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# Bridging the **North-South Divide** in Teacher Education

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Alan E. Wheeler

The majority of problems besetting education in developing countries stem more from political instability, overpopulation, ineffective national development policies, and massive foreign debt than from educational policies. Over the last several decades, such factors have contributed to a disturbing and ever increasing North - South educational divide in which teacher education issues play a significant role. A promising in-service teacher education model is providing a viable bridging mechanism to help close this widening educational divide.

The similarity of issues cited by educators in both developed and developing countries suggests that teacher education concerns are truly global in nature. However, the problems confronting teacher education in less developed countries (LDCs) are far greater in both scale and severity. Less developed countries face massive problems compared to more developed countries, including: basic literacy, which is less than 50% in many LDCs; far lower levels of completion of primary education; higher attrition rates during and at the end of primary schooling; increased pressures from high population growth rates; and most importantly, an average expenditure on schooling per candidate some 20 times lower than in the developed world. In virtually all aspects, the material conditions of education in LDCs are far worse than in the developed world.

The countries of the developing world are easy to identify. Consult any current atlas which color codes the world on indices like life expectancy, literacy rate, child malnutrition, infant mortality, etc. The effect is striking. Most of the LDCs are clustered in the Southern Hemisphere: virtually all of Africa, much of Latin America and the Caribbean, many of the islands of the South Pacific including Papua New Guinea, the sub-continent (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh), several nations in the Middle East, and some rapidly developing countries in

South East Asia like Thailand and Malaysia. Eighty percent of the world's six billion people reside in the developing world, which accounts for less than twenty percent of the global wealth.

The educational challenges confronting these nations are indeed daunting. According to the UNESCO World Education Report 2000 :

“...there are more than 800 million illiterate adults in the world today, and nearly 100 million primary-school-age children (and an even larger number of secondary-school-age children) are not in school. Moreover, millions of those who are in school do not benefit from an education of sufficient quality to meet their basic needs. These needs are daily becoming more pressing as the vast changes in the world wrought by globalization and the revolution in information and communication technologies threaten to marginalize entire populations still living in dire poverty.”<sup>1</sup>

These realities are readily apparent to anyone who has spent time in classrooms in LDCs, where it is not uncommon to have in excess of 50 students, many of whom are chronically undernourished, parasite ridden, and hungry. Teacher education is one area which holds considerable potential to bridge the North-South educational divide.

## The Development of Education in LDCs

The early work of Beeby (1966) on the development of educational systems in developing countries following independence remains a valid theoretical framework to examine factors which influence the quality of education in LDCs today.<sup>2</sup> Beeby's model is characterized by four stages (Dame Schools, Formalism, Transition, and Meaning) as shown in Figure 1. As an educational system evolves from stage to stage, schools become less rigid in terms of the degree of external control



## The North-South Educational Divide



exercised on them, teachers less autocratic in their style, discipline less authoritarian and extrinsic in nature, and the curriculum and textbooks far less prescriptive. As a result, classrooms become increasingly student-centered, student learning more meaningful, and the school more self-directed.

Beeby viewed an educational system's progression through the above four stages as sequential and evolutionary in nature, observing that “[t]here are certain stages of growth which all school systems must pass; although a system may be helped to speed up its progress, it cannot leap-frog a stage or major portion of a stage.”

Many LDCs attempt to bridge the development gap simply by omitting an intermediate stage without due attention to the necessary investment in human capital required to bring about the change — namely, the increased quality achieved through the continuous professional development of the classroom teacher. Beeby strongly contended that the significant driving force behind the capacity of developing educational systems to move from one stage to the next higher one was the quality of the teachers in the system. This refers to both the quality of initial teacher

