

# Overview and Introduction

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## 1. FURTHERING COOPERATION AMONG EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH WORKERS

In early October, 2000 representatives of educational research organisations in the Asia-Pacific region met at the offices of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research of Japan in Tokyo to attend a regional seminar titled 'Educational Research for Policy and Practice'. This meeting was sponsored by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation and Development and followed similar meetings that had been held in Melbourne in 1995, in Bangkok in 1996, and in Tokyo in 1998. It was recognised at this time that there were several very active national educational research associations in the region including the All India Association for Educational Research, the Educational Research Association of Singapore, the Hong Kong Educational Research Association, the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education. The last four associations listed above had held a joint conference in Singapore in 1997. However, the discussions that had taken place over the past five years had indicated the need to establish an Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association.

From this regional seminar, the Tokyo Declaration on joint action to advance educational research for improved policy and practice in education in the Asia-Pacific region was issued.

Recognising the rich and unique traditions, cultural diversity and common challenges – including obstacles of language and geographical separation – we, the assembled educational research leaders meeting in Tokyo in October 2000 under the auspices of the Japanese National Institute for Educational

Research and UNESCO, hereby commit ourselves to joint action to support and advance the conduct and use of educational research to improve policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region.

To this end, we agree to establish an Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association, the objectives of which will be to:

- promote collaboration of researchers in the region;
- facilitate the publication of Asia-Pacific research for improved educational policy and practice;
- organise professional meetings; and
- support the training and professional development of educational researchers in the region.

There are several reasons why improved collaboration among educational researchers in the Asia-Pacific region is desirable. First, researchers frequently work alone or in small research teams, sometimes unaware of similar research being carried out elsewhere. Often, when research workers do look beyond their own national borders, it is to Europe or to the United States, rather than to research being carried out within the region. Language barriers and infrequent opportunities to meet and consider research issues and findings have worked against the development of a substantial and systematic Asia-Pacific body of knowledge in education.

Second, educational change is occurring very rapidly in many Asia-Pacific countries. However, these changes are often made on the basis of fashion or on ideological grounds rather than on dependable research-based evidence. In addition, there is often little systematic evaluation of new initiatives. Since education is a major area of public expenditure in all systems in the region, it seems reasonable to expect that the allocation of resources and the introduction of new educational processes and structures would be based on reliable research evidence and subjected to systematic study and evaluation.

Third, there is recognition worldwide, that educational research could be better directed towards pressing issues of policy and practice. Some educational research is conducted with limited consideration for its practical implications or subsequent implementation. Results often are communicated primarily within the research community rather than to policy makers and practitioners. Regional collaboration could be effective in identifying ways of enhancing the impact and adoption of the findings of research in countries within the region. Greater coordination and collaboration might also be effective in supporting the national implementation of research findings and in enhancing the ways in which educational research is perceived, supported and used within the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, greater cooperation among research workers in the Asia-Pacific region is likely to be effective in enhancing levels of research expertise within the region. Training workshops to introduce researchers to new research methods, if conducted under the auspices of a regional association, are likely to be a very effective way of raising the quality of research within the region (see *Training of Educational Research Workers*).

## 2. NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

The Asia-Pacific region contains countries and school systems at very different stages of development. Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that each school system has its own unique set of problems that require research in order to facilitate the resolution of these problems. Thus it is difficult to summarise the new directions for research within the region. Nevertheless, among the 14 education systems that sent representatives to the Regional Seminar in Tokyo in October 2000, there were few issues or problem areas that were cited by a particular system that were not referred to by another system within the region. It is clear that the education systems of these countries are not so disparate that they do not have something to discuss and learn from the research being carried out in a neighbouring system within the region.

Perhaps the issue that was most common across systems involved the nature of the curriculum, which was already seen to be overburdened, and yet needed reform with new curriculum areas included, or existing curriculum areas extended in order to meet the changes that were occurring rapidly within society. Many systems were concerned with the inculcation of moral values among their youth, and this area relates to concern for adolescent behaviour, life skills and the structure of schools in the future, as well as preparation for adult life, that involves lifelong learning and development. Several systems were concerned with issues and problems relating to information technology and the individualisation of education. Furthermore, many systems were interested in the policy making process and the implementation of change since there was recognition that the simplistic view of direct implementation was no longer adequate at a time of rapid change.

The problems encountered in the region not only differ among the countries within the region, but also differ from those that are present in the other major zones of the educational world, North America, Latin America, Europe and Africa. Consequently, the turning to Europe and North America for guidance by the countries within the region would no longer seem appropriate. Only countries on the fringe of the Asia-Pacific region like Australia and New Zealand, because of both their location and their traditions are likely to make gains from occasionally turning to Europe and North America. The time has come for by far the great majority of education systems within the Asia-Pacific region to see that they are part of a dynamic and vibrant zone of a world in which changes are occurring at an increasing rate.

