

# U. S. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

## CLEARING HOUSE AND CONTINUING SERVICES IN EDUCATION

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### 1. History and Trends

Four trends are discernible as one reviews the brief history of Unesco's activities as a clearing house of information and as a center for continuing services in education. The first of these is towards an increased emphasis upon the function of collecting information. The second is towards the collection of general educational information rather than the assembling of data directly related to international understanding. The third is towards the gathering of information on education by various sections of the Secretariat rather than concentrating these functions in the Education Section. The fourth is towards the acceptance of clearing house items in the program as a means of placating various delegates to the General Conference and winning their votes for other parts of the educational program.

Several factors account for these trends. One is the lack of clarity as to Unesco's role as an agency of action as opposed to its role as an agency of service. Closely related to this is the fear on the part of some persons and governments that Unesco will gain too much power and infringe upon the educational sovereignty of their Ministries of Education. Another reason for these shifts in emphasis is the changing personnel in the Education Section of the Secretariat, particularly in the person of the Head of Section. Still another factor is the demand for educational information and service on a wide range of topics rather than primarily upon aspects of education for international understanding. Of particular importance to educators in the United States in this connection are the different interpretations of "international understanding" by different governments and persons and the belief that indirect and long-term teaching for world-mindedness are more important than direct teaching towards this end; hence the desire for data on rebuilding schools, methods of teaching science without equipment, materials in fundamental education and a score of other topics. Still another explanation of these trends lies in the struggle among various sections of Unesco for increased power by annexing from other parts of the program projects to which they can somewhat legitimately lay claim by a broad interpretation of their functions. Finally, there is the "log-rolling" in the General Conferences which sometimes results in items being accepted as a part of the program not because of their intrinsic worth but because they will win votes for other parts of the program.

Looking backward, it is fairly easy to see these trends developing, particularly as one reads the program recommendations of the Secretariat, the program resolutions adopted by the General Conferences, and the Director-General's reports.



The Preparatory Commission's Report recommended Unesco's development in education along six main lines -- collecting and disseminating educational information, co-ordinating educational activities, stimulating other agencies and associations, facilitating the work of voluntary educational agencies, initiating projects, and operating programs. In retrospect, the number of program items of a Clearing House and Continuing Service nature seems too great, but the balance suggested between service and operation appears reasonably sound. Even the collecting of pertinent educational data was to result in such publications as an International Education Year Book and an International News Letter or Review.

The First Session of the General Conference started the trend towards clipping the wings of the education section's program along these lines and no Unesco edited Year Book or News Letter has ever appeared, although some of the material which might have been included in such a publication has appeared in other printed form.

The most marked shift in emphasis towards Clearing House activities came in 1949 when the Third Session of the General Conference accepted the Clearing House function as of primary importance, giving it first place in the arrangement of the Education Section's program, and listing Educational Missions, collaboration with the International Bureau of Education, and Exchange of Information as sub-topics under this general head. Under its special Recommendations to the Director-General it further emphasized this function.

Likewise the trend towards collecting information on education in general rather than upon education for international understanding is quickly noted. All items in the Director-General's report for 1947 are noted as attempts to promote world-mindedness, such as "Seminars for Teachers on Education for International Understanding", "International Understanding Among Adults", and "Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids in Developing International Understanding." In the 1948 Report of the Director-General these had become "Educational Seminars", "Adult Education", and "Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials".

In the early period of Unesco's history, all Clearing House activities and Continuing Services in education were concentrated in the Education Section. Soon other parts of the Secretariat began to annex these functions one by one. Work camps, seen as a long-term activity to foster international understanding, became a part of the Reconstruction Section's program, with emphasis upon their part in rebuilding devastated areas. Exchange of teachers and students was shifted to a section on Exchange of Persons. The Teachers' Charter was farmed out to the International Bureau of Education. Reconstruction in Education was transferred from the Education Section to the Reconstruction Section. And the role of science in general education was to be handled by scientists rather than educators.



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For several months many inquiries regarding educational matters were answered by the Department of Public Information without consultation with the Education Department. And during 1948 an abortive attempt was made to transfer all clearing house functions to the Section on Documentation, Library and Statistical Services. Fortunately these particular problems have largely disappeared and no further inroads were made on this aspect of the Education Department's program. Those items cited in the preceding paragraph, however, have never been restored to the Education Department.

