Opening Address

by Ph. J. Idenburg, President (Amsterdam)

The subject that we are to discuss in the coming days is one of generally recognized importance. The teacher is the pivot on which the renewal of education hinges, and consequently his training seems to be of decisive importance to the answer that the educational system is to give to the challenge of the day. This challenge is threefold at least.

Throughout Europe the pressures to extend education are strong. Raising school-leaving ages or lengthening the period of compulsory attendance have expanded facilities. University and higher education enrolments more than doubled in the sixties. There has, in short, been a rapid expansion of educational provision. More and more teachers are needed. Many who previously might have taught in secondary schools now obtain university posts. Consequently, the reforms of teacher education should be seen against a background of rapid expansion.

Furthermore democratisation is requested. Previously-elitist systems of education have to be modified. At the secondary school level differentiation within the academic lines and between these and vocational schools is being reduced. Teachers have been faced with less carefully selected, less homogeneous groups of pupils whose aspirations have changed.

Finally, modernisation is slowly gaining ground. We discussed the changes in the curriculum in Prague. But those in the didactical field merit equal attention. The technology of education is on the eve of fundamental renewal.

These three features, expansion, democratisation and modernisation have created problems for the teaching profession. The solution to some of them lies in the realm of teacher education.

It can hardly be the intention that I give an anticipatory commentary on the themes of our programme. But perhaps I may be permitted to make a few modest suggestions as a contribution to the discussions.

Our subject has a built-in multiplication factor. If teacher education is important, then so is the training of the teachers of teachers, or T.T.T., as they say in the United States. It is just like the advertisement we have in Holland for Droste’s cocoa. This depicts a nurse, presenting someone with a cup of milk chocolate. On the cup the whole scene appears again. Anyone with really sharp eyes could even see the scene within a scene for a third time. And indeed, when one speaks of the Triple T provisions the question arises of the intellectual equipment of those who have to be charged with the formation of the teachers of teacher training.

I fear that our programme does not offer the certainty that these aspects lying behind teacher education will be done adequate justice. And yet it might well be that renewal has to begin at this level. If the staffs of institutions for the training of primary school teachers are not better trained themselves, not much will come of the reforming of these institutions. In this connection the
university has to be considered. The first problem is perhaps not the point of the relation between the teacher education institutions and the universities, as is at present under discussion in various countries and is on our programme for Thursday. The most essential problem seems to me to be what contribution the university can make to the training of good teachers for the teacher education institutions. I fear that in various countries the universities are letting us down on this point. In the past they felt attracted to the training of teachers of the academic type of long secondary schools: a problem in itself. But responsibility for what is going on in other parts of the educational system is something that they have displayed to only a small extent. Thus the question could arise whether those who have studied pedagogics, psychology, sociology or philosophy at university are the most suitable persons to instruct intending primary school teachers.

I believe that on this point the university is due for self-reform. It will have to concern itself with the problems of the educational system as a whole. It will have to assume the task of preparing the future politicians, managers, planners and inspectors of this system for their work. It will have to train the practitioners of educational research. It will have to deal with the internal problems of the school, its curriculum and methods. Within this framework it will have to tackle the preparation of the staffs of teacher education institutions. They will have to consist of people who have studied pedagogics or psychology, sociology or philosophy but who in so doing have expressly concentrated on the problems of the school and have at the same time gained practical experience.

The question arises here whether the university is capable of performing this task. Whilst it has since of old absorbed medical science with all its practical implications, it is still hesitating about the applications of the behavioural sciences. Seeking for truth, building up theory is one thing; but the application to the actual needs of society another, which should not be neglected. The problem of teacher-training exists on the level of higher education as on the other levels. Who will train the professors? I return to our Society and this Conference.

With serious regret I have to commemorate Pedro Rossello who died last year. He was best known for his work over many years with the International Bureau of Education. There he carried on his work in Comparative Education in the tradition of Julien de Paris whom he saw as one of the precursors of the IBE. The data collected together from Ministries of Education provided for Rossello the possibility of discerning trends of educational development. One of the most illuminating of the many documents Rossello helped to prepare was the summary of recommendations made at the annual meeting of ministry representatives over a period of thirty years. Well ahead of their time they reflect and indeed anticipated many educational policies which are today being implemented.

Rossello will undoubtedly be remembered as a collector of educational information rather than as an analyst probing the reasons why educational policies and practices differ throughout the world. This interest also found expression in the bibliographic work he supported in Geneva. With very little money he built up a library of books which is of considerable value to scholars in the field of Comparative Education. On this foundation much subsequent work at the IBE will be built.

Rossello always supported our Society. He was a founder member, for several years a Vice President and finally was elected to Honorary membership. We all admired the forthright manner in which at Committee meetings he put forward his point of view, and the grace with which he accepted majority decisions. His deep commitment to Comparative Education, to the international organisations with which he was associated and to the progress of our own Society establishes him as one of the twentieth century pioneers of our study. We shall miss him.
In organising this meeting, the Committee took into account the suggestions made at the Prague General Meeting. Teacher education as a theme commanded overwhelming support. Members wanted the Conference to be carefully prepared beforehand and hoped that during the Conference much of the work would be done in discussion groups. We held a well attended Committee Meeting in The Hague. There, three major issues were identified, namely, the academic and social background of intending teachers; the content of the courses they follow as students, and the ways in which teacher education is financed, administered and controlled. It was decided that groups in Berlin, London and New York should be invited to prepare working documents. The hope was that more members of the Society (and their students) would be involved in the pre-conference preparation. These hopes have been partially realised. In New York Professor Eckstein has been wholly responsible for preparing the working paper on the characteristics of teachers. In Berlin full-time research workers under Dr. Helga Thomas have prepared a paper on the content of teacher education. In London part-time Ph.D. students collected material under the supervision of Mr. Robert Cowen. We then proposed to spend at least half the time in discussion groups having chairmen to run them. In this way, the Committee hoped that the Conference itself would engage the active participation of a large number of participants.

Our plans could not have been brought to fruition without the support of the Swedish Authorities. We are most grateful to them for providing funds which have enabled us to hold this Conference. They are considerable ($12,000) and without such support we could not run such meetings. But beyond this we have received professional support from many people. I should like to thank in particular the members of the Swedish Organising Committee: Dr. Erik Blix, Director of the School of Education, who is our host here; Dr. Sixten Marklund, Head of the Research Bureau of the National Board of Education; Mr. Henning Öberg, Director of Schools in the City of Stockholm, and Professor Torsten Husén of the School of Education, who, as you know, has been associated with the Society since it was founded and for some years was a Committee Member. They have gained for us the support of the Minister of Education, Mr. Ingvar Carlsson, who will give the opening paper, and Mr. Jonas Orring, Director-General of the National Board of Education, who has seen this Conference as a valuable way of improving our understanding of the common problems which face us in our various countries. Members of his Board have contributed greatly by preparing a pamphlet on Swedish Teacher Education, a valuable contribution to our documentation. All these organisations have made it possible for us to meet in this northern city, in a country whose achievements in education have excited the admiration of the world, where systematic research into the problems of education has been highly developed and where a commitment to further improvement is obvious. We hope we shall learn from their experience, and that, collectively through our discussions, we shall gain greater insights into the problems we as educators of teachers face. For the theme of this Conference, Teacher Education, is one which touches us all, in a very immediate way, in our daily, professional lives.