It was within this context that a decision was made to review the field of educational research in the Asia-Pacific region and to publish on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association a *Handbook of Educational Research in the Asia-Pacific Region*. This *Handbook* would focus on the problems and issues facing education at all levels in the region. It would also review the findings of the research that has been conducted within the region, and would provide new directions for research in the decades ahead that would be directed

towards the problems confronting education in the region. The pages that follow in this *Overview and Introduction* contain the views and writings of scholars who are concerned with the problems of educational policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region. Most, but not all authors, live or work in the region. Their writings reveal the strength and extent of research that has been conducted or is currently being undertaken in the region, but has remained hidden because of the dominance of the journals and books that are issued in Britain and the United States and that are published in the English language. In countries like China, India, Japan and Korea in particular, there is a wealth of findings of research studies in the field of education that are reported in the national language of the country and that are not seen outside their country of origin. Unfortunately, this *Handbook* does not achieve full access to this large body of research findings. Nevertheless, it does represent an initial attempt to present information on the research being carried out in the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the authors contributing to the *Handbook* argue strongly for greater collaboration between educational research workers in the Asia-Pacific region. They seek to foster the sharing of the findings of research across the countries of the region that have common problems, which differ from those of the more highly developed countries that currently dominate the field of educational research.

This *Handbook* is prepared as a source book of ideas for those who advise policy makers and practitioners in education. It is too large to have a strong appeal to politicians and policy makers who must draw on the counsel and advice of policy analysts. Moreover, it is too large to appeal to many teachers in schools who must obtain guidance from teacher educators as well as superintendents and administrators of school systems. The *Handbook* is written for these people who need to keep abreast of the latest findings from educational research studies in order to foster change and development in both policy and practice in schools and education systems. The *Handbook* should also prove to be very useful for graduate students, who are planning research studies, as well as research workers in education who seek support in their work from replication through similar studies conducted in different settings, or who seek ideas for future investigation. Likewise, curriculum developers and teachers at university and college levels need to be well-informed about the changes that are occurring in the field of education in the region and the relevance of the findings of research for curriculum development and teacher education programs. With these many different users of this *Handbook* in mind, the editors argue very strongly for the development of a sense of unity in the field of educational research. There is increasing variety in the strategies and tactics that are employed in research into educational problems, as well as in the methods of inquiry, theoretical perspectives and procedures of analysis that are used to investigate the practices and processes of education, the contexts and conditions under which educational services are provided, and the policies and products that influence change and development. Nevertheless, there is a unity of purpose that cuts across the different disciplinary perspectives and approaches to inquiry that are employed.

The purpose of scholarly inquiry and research in education is the building of a coherent body of knowledge that has been examined against evidence from the real world and that is available for transforming the real world through human agency and social action. This *Handbook* presents the coherent body of knowledge that is currently available and is related to educational policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region (see *Research in Education: Nature, Impact, Needs and Priorities*).

### 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THIS HANDBOOK

The articles in this *Handbook of Educational Research in the Asia-Pacific Region* are assembled in eight major sections:

- (a) Trends and Issues,
- (b) Access and Equity,
- (c) Learning and Human Development,
- (d) Curriculum and Technical Education,
- (e) Teaching, Teachers, and Teacher Education,
- (f) Organisation and Management of Education,
- (g) Educational Research and National Development,
- (h) Towards the Future.

The structure of the *Handbook* is in many ways greatly influenced by a decision that the *Handbook* should be contained in two volumes, each of approximately 700 pages for the purposes of printing and production. This demands that the length of articles must necessarily be limited, which has required that the initial drafts of some articles unfortunately needed substantial pruning, so that the articles did not exceed the specified word limit. In total, 90 articles were sought with each article not exceeding a word limit of 6000 words. The use of sections served primarily the purposes of sub-dividing the workload of inviting contributing authors and the supervision and editing of contributed articles. The use of section editors and the general editors also ensured that each article was systematically reviewed by two reviewers who examined the material presented in each article for content, style and appropriateness for inclusion in the *Handbook*.

At the beginning of each of the six middle sections there is an introductory article, written by the section editor that not only reviews developments in the area and discusses issues, but also comments on how the entries in the section are clustered together and organised for reference purposes. Thus, within each section, and where sub-sections also exist, the articles are grouped in such a way as to provide a coherent perspective across the topics considered in the articles that contribute to the particular section or sub-section. The sections that comprise the complete volume seek to focus on the major issues that are seen to confront educational research in the region. In a similar way the topics that are addressed in each of the articles seek to direct attention to particular problems



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