FIGURE 1

Beeby's Developmental Model - Stages in the Growth of a Primary School System		
STAGE	TEACHERS	CHARACTERISTICS
1. Dame School	Ill-educated, untrained	Unorganized, relatively meaningless symbols; very narrow. Subject content - 3 R's; very low standards; memorizing all important.
2. Formalism	Ill-educated, trained	Highly organized; symbols with limited meaning; rigid syllabus; emphasis on 3 R's; rigid methods - 'one best way'; one textbook; external examinations; inspection stressed; discipline tight and external; memorizing heavily stressed; emotional life largely ignored.
3. Transition	Better-educated, trained	Roughly same goals as stage 2, but more efficiently achieved; more emphasis on meaning, but is still rather 'thin' and formal; syllabus and textbooks less restrictive, but teachers hesitate to use greater freedom; final leaving examination often restricts experimentation; little in classroom to cater for emotional and creative life of child.
4. Meaning	Well-educated, trained	Meaning and understanding stressed; somewhat wider curriculum, variety of content and methods; individual differences catered for; activity methods, problem solving and creativity; internal tests; relaxed and positive discipline; emotional and aesthetic life, as well as intellectual; closer relations with community; better buildings and equipment essential.



**MANY LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ATTEMPT TO BRIDGE THE DEVELOPMENT GAP SIMPLY BY OMITTING AN INTERMEDIATE STAGE WITHOUT DUE ATTENTION TO THE NECESSARY INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL REQUIRED TO BRING ABOUT THE CHANGE.**

#### EN BREF

Au cours de la dernière décennie, divers facteurs dont l'instabilité politique, le surpeuplement, de mauvaises politiques de développement national et un endettement massif auprès des établissements de crédit étrangers ont contribué à élargir le fossé Nord-Sud en matière d'éducation. L'Institut de développement pédagogique (Institut for Educational Development) situé à Karachi au Pakistan a été conçu pour être avant tout un centre modèle en matière de formation et de perfectionnement professionnel. Les candidats et candidates y comparent leurs pratiques courantes avec les théories les plus récentes sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Le processus de reconceptualisation qui en résulte donne lieu à des changements d'envergure qui peuvent mener à une nouvelle perspective sur la formation des maîtres.

training and the provision of ongoing professional development.

## Increasing the Angle of Reform in Teacher Education

Beeby's model highlights the pivotal role played by the classroom teacher as a change agent in educational development and the importance of teacher education in national development. Teachers in the developing world generally have far less formal education and provision for continued professional growth than those in the developed world. Since professional growth over one's teaching career is highly dependent upon one's initial position on Beebe's scale, the probability of significant change through traditional professional in-service programs for teachers is generally limited.

To have significant impact, inservice education in LDCs must be carefully designed to meet the contextual needs of the teachers involved and contain built-in monitoring and sustainability components. Under Beeby's model, it is possible to increase the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of relevant, ongoing inservice teacher education provided key components and support mechanisms are in place. Such efforts result in what Beeby termed an increased 'angle of reform' in teacher education, whereby the amount of professional growth over a given teacher's career can be greatly enhanced.

Efforts to create too acute an angle of reform (i.e. dramatic change) are unrealistic and doomed to failure, while if the angle is minimal, little or no professional development occurs and the system simply stagnates. A key to effective inservice education in the developing world, therefore, is to carefully match the program to the incoming level and contextual needs of the teachers involved to achieve an appropriate angle of reform. Given sufficient time, such efforts may serve to reduce the developmental gap that characterizes the North - South educational divide.

