

NIER'S Educational Co-operation Programme in Asia and the Pacific

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Prof. M. Hiratsuka, my predecessor as the Director General of the National Institute for Educational Research (NIER) of Japan, devoted enthusiastically to the development of regional programmes for educational co-operation in Asia and the Pacific which have been highly appreciated by educators in the Asian region. I caught a glimpse of his endeavour from time to time when I was in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, but it was only when I succeeded him that I came to fully realize the weight of the tasks involved.



My active participation began with a letter from Mr. Raja Roy Singh, the then Director of the Unesco Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific. He congratulated me on my appointment as the Director General of NIER, and pointed out in his letter how crucial a place NIER's regional programme for educational co-operation in Asia, which was initiated by Prof. Hiratsuka, occupies in the total sphere of Unesco's regional programme for educational development. He stressed the strong demands of Asian countries towards further development of NIER's regional programme, and he kindly invited me to make a study visit to several Asian countries for the purpose of observing educational situations in some of the countries.

Due to my previous commitments, I was not able to accept this kind invitation immediately, but a year later. I was asked to set aside at least four weeks for grasping the overall situation of the region, but due to circumstances this time was condensed into a three week programme. From 11 February to 1 March 1979, I visited four countries, namely, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Following the itinerary which had been carefully prepared by the Unesco Regional Office, I visited New Delhi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, and I was able to feel the different national characteristics of the countries. More than ten years had passed since I had originally been to these countries.

My travel coincided with two big events in east and west Asia. In Iran, the Islamic revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded and Shah Pahlavi was expatriated. In east Asia, China and Viet Nam engaged in a battle at their border. These events reminded me of the existence of extremely complex political situations in Asia. At the same time, the Diet of Japan was going "round in circles" arguing about a bill on the name of the year in an era. The Diet gave final approval for that bill, but almost all other bills proposed at that session were dropped in exchange.

When I read through back issues of newspapers on my return home, I found that the front pages were occupied with reports on the confusion in the Diet and the Lockheed scandal. News of the events in Iran and Viet Nam

Educational Co-operation in Asia and the Pacific

were put aside in a small corner. In the local papers I read in the cities I visited, more space was given to the news on the emergent border meeting by top leaders of Malaysia and Thailand regarding the China-Viet Nam border disputes, and the news of the tense situation in the Persian Gulf. I felt strong misgivings about the fundamental defects of Japanese leaders in the Diet as well as the mass communication world and their international perspective.

In that sense, I can never forget my visits to Asian countries at that time. I have been firmly convinced through the experiences I gained during the trip that educational co-operation in Asia should have a pivotal role to play for the future of Japan. At least we have had to make our regional educational co-operation programme closer to the future destiny of our society.

At that time, NIER's regional programme was being conducted mainly in the context of co-operation with Unesco-APEID. Countries which were not participating in APEID did not participate in NIER's programme as well. Consequently, there were participants from, say, Australia or India, but no participants from New Zealand and Pacific countries. I thought it should be vital for Japan to have participants from these countries as they will certainly play crucial roles in the Asian and Pacific region, and I asked Mr. R. Miller, the then New Zealand Ambassador to Japan, who is a close friend of mine, to encourage his government to participate in APEID. Fortunately, New Zealand's participation in APEID was realized fairly quickly and NIER enjoyed having distinguished participants from New Zealand in its regional programme. Later, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa also have begun to send their educationists to the NIER's regional programme.

NIER organizes its regional workshops and seminars three or four times a year. You might think that the frequency is rather high for a national institution. A huge amount of work is needed for preparation, follow-up and the publication of final reports. The most difficult task is, however, the selection of workshop themes. What theme or topic will be the most suitable and attractive for a joint study of all participating countries? It requires a large amount of preparatory work on the part of NIER, if we select different themes or topics for each workshop or seminar. On the other hand, if we choose the same topic for a series of workshops or seminars, it may become less stimulating to participants as well as staff members. Needless to say, we always have consultations with the Unesco Regional Office in Bangkok in selecting themes or topics of NIER's regional workshops and/or seminars to be organized within the framework of APEID.

My predecessor, Prof. Hiratsuka paid special attention to moral education and established a section within NIER for the study of moral education. He also strongly appealed to the international community for the necessity of including moral education. Under his guidance, NIER conducted a series of workshops for the study of moral education in Asia. The report entitled "Moral Education in Asia", which presents the state of art for moral education in Asian countries based on the data collected through NIER's workshops on the subject, was highly appreciated by late Prof. J. A. Lauwerys of the University of London. He even suggested that we distribute the reports through the international book market. I presume that Prof. Hiratsuka's enthusiasm for the promotion of moral education moved Mr. M'Bow, Director-

General of Unesco, to such an extent, that he stressed the importance of moral education in his speech at a regional conference of education ministers in Latin America.

While I enjoy international appreciation of NIER's regional programme for educational co-operation, I can also recognize several issues or problems emerging from the implementation of the regional programme. I have to confess that even the staff members of NIER in general tend not to pay close enough attention to regional co-operation in education. I feel that it is not easy to ask local experts in education to participate in NIER's regional programme, because NIER is provided by the government with travel expenses to invite participants from countries outside Japan only. No financial provision has been made for inviting local experts to the regional workshop held at NIER. Once we managed to invite local experts, but I found it difficult to ask Japanese experts to stay throughout the workshop period and to become familiar with fellow participants from outside Japan. Consequently, in spite of dedicated efforts of staff members of the Section for Educational Co-operation in Asia and others concerned at NIER, you may observe a peculiar scene. While an effort to make educational experts from Asian countries familiar with each other is being made by the host organization using its own facilities in Japan, only a few participants from Japan are attending.

