Discussion Group Reports

Discussion Group I (English Speaking)

Chairman: E. J. King (London)
Rapporteur: A. Trethewy (London)

Accepting Professor Eckstein's paper, both as a progress report and as a brief outline of a larger project, members of the group were concerned principally to raise questions for clarification and further consideration. Having shared various reactions to the paper, the group appreciated Professor Eckstein's offering of further information, interpretation and justification towards the end of the discussion session.

Reactions of the group may be summarized under the following heads:

(1) Purpose of the Study
Some felt that the purpose of the study was not altogether clear. Was it intended specifically to offer policy guidance to educational decision-makers in New York or did it have a more general-level purpose—perhaps the questioning of common assumptions about characteristics of teachers in metropolitan schools? If both were intended, which was predominant, the question-raising or the answer-giving? If the latter, supposing the main hypothesis was proved, in what ways would the study aid policy formation?

(2) Concerning Definition of Terms
Professor Eckstein drew attention in his paper to the use of subnational units in the comparison but members of the group were more concerned that an operational definition or definitions of such terms as "big cities", "metropolitan setting" was not indicated. In the discussion of problems of suitable definitions the following points were raised. (a) Efforts should be made to take account of the differences between the cities chosen as well as the similarities assumed. (b) Assuming that an attempt will be made to sample districts, schools and teachers within the chosen cities, attention was drawn to the complex differences within cities, and the problems which were posed for sampling procedures and comparative purposes. On the other hand, should an attempt be made to comprehend the total area or population, the resultant general averaging out could mask significant differences.

(3) Concerning Criteria for the Selection of the Four Cities in the Study
The group spent considerable time discussing the basis on which the choice of New York, Amsterdam, Paris and London might be justified. The impression had been given that practical considerations (personal knowledge and contacts, availability of sources of data) had been decisive and that it had been assumed that the four cities shared many characteristics. Unfortunately the paper offered no discussion of similarities and differences between the cities as part of a rationale for their selection. In the absence of such a discussion, group members raised the following questions:

- (a) Are useful analyses available, or possible, of the characteristics of big cities
which may suggest criteria for the choice of comparable units for study? Is it possible, for example, to identify different stages in the development of cities, each stage characterized by certain attributes which may be useful in determining comparable units either on a total city basis or within cities?

(b) Is it assumed that teaching in the four cities is equally attractive and repulsive to teachers? It was suggested by some that inner city schools in Paris and Amsterdam were likely to be less repulsive to teachers than inner city schools in New York and London. Again, perhaps the attractiveness/repulsiveness of the city was not a function of the city alone but partly of out-of-city circumstances. The attractiveness of a city, for example, may be partly a function of the repulsiveness of the country.

(4) Concerning the Identification and Control of Extraneous Variables

This led the group to a discussion of problems of identifying and controlling for factors extraneous to the “big city” variables, especially where it was anticipated that there could be significant differences between these factors in the four cities chosen. Among the factors with a relevance for comparison were (a) the differential attractiveness of particular school types within cities and the differing incidence of these schools types in the four chosen, (b) different patterns of system organization and control, e.g. the schools of one city as part of a larger centralized educational system, the schools of another as part of a smaller decentralized unit. Two implications were noted: (i) measures of staff age and turnover, for example, could be affected by different appointment and staffing practices; (ii) the promotion and status system, in France, for example, may tend to lead a teacher from the provinces to the city in a way not typical in, say, New York.

(5) Concerning Choice of Variables in the Section on Teacher Characteristics

Mindful that choice of variables can be significant for conclusions reached, what were the criteria for the particular variables chosen?

After hearing further from Professor Eckstein on most of the issues raised, a general conclusion was that, while lack of time and detailed information made it difficult to consider the study in depth, the paper as presented had provoked discussion of many of the recurring problems facing researchers in comparative education and, for this reason alone, was an appropriate conference "opener".

Discussion of the papers presented by the Berlin Working party was limited by time available and the following matters were raised rather than pursued to any conclusion:

(1) Several members sought further clarification of the concept of "innovation", especially in relation to such other concepts as "change", "reform" and "improvement". The less optimistic asked for some expression of meaning so that discussion could proceed on a common basis.

(2) Several members asserted that the papers generally rested on the value assumption that innovation was a good thing in itself, and that this assumption needed to be examined in greater detail. In the discussion, concern was expressed (a) that innovation was tending to become valued for its own sake, an end rather than a means, so that it was becoming almost obligatory to innovate or at least effect changes whether or not it could be demonstrated that existing practices were ineffective, inefficient or irrelevant, and (b) that, while response to changes taking place in society is necessary in education and while teachers need to be prepared to initiate and participate in these responses, the notion of the teacher as an active initiator of change in society required further elaboration and analysis. For
example, if he is to be an initiator of change, an innovator, especially the agent of emancipation in society, what particular changes or innovations is he to advocate, and in what areas of social and/or individual life? In societies that are pluralistic on many dimensions, where different analyses and prescriptions for society claim adherents, which views and which values is the teacher to represent as desirable? And what freedoms shall the teacher have in these matters? Again, what are the implications of the teacher's role as innovator for his other roles as the employee of a state or city education department?

(3) The chairman raised the question of the contribution of the papers to studies in comparative education, asking what marked them in content or technique as belonging, even potentially, to comparative education rather than, say, sociology or social psychology. This question was not really taken up in discussion, but one member suggested that the concept of reality shock mentioned by Dr. Thomas could lend itself to cross-national comparison.

