We IN the United States have discussed long, and often hotly, the question of how best to prepare teachers. Needless to say, we have not yet resolved the issue to our satisfaction. It is hoped that viewing Trinidad-Tobago's program will encourage constructive consideration of our own. Trinidad-Tobago has been a civilized country for several centuries. Since its independence was secured from Great Britain in 1962, it has been a sovereign nation assuming a responsible and unique role as a member of the United Nations.

The islands lie in the Caribbean just off the coast of Venezuela, sheltered from severe storms and endowed with a tropical climate that varies only slightly the year around. Life is essentially rural and primitive except near the major city, Port-of-Spain, and in scattered areas where foreign industries and tourist facilities are being introduced.

A primary criterion for judging the validity of a nation's educational program is how well it meets the perceived needs of the society it serves. As one Trinidad educator stated in a recent talk, "What Are We Educating For?" presented over the facilities of the Government Broadcasting Unit:

As knowledge widens and expectations grow, as interests broaden and the demands of society expand, the aims of education, the objectives of the school, must undergo drastic change.1

He sees the needs of society which education can fulfill as helping the individual to live in a multi-racial society, a society which once suffered the humiliation of slavery and the indignities attached, a society which has struggled through many hardships and privations and which today can boast of having achieved some prominence, some dignity, and some respect.

He sees education as furnishing the individual with adequate knowledge and skill, thus making him an understanding part of his community, his society, and his world.

Although economic status of the multi-racial population has not changed significantly during the relatively long history of the islands, there is recognition by the leaders that a population explosion is imminent. They are fully aware that the economic and cultural welfare and progress of this population are directly related to the educational

1 Taped talk, "What Are We Educating For?" by P. Dyer. A recording by Government Broadcasting Unit, Trinidad and Tobago.

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program; that is, national prosperity is dependent upon a successful program of education. Appraisal of any aspect of education in Trinidad-Tobago then must be from a frame of reference which considers whether the education is appropriately designed and operated to help individuals succeed in the society as it is and as it expects to be in the immediate future.

Although there were numerous schools in Trinidad when it became independent, they were small, lacking in equipment and facilities, and understaffed with teachers, many of whom were inadequately prepared. The better schools were the parochial schools. Only two secondary schools were not church supported; apparently only the churches were willing to spend the money for more than a bare basic education for the natives.

A Comprehensive Plan

The new government was aware that it had inherited a large and complex problem and that its limited economic capabilities would enable it to make progress only very slowly. It began by preparing a 15-year comprehensive plan for education at all levels. The implementation of this plan began in 1968 and is scheduled to be completed in 1983.

There are at present three distinct levels of preparedness of teachers in Trinidad:

1. Assistant teachers—no formal preparation beyond secondary school
2. In-service teachers—two years of teachers college
3. Qualified teachers—two years of teachers college plus one or more university degrees.

There are two types of teachers colleges in Trinidad. Both are two-year institutions. The first post-secondary school enrolls mostly students who have had no experience as assistant teachers. The title, “assistant teacher,” is more descriptive of the salary and experience of these persons than of their duties, since they are in charge of their own classes. Mausica, the first institution of this type, has a rather spacious campus with dormitories. Students are given full support. Mausica was built as a college and has the most adequate facilities of any of the Trinidadian colleges. It has laboratories and other equipment, including a library. The space and facilities, however, are very minimal. It has no formal library and very limited facilities, and the small amount of equipment is outdated.

The other type of teachers college admits assistant teachers for a two-year course also. The course comprises:

   Professional Studies: Educational Psychology; Principles and Practice of Education; and Practice Teaching.

   Basic Subjects: Language Studies; Mathematics; General Science; and Social Studies.

   Elective Subject: One subject, pursued in depth, selected from a list of about 15 subjects.

There are four colleges of this second type. They possess very limited facilities and only a small amount of equipment, which in some cases is outdated.

One is very much impressed, however, by the high degree of achievement of these institutions. It appears that eager, able learners, coupled with low pupil-teacher ratios, modern seminars, and frequent tutorial sessions, are responsible. There is little reliance on formal lecturing of the type so common in the United States. Effective use of those materials which are available is, of course, a contributing factor.

Visits to the schools of Trinidad to see the products of the teacher preparation system at work reveal a highly regimented program. It appears obvious that there is a high degree of central authority and of political influence over education as a whole, as well as over specific aspects of it. Regimentation facilitates the operation of a program in which individuals lack the preparation to function democratically.

The curriculum and the teaching methods in the elementary and secondary classrooms have a definite British flavor. Modification is sufficiently slow that it appears to be avoided by both the administra-
tion, which fears the lessening of control and subsequently the lowering of standards, and by the teachers, who do not resist because they are not sufficiently prepared to deviate. Change, however, is inevitable. The curriculum for the teachers colleges is being revised as is that for the schools.

The schools are functioning effectively in terms of their immediate needs and exceptionally well in terms of their facilities. Trinidad's literacy rate is extremely high (95 percent). The students appear to enjoy school and the citizens appear satisfied with the progress being made. Most seem to take for granted the fact that there are now 21 government secondary schools in Trinidad, even though six years ago, before the Trinidadian government took over, there were only two.

Inevitably the responsibilities of world citizenship are soon to be thrust upon the residents of the islands. The effectiveness of the Trinidad-Tobago Teacher Preparation Program for preparing its people for greater involvement as world citizens is difficult to assess. A literacy level that is satisfactory for an insular existence may be inadequate for a more cosmopolitan life in which most of its citizens must work for less immediate personal goals. There is a question as to whether teachers as presently prepared will be able to meet the larger demands of a broader education for a majority of the population.

The great scarcity of audio-visual aids, periodicals, and library books, both in schools and in colleges, seems to indicate that these tools, considered so vital in the United States, do not have as high a priority in the Trinidad-Tobago program. This is especially significant since there is but a single television channel and few motion pictures. Radio, however, is available to a large share of the population. In addition, the policy of employing only natives of the islands as educators in colleges and public schools, although commendable in many ways, tends to encourage a less cosmopolitan influence on future teachers. It is true, however, that many native college teachers have received their education abroad.

American educators concerned with the preparation of teachers should be especially interested in factors that seem to be of major significance in consideration of the Trinidad-Tobago program.

There is a detailed, carefully prepared plan for the integrated development of all phases of education, and this plan is subscribed to by everyone in positions of influence.

An informal program of tutorials and seminars is effectively replacing education courses as typically offered to future teachers in the United States.

It is possible to attain a literacy rate of 95 percent on an island of multi-ethnic, rural people without the utilization of modern facilities such as audio-visual equipment and large libraries, although unquestionably such resources would make achievement easier for both learners and teachers.

When teachers are not fully prepared professionals, a regimented program with a high degree of central authority can provide a floor which ensures at least a minimum quality in that program. Care, however, must be exercised to ensure that this practice does not also impose a ceiling on both initiative and quality.

The people of Trinidad-Tobago are proud citizens of their new nation, ambitious to increase their recognition as productive members of the world community. In the preparation of their teachers, they have embarked on a program that should contribute greatly to the fulfillment of their dreams. More experienced educators in the United States would do well to reconsider their own activities in light of the early achievements of their colleagues in Trinidad-Tobago.