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RESEARCH ...

MONASH UNIVERSITY - THE S.T.E.P.S. PROJECT

A Survey of Teacher Education for Plural Societies (the S.T.E.P.S. Project) has been commissioned and funded by the Education Research and Development Committee of the Australian Department of Education.

In the present state of teacher education in Australia, there are quite apparent uncertainties about aims, guiding pre-suppositions, and models of society. For instance, in the area of pluralism, agreement has yet to be reached on whether Australia is multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, or polyethnic. All these terms have been used at various times - often as political rhetoric - but arguably do not clarify our understanding of the nature of Australian pluralism.

At the conceptual mapping level, STEPS is designed to survey available recent Australian and overseas literature and research to arrive at a summary of the concepts currently employed to describe plural societies. It is hoped that this summary will provide a basis for arriving at a definitive statement about the special characteristics of Australian pluralism - it being axiomatic that each plural society will have its own 'brand' of pluralism - in order to assist educators' and educational planners' thinking and policy making.

Within constraints of time, finance and research personnel, STEPS aims to obtain data on the types of teacher education adopted for the pluralist conditions in a number of overseas countries - Great Britain, United States of America, Canada, Honolulu, Fiji, and New Zealand. Data will also be obtained from teacher education institutions (pre-service and in-service) within Australia to establish the degree to which teacher training programs take account of the pluralist nature of Australian society and culture. The definitive statement arrived at by the conceptual mapping phase of STEPS will be used as the basis for the design of the questionnaire to obtain these data. This phase will be undertaken by the research assistant for the project, Mr David Whitton, of State College of Victoria, Toorak, on a part-time basis.

It is recognized that STEPS will only be able to achieve limited results in view of the constraints referred to above under which it is operating. In addition, it is hoped to present a report early in 1979, which is an additional limiting factor on what can be achieved. It is thus anticipated that further in-depth research might be desirable at some later date into various sectors of teacher education for plural societies, for example, technical and further education, primary education. Such follow-up research might want to build on what it is hoped to achieve through STEPS. Accordingly, its final report will incorporate suggestions for future research to monitor developments in selected areas of teacher education, and will provide an annotated bibliography of sources consulted.

Educationists and social scientists in relevant fields, both within Australia and overseas, who have opinions or research findings relevant for the aims of STEPS, are invited to write to the project director. All contributions of this nature will be acknowledged in an appendix to the final report.

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