Finally, a number of small items were accepted by the General Conference to please certain governments or delegates, cluttering up the program in education. Little progress has been made on such items as the Youth Charter, and yet they have appeared in the program each year as "unfinished due to lack of personnel" or under the even more ambiguous phrasing of being "under consideration".

## 2. Accomplishments

Progress, however, has been made in a number of projects which can be considered Clearing House functions or Continuing Services.

The best work has probably been done in Fundamental Education. As early as 1946 material was collected from authorities on illiteracy in various parts of the world and published in the volume Fundamental Education: Common Ground for All Peoples. A wealth of material has been assembled since then and in 1949 a "quarterly Fundamental Education Bulletin" appeared in separate English, French and Spanish editions, making much of this material available to persons around the globe. "Abstracts and Bibliography" is another new Unesco publication in this field. The collection of such data has been facilitated by having one representative of the Secretariat roving in several countries, by pilot and associated projects in several countries, and by several Fundamental Education meetings, conferences, and regional Seminars.

During the Preparatory Commission period material was collected on the history of textbook improvement. This was edited and appeared in English and French in a document entitled "Looking at the World Through Textbooks". Since then more material has been collected and a small booklet printed under the title "A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding." Recently a grant has been made to the International Bureau of Education to bring its textbook collection up to date. Further data should result from the seminar scheduled for 1950 on the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials.

An important continuing service of Unesco's education section is its collection of information on ways and means of developing international understanding or world-mindedness through the schools. The First Session of the General Conference approved "A Study of Education for International Understanding in the primary and secondary schools and in



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institutions of higher learning...." and an Eight-Part Inquiry was drafted by the Secretariat covering a wide range of topics pertinent to education for international understanding.

The first section of that Inquiry, on teaching about the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, was approved by the Second Session of the General Conference and considerable progress has been made on that item. A summary of the reports from national governments on their teaching about U.N. was published in 1948 by Unesco and much of that material incorporated in an Interim Report to the Economic and Social Council (in 1948 and 1949) by Unesco and the U.N. A member of the Unesco Education Section has recently spent several days at Lake Success working on a revision of this report, bringing it up to date.

A booklet on "Some Suggestions on Teaching About the United Nations and Its Specialized Agencies" drafted by the Education Section of the Secretariat was discussed by the annual joint meeting of Unesco and the I.B.E. and criticized by a study group at the 1948 Unesco Seminar at Adelphi College. It has recently been published in a revised edition, as one of a series of booklets under the general title "Towards World Understanding".

A related service has been to furnish schools and club groups with suggestions and study guides on Unesco and education for international understanding in general. In 1947 a booklet was published on "International Relations Clubs and Similar Societies" and distributed in English and French editions. In 1948 two booklets on Unesco were published by the Education Department on Unesco for use with upper elementary and junior high school boys and girls and senior high school students, bearing the titles "Let's Visit Unesco House" and "You and Unesco".

Another type of service which Unesco has started is the preparation of bibliographies in education. The first of these was originally prepared by the Education Section, with some help from the Unesco Library, and used at the Adelphi Seminar. It has recently been revised and published in the series of booklets referred to in the preceding paragraph. Other data of this kind could be published by Unesco from the bibliographies it has prepared for the various seminars.

Many requests have come to Unesco from war devastated countries for help with the many problems arising from the war and occupation. Booklets on "The Teacher and the Post-War Child in War-Devastated Countries" and "Going to School in War-Devastated Countries" were prepared by a member of the Education Secretariat in conjunction with the Reconstruction Section after a trip to Greece and the assembling of data from several war-damaged countries. A booklet of "Suggestions for Science Teachers in War-Devastated Countries" was published by the Reconstruction Section, although originally outlined by the Education Section. Material on war-handicapped children has also been collected by the Education Section and published in booklet form.



Unesco has also assisted the International Bureau of Education in assembling information on the teaching of natural science in the primary schools, on the place of the school psychologist, on the teaching of handwriting, and the teaching of reading. It has also published jointly with the I.B.E. the Proceedings and Recommendations of the yearly Conferences on Public Education and the International Yearbook prepared each year from reports from member states of Unesco and the I.B.E. of recent educational events in their respective countries. Just how much these publications contribute to Unesco's major aims will be discussed later in this paper.

