

Introduction: International Perspectives

By Donald K. Sharpes

It is an esteemed honor and special delight to me to present to the teaching profession, through the courtesy and foresight of Alan H. Jones, editor of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, the work of several colleagues in teacher education from a variety of countries and from different teacher education perspectives.

What is surprising, as we read examples of programs, curricula, methods, and themes from around the globe, is the universality of teacher education concerns, whether multicultural education or teaching assessment, program content or methodological adaptability to schools, or the various needs for inservice education. The ubiquity of teacher education as a worldwide phenomenon of teacher preparation and as inservice training confirms the vigorous health of the profession and its amazing public sector growth, especially in the developing world in the past two decades. Whether in South Africa or Siberia, Poland or New Zealand, issues of governance, the debate over the procedures for training, and the incorporation of multicultural themes in the education of teachers are just a few of the topical concerns clamoring for closure among teacher educators.

Of course, there are regional and political distinctions between many national systems for preparing teachers. In former Eastern bloc countries, like Poland, there is an emerging new economy based on western-style capitalism that, in the conversion process from state socialism, caused some initial apoplectic seizures throughout the educational system. This has now stabilized somewhat with steady economic growth and improvement. In

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Siberia, on the other hand, as part of the Russian Federation the socialist model of “collective training” persists in spite of other dramatic societal and political changes. Meanwhile in South Africa, the transformation of the whole society and an emergent, new political system will continue to present problems to the teacher education establishment for some time to come.

Nevertheless, there are many similarities between diverse countries. For example, New Zealand is grappling with a teacher education governance problem, as is Cameroon—each a relatively small country seeking both to broaden and deepen its foundational academic base among colleges and universities and at the same time cope with expanding school enrollments and the concomitant teacher supply problem.

I have selected these particular countries and authors for a couple of reasons. One reason is that they are not all the usual countries found in standard international descriptions of teacher education programs, although I have included some European countries for comparison. I believe we need to hear more from colleagues in developing nations, who are normally not found in the traditional international journals (nor are they as notably represented at international conferences), and to discover those concerns which are mutual, like inservice education, and those domains which are unique and distinctly different because of the special dynamism of political, economic, or cultural differences.

Such teacher education program descriptions as those found in these pages are usually not studies based on empirical or quantitative evidence, the traditional form of professional presentation. Neither are they written in English as precise and accurate as it might be, for example, from a European author, even in translation. The opportunity to have an international outlet, however, remains just as compellingly professional for the teacher educator in a developing country as it does in the developed world.

As teacher education becomes more internationalized in the United States and Europe, and as developing programs everywhere struggle to find appropriate models for the changing age, may we all become more informed of the cultural and national differences in a variety of teacher education contexts that can add, through teaching and research, a global diversity to our own programs.