

Reflections on Teacher Education in Papua New Guinea: Issues and Concerns

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Introduction

The educational history of Papua New Guinea (PNG) documents numerous cases of innovative efforts by educational planners and administrators to improve the quality of teacher education programmes. Many committees and commissions have repeatedly stressed the significance and impact of teachers and of teacher education programmes for PNG's education system and development (Wedgewood 1945, Foot 1962, Brown 1972). They have emphasized that the advancement of the country and of its educational standards are dependent on the availability and quality of its teachers and their education.

Several teacher education issues are discussed in this article and possible options are offered as future strategies. These include quality and quantity of output, institutional philosophies and missions, professional programme rivalries among teacher educators, and the career interests of teachers.

Quality and Quantity of Output

Guthrie (1980) reported that a common problem faced by secondary teachers, especially diplomates from the former Goroka Teachers' College, was a lack of subject content knowledge to enhance their advanced pedagogical skills.

Until recently, similar cases could be quoted for community school teachers. The admission criterion to a primary teacher education programme was limited to Grade 10 School Certificate. Grade 12 matriculation remains the minimum entry qualification to secondary teacher education programmes. Given such limitations and their being compounded by entrenched behaviouristic and didactic forms of

teaching as noted by Webster in this edition, and other non-intentional dysfunctional practices (see McLaughlan, this edition) in the system, quality teacher output must remain an outstanding teacher education issue for the future.

Similarly, the call for an adequate supply of teachers for primary and secondary schools continues to recur in recent reviews and reports on teacher education (PNG - Australia Development Education Program Report 1994 Turner 1994) Mulford and Solon 1995). They summarise that current output from teacher education institutions is inadequate to fully service current system needs and must substantially improve to respond to forecasted demands.

Institutional Philosophy and Mission

Varying philosophies and missions of teacher education institutions in the country pose significant challenges for educational planners. Eight of the nine community teachers' colleges are governed and financed by various church agencies with special agency identities and missions. Their philosophies may not fully reflect government policies or agenda. Not all secular objectives may be welcomed and encouraged in church-run institutions. The issue of cost and institutional efficiency, as opposed to the development of Christian doctrinal principles in teachers, may not be a dominant issue in the planning of multitudes of small church colleges. Thus suggested structural reforms favouring amalgamations of smaller institutions or economies of scale may be perceived as an erosion of agency autonomy, and/or a propagation of sectarian Christian doctrines. Such issues may remain as challenges until significant approaches are taken to clarify the differences.

Programme Diversity

Inherent in teacher education history (until recently) is the fact that most primary and

some secondary school teachers were recruited as Grade 10 school-leavers or low-performance Grade 12 graduates. From this historical antecedent has arisen the misconception that teachers in this category may be incompetent to pursue further studies beyond initial teacher training. Furthermore, superficial admission barriers are constructed against primary school teachers who attempt to seek admission into higher and further education institutions. Professional performance beyond the primary school context is attempted by very few of them. Consequently, programme diversity rather than programme coordination and cooperation has dominated past practices in teacher education in the country. Diverse programmes unique to individual institutions were created as alternatives.

More recently, the three-year diploma programme introduced in primary teachers colleges represents an attempt to improve the situation. However, institutional capacity in both staffing and physical resources restricts full implementation of intended practice. Furthermore, little attempt is being made to coordinate and establish a common programme for primary and secondary teachers.

Career Interests of Teachers

The promotion of the career interests of practising and graduating teachers appears to be absent in the current teacher education system. The limitations referred to above, confine primary teachers' careers to that sector of the system. Little credit is given to the teachers' initial training programmes to enable them to progressively enter higher certificate studies and to provide service at institutions other than primary schools. Discounting the limited supply of secondary teachers, no consideration is afforded to secondary trained teachers to practise in primary schools while being remunerated at a level commensurate with their advanced qualifications. Serious consideration is overdue for an institutional accreditation review to address such shortfalls.

Towards a Basic Teacher Education

Programme

Papua New Guinea's teacher education beyond the 1990s should incorporate a basic academic programme that will enable foundation teachers to

- ◆ identify basic human needs of the community they serve;
- ◆ analyse their professional situations in terms of such needs;
- ◆ perform competently in the knowledge areas associated with community and client needs;
- ◆ be aware of and familiar with the body of modern educational theory and be able to select from it alternative teaching strategies suitable for their children's needs;
- ◆ be skilled in the application of such basic techniques of teaching as the use of advanced questioning, motivating children, relating new learning to previous knowledge, teaching in relation to context, and varying learning through materials, methods and settings.

In sum, teacher education programmes in Papua New Guinea should have a set of agreed minimum requirements that generates our confidence that teaching personnel are professionally acceptable to their clients in this country.

A basic programme accepted by all institutions for teacher education will reduce institutional duplication and competition, encourage coordinated quality and quantity teacher supply, minimize professional misconceptions among teachers and the public, foster an understanding of agency and institutional similarities, differences and unique strengths and motivate teachers to develop career paths in, and commitments to, the teaching profession, thereby reducing high attrition costs.

Progress towards the above may be hastened if continued dialogue and cooperation are encouraged among teacher education authorities. Institutions such as the Association for Teacher Education (ATE)

or the Council for Teacher Education (CTE) need consolidation through adequate resourcing.

Leading institutions such as the Goroka Campus of the University of Papua New Guinea should be encouraged to play a major role in carving the path to programme coordination and institutional cooperation.

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