One of the chief values of the Educational Missions to member states upon their request has been the assembling of valuable data on education in those particular countries, their problems and their progress. An exchange of information actually takes place, since the members of the Missions have been selected from different countries and bring with them valuable data to share with the educators they are assisting. When the Reports on such Missions to Afghanistan, Iraq and the Philippines have been printed, other countries will have access to much valuable data. So far, however, no member of the Secretariat has been appointed a member of one of these Missions, which seems to the writer a distinct loss as one means of educating the Secretariat to the kinds of information which are needed by various nations.

In a similar way all of Unesco's educational projects demand the compilation of pertinent data and provide opportunities for disseminating information through publications, through conferences and seminars, and through personal contacts. If space permitted, mention could be made of the Education Section's work as a clearing house and as a center for continuing services in adult education, university education, and Vocational Guidance and Technical Education, to mention only three additional projects.

An increasing number of persons are visiting Unesco or writing to it for information on every conceivable aspect of education. An attempt is made to meet such persons and consult with them, gleaning pertinent information from them as well as assisting them to gather data which they want, or in the case of correspondence to meet their requests by letter. As the number of such visits and letters increases, much better means will have to be found to answer their requests and at the same time conserve the time and energy of members of the Secretariat. Suggestions along these lines will be made in a later section.

### 3. Problems Encountered

The problems of Unesco's Education Department in Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services might be grouped under the headings of Aims, Organization, Personnel and Evaluation. Reference has already been made to each of these in the foregoing sections, but they are so important to the proper functioning of Unesco as a world organization that they bear further examination.

The first problem is that of Aims. It is not yet clear just what Unesco's real mission is to be or how it is to be carried out. Most educators in the United States insist that it is solely or primarily an agency to promote international understanding or world-mindedness. But at this



point many nations insist, and with considerable justification, that all aspects of education, from Fundamental Education to Reconstruction, and from the place of science in general education to the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials rightfully come under that purpose. Until that basic problem is resolved, the role of the Educational Clearing House and Center of Continuing Activities will not be fully clarified. Whether it should collect data on school buildings, on health education, on the status of teachers, and on a score of other subjects can only be satisfactorily determined when the question of Unesco's basic aims is solved.

2. Coupled with this problem is the question of how Unesco's Education Section should collect data. Up to the present time most of the information has been collected through correspondence, through persons attending conferences or seminars or visiting Unesco House, and through assembling publications--chiefly in English, although increasingly in other languages. Little use has been made so far of National Commissions or Cooperating Bodies, Ministries of Education, or private educational groups. Still less use has been made of travelling Unesco representatives, except in the case of Fundamental Education's field representatives.

3. There is also the problem of the languages in which information should be disseminated. To date publications have been in English and French, with a few materials printed in Spanish. Yet only a small proportion of the world's educators can read materials in these three languages.

4. Furthermore, there is the question of the best ways to insure wide distribution of publications and information. The majority of the materials prepared by Unesco's Education Section have been distributed in the United States, yet only a very small percentage of American educators have ever seen any of the information supplied by Unesco. The best means employed so far have been the publication of items about Unesco in educational journals in this country which reach large groups of teachers, and the republishing in the United States of the Unesco Courier, edited in Paris.

II The second problem is one of Organization. In the early days of Unesco there was no special division within the Education Section charged with Clearing House Activities and/or Continuing Services. In 1949 such a division was set up, with a staff of five persons, including a Division Chief, two persons working on Fundamental Education and two working on other aspects of the Education Section's program. Whether this is a necessary or helpful organization is doubted by the writer.

Furthermore, there is the problem of the relation of general Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services within the Education Section to the other parts of the Secretariat. For example, how much can the Education Section rely upon the Unesco Library staff to collect necessary information? Will members of that staff be chosen who are conversant with library techniques, with languages, and with education? Similarly, how can other Sections contribute to the Education Section's work without taking over functional activities?



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Mention has already been made of Unesco's relation to the National Commissions and Cooperating Bodies. But as long as they are weak or staffed solely by voluntary persons, they cannot be expected to assist greatly in the collection and/or dissemination of information. Nor is the extent of cooperation with voluntary educational organizations clear yet. Such organizations as the World Organization of the Teaching Profession and the International New Education Fellowship could be very helpful in many aspects of Unesco's program if their relationship to Unesco were clearer.