(4) Several members put forward the view that while understanding of changes in society and education should be sought in initial training, substantial emphasis on the teacher's innovating role might more appropriately be placed in programmes of continuing education for teachers. They gave training for survival in the existing school situations their priority in initial training and considered that detailed consideration of the innovating role might be better placed against the background of several years of experience.

... In discussing the papers of the London Working Party, the group followed the following points of interest raised by them:

(1) Patterns of Teacher Education

Attention was drawn to ways in which teacher education in Scotland did not fit the framework suggested in Mr. Cowen's paper. It was reported, for example, that in Scotland all secondary teachers must be university graduates; that all must be teacher trained; that their training was undertaken in Colleges of Education which were also responsible for the training of primary teachers; and that Colleges of Education were not under the control of local education authorities but answerable, through Governors, directly to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

(2) The Influence of Teachers' Unions on Teacher Education

The case of Scotland was again cited, this time to illustrate the strength of influence of a Union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, which had played a decisive role in the establishment of the General Teaching Council, a body strongly representative of the teaching profession, which controlled the registration of teachers.

The case of the state of Victoria in Australia was also cited where the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association, by operating a registration system of its own and closing secondary schools by strike action wherever the educational authorities attempted to appoint underqualified staff, had forced consideration of an official registration scheme.

It was thought that a comparative study of the activities of teachers’ unions in several societies in relation to teacher education might be profitable.

(3) Points Relating to the Supply and Demand of teachers

Group members suggested a number of issues as worthy of further consideration, if possible, comparatively.

(a) If demand for teachers exceeds supply, what measures can be taken to maintain a high level of qualified people? What alternatives are there to lowering entrance requirements, conducting crash courses and employing temporary teachers? (b) What implications for supply and demand of teachers (and indeed, for content of train-
ing) are there in developments in educational technology, in such teaching strategies as team teaching and flexible grouping patterns, in the employment of teacher aides and in new patterns of school organisation and management?

(c) What measures are used, and what improvements are possible, in the prediction of supply and demand of teachers? Is it possible to overcome the time-lag problem—that it takes four or five years to prepare a teacher—when he is really needed today?

(d) A related question—one member spoke of the need for a sophisticated analysis of the factors contributing to the loss of teachers from the profession.

(4) Government Control of Teacher Education

A number of contributions bore on the contention that government control of teacher education in terms of organisation, finance, administration and content was increasing in many societies and would increase further. Some members cited (a) controls not only in the allocation of finance generally, but increasingly in the tagging of grants or allocations for specified purposes, (b) controls exercised through policies for the funding of research (c) controls exercised through the number, size and selection procedures established for student scholarships and allowances (d) controls implicit in preparing teachers who will find employment in predominantly government-sponsored schools. The question of the meaning of “the autonomy of the university” was raised but not discussed, except in the oblique terms mentioned above.

(5) Students as an Increasingly Influential Force in the Politics of Teacher Education

The view was expressed that ways of incorporating students and young teachers in consideration of their own training should be sought.

(6) A Matter of Definition

After the group had been at work for some time we were reminded that terms used in our discussion and in the papers, such as “profession”, “training” and “graduate”, carry different meanings in different countries, and therefore required definition. It was a useful reminder of one of many pitfalls awaiting all who dare to compare.
Groupe de Discussion I (Langue Anglaise)

Président : E. J. King (Londres)
Rapporteur : A. Trethewy (Londres)

En rapport avec l’exposé du Professeur Eckstein cinq problèmes principaux furent étudiés :
1) le but visé par cette étude et, en particulier, dans quelle limite elle peut aider lors de la détermination des projets à envisager ;
2) la définition des termes « grandes villes » et « environnement métropolitain » ;
3) les critères pour la sélection des quatre villes. Ceux-ci semblaient nécessiter une justification en fonction des caractéristiques spécifiques des villes choisies ;
4) l’identification et le contrôle de variables qui n’entrent pas en ligne de compte telles que l’attracteur différentiel des types d’écoles spécifiques dans les différentes villes ;
5) les critères pour lesquels on a choisi les variables des caractéristiques des enseignants.

Les communications du groupe de Berlin ont amené la discussion des points suivants :
1) la possibilité d’une plus grande clarification du concept d’« innovation » ;
2) l’apparent jugement de valeur, subsistant dans les exposés, établissant que l’innovation est nécessairement à désirer ;
3) dans quelle mesure les exposés étaient vraiment comparatistes ;
4) l’à-propos de l’importance donnée à l’innovation dans les cours de formation initiale par rapport à sa place dans les cours de recyclage ensuite.

Les exposés du groupe de Londres ont amené à la discussion des points suivants :
1) dans quelle mesure les systèmes d’éducation convenaient vraiment à un cadre donné ;
2) l’influence, parfois considérable, des syndicats d’enseignants sur la formation des enseignants ;
3) la manière dont le déséquilibre offre/demande diminue les choix possibles ;
4) dans quelle mesure le contrôle gouvernemental sur la formation des enseignants augmentait dans de nombreux pays ;
5) la nécessité de considérer le rôle des étudiants dans la politique de formation des enseignants ;
6) l’importance, dans les comparaisons internationales, de bien comprendre le sens attaché dans chaque pays à des termes communs comme « professions », « formation » et « licencié ».