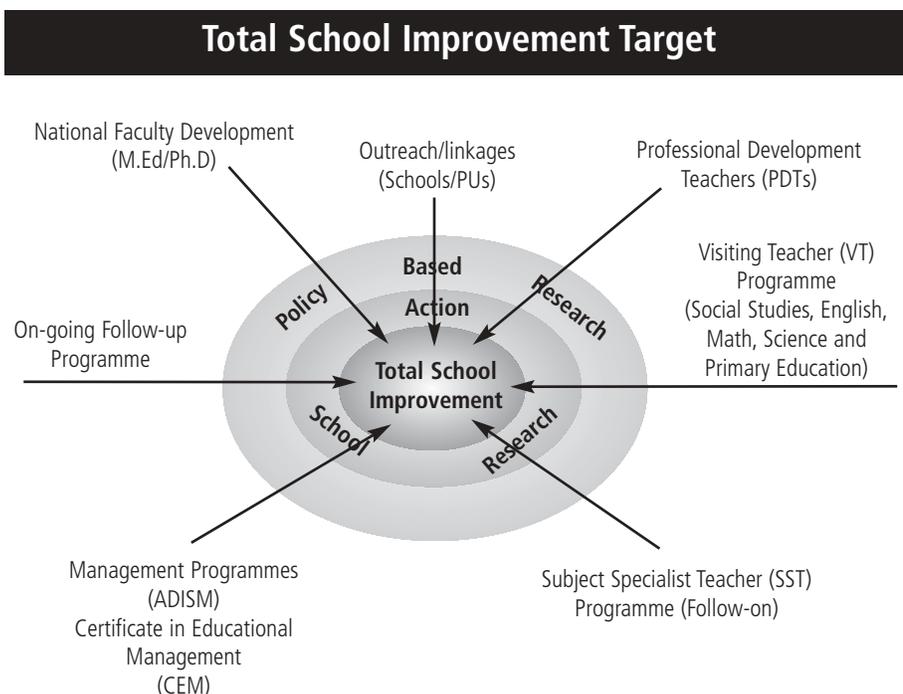
## Education in Pakistan and the Region

Like many developing countries, Pakistan faces enormous developmental and social problems which are clearly reflected in the field of education. Consider, for example, that two thirds of Pakistan's estimated population of 140 million are uneducated, and 64% of boys and 75% of girls are unschooled at the primary level. Over two-thirds of Pakistani schools have no access to safe drinking water, electricity, or bathroom facilities.

The national literacy rate is approximately 35%, with a pronounced range across the four provinces, rural and urban contexts, and between male and female education. In some areas, female literacy is below 5%. Education in general suffers from bureaucratic apathy, discriminatory cultural practices, and political rhetoric.

Conservatism and feudalism are still prevalent in much of rural Pakistan, and it is easy to become pessimistic about any meaningful change in the educational system. During the planning period which led to the formation of the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED),

FIGURE 2



**CONSERVATISM AND FEUDALISM ARE STILL PREVALENT IN MUCH OF RURAL PAKISTAN, AND IT IS EASY TO BECOME PESSIMISTIC ABOUT ANY MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.**

there was a general consensus that education in Pakistan was in a state of crisis, with low literacy levels, low retention, and low achievement rates.<sup>3</sup> Contributing to and exacerbating these problems were the lack of adequate expenditure on all aspects of education and the very low status accorded teachers. Teacher performance was severely handicapped by an insufficient number of teachers to keep pace with the growing numbers of children, often resulting in unmanageably large classes. Other factors included the poor quality of teacher education, poor supervision with little attention to performance in the classroom, and a chronic shortage of teachers in rural schools. The curriculum often lacked relevance, and teaching and learning strategies were shaped by ineffective testing and examination systems that fostered rote learning and passive students.

The educational scenario described above applies, in varying degrees, across the developing regions served by AKU-IED namely South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh), Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan), and East Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya).

The basic premises for the establishment of the AKU-IED were that, (i) the education of all children depends upon the improvement of the performance and the elevation of the dignity of teachers, and (ii) effective school improvement depends in turn upon the creation of a network of teacher development, dispersed throughout the region but linked to professional development centres of excellence in the region.