My biggest worry at the time was whether, in spite of the efforts made by staff members concerned, Asian participants felt dissatisfied with the lack of participation by Japanese experts. I was afraid they might even feel that they were not welcomed by Japanese education circles. I really felt relieved when Asian participants, after three to four weeks' stay in Tokyo for the workshop, expressed their unwillingness to leave and also their appreciation for the hospitality extended to them.

This situation typically reflects the difficulty and problem of Asian co-operation of Japan. It relates to the problem of language. When we use English as a working language, Japanese experts feel it is not possible for them to participate. Many of the Japanese experts, who have expertise in the workshop subject, are not able to express themselves well in English. Thus, the international practice that the participant from a host country will preside over discussions can not be followed at NIER's regional workshops and seminars.

Secondly and more seriously, Japanese experts have in general less knowledge of and concern for Asian issues. Generally speaking, this society tends to look to Europe and North America for getting new knowledge and learning from their experiences. This in turn creates an overall situation that Japanese experts lack basic knowledge of Asian issues and they are unable to deliberate on matters of common concern with Asian fellows. If I presume further, it may reach an assumption that Japanese experts may have a feeling that they have nothing to learn from other Asian countries, but only from Western societies. This is my third worry.

When I listened carefully to the explanation of educational problems and issues of other Asian countries, plus the measures that they have taken for solving them, I felt myself that essentially there are many problems and issues that we share among us. Naturally, we have to admit the existence of differences in developmental stages. I found that there are areas of educa-

Educational Co-operation in Asia and the Pacific

tion in Asian countries far more advanced than ours. One example is dissemination and utilization of research outcomes in education. In some Asian countries, certain contents of some subject areas are taught at a much faster pace than ours. There are countries in Asia that Japan could learn from sharing others' experiences. For example, in such areas as informatics or utilization of distance education.

I believe, therefore, that there are things that the Japanese experts could learn from their counterparts in other Asian countries. Nevertheless, there are still those who take an indifferent attitude towards other Asian countries. I very much regret the indifference of Japanese educationists who display their ignorance and resign their position as members of the Asian Society.

In order to solve these fundamental problems, we need to train specialists who can work together with their Asian fellows. We should provide more opportunities for work experiences in Asian countries for younger Japanese researchers. In addition, we have to improve our methods for presenting our own experiences. There were some staff members at NIER who could do this when I was the Director General of NIER, but I think now that I should have provided more such opportunities to many more people on the staff.

Furthermore, I believe that Japan should promote studies on the development of curriculum and/or instructional strategies by individual teachers. I raise this point not because of the need for promoting regional co-operation programmes, but I rather believe that the improvement of teaching-learning activities at the classroom level is a very crucial undertaking as a basis for the learning and teaching processes. I once visited the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics (RECSAM) in Penang, Malaysia and I observed its training courses in action. It was at that time that I realized the necessity for helping individual school teachers in Japan develop their capabilities in curriculum development. Certainly, local education centres in Japan are making huge efforts for that cause and I am quite certain the exchange of experiences for the improvement of instructional activities with Asian countries will be of mutual benefit.

Under such circumstances, we have organized the regional programme for educational co-operation in such areas as instructional materials in science education, moral education, vocational and technical education, educational information, research and reform in education, mathematics education, and the elementary curriculum.

Now I recall with thanks that many prominent scholars in education and educationists in Asia and the Pacific helped me in various ways. Just to name a few, apart from Mr. Raja Roy Singh, they include, Dr. S. K. Mitra, former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), India, Mr. Eric de Silva, the then Under Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, Dr. Minda C. Sutaria, present Vice Minister of Education, Culture and Sports, Philippines, Dr. Saiyut Champatong, present Under Secretary of State for Education, Thailand, and Dr. John P. Keeves, former Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Though I cannot mention all the names of those who helped me while I was at NIER, I should not forget to mention the name of Mr. John E. Watson, former Director

of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) who has been and still is friendly and co-operative to me and to NIER. He once advised me frankly that Japan should be more frank and more positive in transferring her experiences in educational development to her Asian neighbours. He commented that NIER's regional programme has developed a sound foundation for further leadership in educational development in Asia and the Pacific. He stressed that the participants of NIER's regional programme are eager to learn from the Japanese experiences and it is the duty of NIER and the Japanese society at large to respond to such requests of Asian educationists.

In the past, Japan could not properly respond to such a request and Japan could not express herself adequately. It is the very problem that we have now to improve basically so that our regional or international co-operation can be promoted more substantially and effectively for the sake of both sides.

In addition to the organization of regional seminars and workshops, NIER publishes Newsletters and other publications in English and distributes them among former participants and others in the region, through which information regarding NIER's activities and educational development in Japan are communicated. These information services are appreciated by many Asian educationists. I wrote front-page essays for the NIER Newsletter with the help of Messrs. Koizumi and Kanaya. Sometimes I heard the comments and appraisal on my writing and I realized that whenever we write about education in Japan we should always be aware that many Asian educationists read them quite carefully and we should respond in writing to their sincere attitudes and concerns.

Although it is beyond the scope of the regional programme for educational co-operation, NIER participates in the projects of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), more concretely IEA's projects on mathematics and science studies. In this connection, I should mention that we organized a training seminar on educational evaluation in Tokyo and Jakarta for curriculum developers from three southeast Asian countries in close collaboration with IEA. This is one example that NIER develops its regional co-operation programme in many ways. We should develop more such multilateral co-operation programmes in the future.

Finally, I wish every success in NIER's undertakings for regional educational co-operation. I shall also continue to support NIER's efforts in this field. NIER is the only agency that continues to conduct a wide range of activities of international and regional co-operation in education in Japan. I am convinced that it is one of NIER's basic responsibilities to join hands with Asian people through educational research activities.