*Relations with F.B.E.*  
Furthermore, the International Bureau of Education's role in relation to Unesco's educational program in collecting and disseminating information has never been satisfactorily settled in the writer's estimation.

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A similar problem is noticed in the Education Section's relationship to the United Nations and the other Specialized Agencies. The complications involved in this relationship have nowhere been more apparent than in the involved and intricate details of who should have the responsibility for encouraging teaching about the U.N. and its Agencies. In 1948, for example, inquiries were being made simultaneously on this subject by the U.N. and by Unesco. Nor has there been any real co-ordination as yet between U.N. and Unesco, and the other Specialized Agencies preparing materials for use in the schools on this topic.

The third problem is one of Personnel. This is a basic problem for all international organizations and Unesco is no exception. To find persons adequately trained as educators, imbued with the ideals of Unesco, linguistically gifted, and capable of working abroad in an international Secretariat is almost impossible. In addition, persons in Clearing House and Continuing Services activities must have specialized knowledge in a number of different fields. This probably means that a new type of international educator must be trained, including considerable field work, in order to acquaint them with the problems of education in different countries.

Lastly, there is the problem of evaluation of Unesco's activities of a Clearing House and Continuing Service nature. Little has been done as yet along these lines, except for the comments of delegates to the General Conferences, to Seminars, and conferences, and in a few cases by members of National Commissions and Cooperating Bodies. Here is a problem of such proportions that it cannot be solved easily.

#### 4. Suggestions and Recommendations

Some of the problems just mentioned could be solved fairly quickly by the Education Department itself; several of them can be solved only as the goals and organization of Unesco as a whole are determined. Specifically the writer would like to make the following suggestions and recommendations regarding the Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services of Unesco's Education Department:



Aims

1. That an attempt be made to define more clearly Unesco's role as an international agency of education, with particular reference to the extent to which its Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services should be focused upon direct education for international understanding.
2. That a study be made of the basic research which should be carried on as a continuing activity in Education, with special reference to the relation between the Tensions Project and the work of the Education Department.

Collecting and Disseminating Information

3. That a closer liaison be established between Unesco's Education Department and the National Commissions and Co-operating Bodies, the Ministries of Education, and international and national teachers organizations as a means of collecting and distributing pertinent data.
4. That the Seminars conducted and/or assisted by Unesco be utilized much more as a means of collecting important educational data, with national seminars or conferences preceding such international seminars.
5. That much more attention be given to the collection of data on promising practices in education for international understanding, to be collected by various governmental and non-governmental groups in their respective countries, and by field representatives of Unesco's Education Department.
6. That a one-volume World Encyclopedia of Educational Information be published by Unesco every **three to five** years.
7. That a World Journal of Education be published quarterly by Unesco.
8. That bibliographies, form letters and bulletins be prepared by Unesco to answer the bulk of letters coming to Unesco now in increasing numbers.
9. That the feasibility of providing educational journals throughout the world with articles and news notes on significant ideas and experiences in education be explored further.
10. That national governments and National Commissions and Co-operating Bodies be encouraged to reprint in their own national languages some of the data originally prepared by the Education Department.

Organization and Personnel

11. That Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services become an integral part organizationally of the Education Department rather than a separate unit.
12. That the relationship between Unesco's Education Department and other Departments of the Secretariat be closely examined in an effort to avoid



duplication and to concentrate leadership of Educational Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services in the Education Department.

13. That a closer liaison be fostered between Unesco's Education Department and the U.N. and its other Specialized Agencies on all matters pertaining to Clearing House Activities in Education.

14. That a thorough survey be made at the end of Unesco's first five years of its relationship with the International Bureau of Education.

15. That every effort be made to recruit personnel of the highest possible quality for the Clearing House and Continuing Services Activities, to train them as specialists, and to retain their services over a period of years.

16. That members of the Education Department be encouraged to obtain field experience in countries other than their own through such means as inclusion as full-time members of Educational Missions and Seminar staffs as a means of giving them a rich and realistic background for their work.

#### Evaluation

17. That a survey be made of the effectiveness to date of Unesco's Educational Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services by consultation with international and national educational organizations, National Commissions and Co-operating Bodies, Ministries of Education, and interested and competent persons.

It is hoped that by such suggestions and recommendations the work of Unesco's Education Department in Clearing House Activities and Continuing Services may be further strengthened.