute a particularly troublesome factor. The teachers in fact are little or not at all prepared to work in such difficult types of situations.

Organizing initial and continuing training in such areas, with the support of professional and psychological aid networks, would be one possible way of helping the teachers who work there.

Future outlook

Despite the shortage of resources, a shift of in-service training programmes to the schools themselves should be encouraged in developing countries. Making the schools responsible for the development of education has been the keystone of educational reforms in industrialized countries in recent decades. In the longer term, therefore, far from being a superfluous luxury, school-based continuing training programmes will become a national necessity.

(UNESCO)