

PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY: THE AMERICAS ARE COMMITTED

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IN JUST six short years¹ the Americas have created a major strategy change for education. This may not be visible as yet in terms of educational output, but the impact of the shift is affecting the Latin American world in economic, organizational, and philosophic terms. The degree of involvement varies regionally as well as from country to country throughout the Americas.

The new directions became institutionalized on a hemisphere-wide basis in November 1968, with the installation of the Inter-American Committee on Education. This committee was the outgrowth of considerable dialogue, many meetings, some experimentation, and finally the action of the Inter-American Cultural Council of the Organization of American States, which in its fifth meeting at Maracay, Venezuela, in February 1968 defined the need and role for such a committee.² The Council also established and funded a Regional Educational Development Program.³

Scores of agencies, foundations, and governments have contributed to education's

¹ The writer believes that the endorsement of the final report of the OAS Education Task Force by the Third Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education in Bogotá, Colombia, in August 1963 constituted a major turning point for educational strategy in the Americas.

² "Final Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Inter-American Cultural Council," Maracay, Venezuela, February 15-22, 1968, Pan American Union, Washington, D.C., 1968.

³ *Ibid.*

development in the Americas since the close of World War II. Many conferences and meetings have been held. A great deal of training, technical assistance, and cross-cultural exchange has gradually sharpened problem definition and has contributed to growing educational leadership in Latin America. None of these inputs, however, has brought this part of the world a modern and technologically oriented curriculum, or has made the expected impact on the problems of student desertion, teacher preparation, universal public education, cost efficiency, and basic educational planning. This does not mean that in a few cases good educational models and programs have not been built. There are some bright lights. A great deal of experimentation is going on. What this paper presents is a view of the dynamics at work and the prospects these reveal for education's future in the Americas.

Three key elements are here presented as the most significant factors responsible for the shift in educational strategy:

1. An in-depth commitment to educational planning as the basic conceptual and methodological process for achieving a functional and a quality education
2. The granting of top priority and status to the role of educational and development re-

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search as the critical tool for the support of educational planning

3. The formalization of hemisphere-wide and regional levels of cooperation and organization for the development of education.

From the Second Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education held in Lima, Peru, in 1956 to the meeting of the American Chiefs of State at Punta del Este, Uruguay, in 1967, educational planning grew from an accepted, but largely untested, idea to a full-fledged partner in the educational process, including an inter-American organization of educational planning and research directors. Within the past six months, directors and faculty of newly organized (since 1966) educational research and planning units from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela, and the Caribbean region have met (not as one group) to share plans and to explore regional cooperation and exchange possibilities.

It seems important to point out that the process of educational planning as demonstrated by several member countries of the Americas and by the newly established Inter-American Committee on Education⁴ is being conceptualized at rather sophisticated levels. For example, the Office of Educational Planning (EDUPLAN) in the Ministry of Education, Venezuela, and several of the regional conferences on educational planning have taken the position that base-line measures and assessments of what exists must be made and analyzed before educational strategies are meaningfully planned. Planning is being conceived more as a process involving a broad spectrum of areas and individuals concerned; and, specifically, planning is being viewed as continuous dialogue among interested and concerned groups.⁵

Deliberate organizational patterns have been constructed to involve the private sector and economic and social planners. The process receives as much attention as the subjects which form the problems to be resolved. Be-

hind these planning principles lies a serious concern for the improvement of the qualitative, as well as the quantitative, aspects of education. The Declaration of the Presidents of America signed in 1967 at Punta del Este stated, "Education at all levels will be greatly expanded, and its quality improved so that the rich human potential of their peoples may make their maximum contribution to the economic, social, and cultural development of Latin America."⁶

An assessment of the status and quality of educational research leads us to believe that real commitments to support this area have been made, but that levels of trained resources are far from adequate. Most ministries of education have research departments and many universities have been developing departments of educational research, yet less than a handful of Latin American universities provide any graduate training in this field. One of the consequences of slim manpower at graduate levels of educational research is the dearth of adequate data analyses. Mountains of data are collected, but are subjected generally to descriptive analysis. Fortunately, with the new attention focused on research, accompanied by new types of computer hardware, data bank developments, and so forth, we can look forward to reliable and detailed analyses.

One rather important policy matter is not yet fully resolved. Educational research in Latin America has been funded and administered largely by education ministries or government. Research must be free to make research-based decisions if it is to provide effective data. Too often the research decision within normal bureaucratic operations is controlled by the political rather than the professional decision. As more dependence on research for planning grows, this problem should diminish.

Commitment to regional planning and development is a great boon to Latin American education. With accelerating problems of urban growth, inadequate rural education, the population explosion, and technological lag, there is a critical need for sharing of edu-

⁴ Final Report of First Meeting of the CECIC. Washington, D.C., November 7-22, 1968; Pan American Union, Washington, D.C., 1969.

⁵ John Friedmann, *Venezuela—From Doctrine to Dialogue*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1965.

⁶ "Final Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Inter-American Cultural Council," *op. cit.*, p. 9.

cational innovations, new education models, and general information. There is also a need to share the limited human resources for essential and diversified training. Cooperatively, Latin Americans can come closer to meeting educational goals. Hopefully, through the pressures of educational need, political resistances to regional undertakings can be effectively minimized.

Having indicated (although too briefly) some of the educational directions, tools, commitments, and problems as these are perceived, let us outline what appear to be the central aspirations and goals. Since space does not permit a country-by-country analysis, we will attempt to reflect the broad regional and generally accepted set of priorities for the Americas.

The 1967 and 1968 educational plans and developments in the Americas were products of the leader-professionals of all the Americas meeting in concert. As such, they should be representative of regional aspirations, and, to a degree, of those of the member countries. Their recent statement would appear to be the most direct expression of educational goals and aspirations we could examine:

The Regional Educational Development Program shall have the following objectives:

1. To encourage and complement national and multinational efforts in the fields of education, in accordance with the priorities established in the Declaration of the Presidents of America:
 - a. To increase the effectiveness of national educational efforts;
 - b. To raise the quality of education;
 - c. To accelerate the expansion of educational systems at all levels;
 - d. To improve educational administration and planning systems; and
 - e. To adjust educational systems more adequately to the demands of economic, social, and cultural development.

2. To intensify inter-American cooperation in educational matters, in accordance with the standards of the Charter of the Organization of American States, the spirit of the protocol of Amendment to the Charter, and the mandates concerning education contained in the Declaration of the Presidents of America

3. To promote the integration of Latin America, through education, in order to raise the economic and social level of the region and as an important step toward integration of the Americas, respecting the educational and cultural personality of the peoples.⁷

The program shall be comprised of activities in the following areas:

1. Advanced training in educational planning and administration, adult education, school construction, agricultural education, and so forth, for education specialists
2. Educational television
3. Educational research, planning, experimentation, and innovation
4. Harmonization of national curricula with the goals of Latin American integration
5. Textbooks and teaching materials
6. University and school libraries
7. University modernization
8. Teaching and research in the social sciences
9. Vocational and technical education
10. Student welfare and guidance, with special attention to the fields of nutrition and health.⁸

The 22 countries of the Americas⁹ engaged in the new educational strategy have participated very fully. The regional approach should provide new stimulus for developing educational leadership in Latin America and for reducing the disparities. There is real promise for the future. □

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.



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