The Institute for Educational Development, located in Karachi, was designed as an exemplary centre for inservice teacher education and was created to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in the region. Its basic underlying tenet was to fundamentally challenge existing incoming notions and beliefs through an ongoing 'reconceptualization' process. Here candidates confront their existing practices in relation to current theory on teaching and learning to overcome the dominant didactic or transmissional 'teaching-

learning-teaching' cycle which characterizes so much of their prior experience and is so widespread in the developing world. The reconceptualization process is systemic to the total program and serves as a major vehicle by which change on a wide front can lead to a new conceptual perspective in teacher education.<sup>3</sup>

The longer term significance of the model resides in its ability to reach out to influence governmental educational policy and to enable non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other educational stakeholders to adopt successful change strategies on a wider scale.

Key players in the overall model are the graduates of a specially designed, two year M.Ed. Program in Teacher Education. Referred to as Professional Development Teachers or PDTs, these graduates facilitate the educational change process in selected cooperating schools throughout the region, working in conjunction with graduates of other associated programs.

The basic target is Total School Improvement through the professional development of all stakeholders involved as shown in Figure 2. Each component is inter-related and inte-

*DIVIDE...*

*Continued on page 39*



gral to the overall success of the approach within the general research framework.

During the initial phase of the project, (1993 - 1999), considerable program growth took place at all levels in concert with ongoing research aimed at measuring the overall impact of the change model. Two main Partner Universities — University of Oxford, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) — provided assistance in bridging the North-South development gap in teacher education consistent with the growing body of literature on effective cross-cultural transfer of western teacher education models and interventions to differing contexts. Central themes in this area are the need to address the inevitable tension between western and indigenous approaches and the importance of increasing our cultural understanding and knowledge base in this field.<sup>4</sup> Careful attention was given to the sensitivity associated with a range of cross-cultural issues (i.e. pedagogical, content, and cognitive concerns).<sup>5</sup> Mechanisms to balance and test applications of western teacher education approaches with existing indigenous practices were dealt with on an ongoing basis.

Many of the programs shown in Figure 2 (e.g. the Visiting Teacher (VT) Program, Subject Specialist Teacher (SST) Program, Management Programs) were initiated following the graduation of the first M.Ed. cohort in 1995. Since then the model has undergone considerable revision and development. Overall the change model has proven to be a highly resilient and flexible one for enhancing the quality of education in selected schools throughout the region. Further, given a critical mass of like-minded graduates, the model generates an impressive multiplier effect which benefits other teachers and educators. For example, by the end of 2000, approximately 1200 teachers had successfully completed the VT program and 117 candidates had graduated from four cohorts of the M.Ed. Program. It is estimated that they will interact with some 6000 other teachers and ultimately impact on approximately 180,000 students at the classroom level.

While the quantitative aspects of the model are impressive in themselves, far more important are the qualitative improvements that have taken place at the classroom level, often resulting in a total transformation in the nature of teaching and learning.

The model has now moved into a second period of development (2000-2005), which builds upon a number of significant capacity building and sustainability features. These include the further professional development of key national faculty, a series of new professional development centres at key locations in the region, the introduction of distance education, the establishment of a number of professional development organizations to foster more systemic teacher growth, and policy based research studies designed to influence government policy on a national and regional scale. In the longer term, the model should be viewed as an exemplary template for the developing world in closing the educational development gap.

- 1 World Education Report, *The Right to Education, Towards Education For All Throughout Life* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2000).
- 2 C.E. Beeby, *The Quality of Education in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966)
- 3 Alan E. Wheeler, "Reconceptualising Teacher Education: An Experience from Pakistan," *Canadian and International Education* 29, no. 2 (2000): 71-90.
- 4 Yatta Kanu, "Curriculum, Culture and Teacher Learning: A Case Study of an Innovative Teacher Education Program in Pakistan," *Canadian and International Education* 29, no. 2 (December 2000): 21-45; Susie Rodwell, "Internationalisation or Indigenisation of Educational Management Development? Some issues of cross-cultural transfer," *Comparative Education* 34, no. 1 (1998): 41-54.
- 5 P. Kirkbridge & S. Tang, "Management Development in the Nanyang Chinese Societies of South-East Asia," *Journal of Management Development* 11 (1992): 94-106.

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