Teaching Rewards Are Many

The following report was written by Rena and George Kroeker, a Canadian couple who taught English under the Amity teachers program from 1987 to 1989.

We teach in a financially poor, two-year teachers' college. It is located 15 km from a semi-industrialized city in a poverty-stricken province. As elsewhere in China, teachers here have low salaries and low status. Students come from the city, suburbs and countryside. The latter, especially, often have a low self-image and are resentful of being sent here because they do not want to be teachers. Since schools, especially in the countryside, are desperately in need of teachers, they had no choice in determining their location.

Still, the year went quite well and some students, hoping for city assignments, came to think they might even enjoy teaching. This feeling of euphoria was enhanced when they returned from their spring teaching practicum: they had liked their students and enjoyed teaching. When the news was released that 95% of the student body would be needed in the countryside, it was received like a death sentence. Students knew the government policy of sending students back to teach in their home area. Still, most had hoped for a better placement. Morale plummeted, depression and gloom prevailed. Many students cut classes with lame excuses of not feeling well or frankly admitting they had slept, gone to a movie or played ping-pong. Said one, "It's our last chance to live." Others spoke of feelings of emptiness and futility, and, though they came to class, were so listless that they learned little.

Then a beautiful, promising girl committed suicide, having told her classmates that teaching in the countryside was worse than death. Some students told us they wished that they themselves had had courage.

Something needed to be done. We decided to work with our students in a number of ways to restore faith in themselves, their profession and in society. We encouraged them to talk about their feelings of hopelessness and despair. They came to the apartment and office but also learned to share openly in the classroom. The difficulties they envisioned are very real, so we did not try to minimize them. We did, however, talk about how positive attitudes to problems or we are powerless to change can help to counteract the disastrous effects of pessimism and fear.

We discussed the importance of a good teacher in the lives of children, their parents and the community. We encouraged them to talk about their favorite middle-school teachers, and when they did, their eyes brightened as they praised their patience, kindness and understanding. "We will never forget them," they said, whereupon we, of course, countered with "You too, can develop these qualities, you too can influence lives like your teachers did."

We stressed the opportunities and privileges of working with people as opposed to working with objects or things. Even in the overabundance of population, every child is unique and needs help to develop his or her potential. We drew attention to the satisfaction that comes with helping a child to grow mentally, of kindling an interest in learning, enlarging horizons, of stimulating thought.

We also stressed the broader view: the importance of combating illiteracy, of having the rare privilege of making a significant contribution to the building of China's future. We cited articles from Chinese newspapers advocating educational reforms that would mean better salaries, living conditions and higher status for teachers.

Change came slowly, but gradually we sensed a new awareness of the students' own worth as people and as teachers. As confidence grew, a sense of peace and contentment settled on the classroom which, with some, even reached enthusiasm.

When we came back last fall we felt tremendously rewarded when a number of students wrote us to let us know how much they were enjoying teaching, how they loved their students, how our discussions had helped them adopt certain attitudes and ideas.

Two students teaching in a remote suburb invited us to open an English corner for their school. It took a great deal of planning and negotiation on their part, to arrange it all, and the appointed day dawned rainy, cold and miserable. On arrival at the school, we found, to our great surprise, more than one hundred students waiting under umbrellas to practice their English with us. Our two students were obviously doing an excellent job and wanted us to see it.

As we have told our students, teaching rewards are many, varied, and profound. They will be so for them as they have been for us here.
Teachers at the Grassroots

Nearly fifty of Amity's language teachers left China after the academic year ended in July. While most of them had completed the Foundation's regular two-year term, one couple can look back on four years of service in China. Margaret and Everett Metzler, seconded to the Amity Foundation by the Mennonite China Educational Exchange (CEE), came to China with the first group of teachers in 1985, right after the foundation of the Amity Foundation.

Since then, they have taught English in three different cities, each one farther away from the major urban centers. They gradually stepped down to the rougher living and working conditions of remoter regions. Last year they lived in Jixiang, 400 km west of Shanghai on the Yangtse River, and taught students who will become teachers in primary and middle schools after completing studies at a two-year college. There they were the only foreigners in town.

"We finally were involved in real grassroots education," Everett comments. "Doing this kind of pioneering work was meaningful and rewarding. But, of course, the language barrier sometimes got a bit frustrating. In the lower level colleges you can't expect your colleagues or students to have a good command of English." Adds Margaret: "In our last year we rarely met people we could fluently converse with. What could we do about it? Teach English better and learn Chinese better!"

Asked what made them stay that long in spite of all difficulties, Margaret replies: "The students, the students, the students!" Although each of them faced more than 100 students in classroom every week, they knew every one's Chinese name by heart and were able to guide them personally along in their studies. "It was the resilience, the helpfulness, the youth and energy of our students that made our work in China satisfying," Everett explains. "They were so eager, enthusiastic and responsive to our attempts to teach them." Knowing the Metzlers' passion for relating to people, the friendly and warmhearted way in which they built up their young students' self-confidence, such a positive response is easy to understand.

The Metzlers, who served as missionaries in Vietnam and Hongkong in earlier years, took their teaching assignment in China as quite a different kind of mission: "Through our connection with the Amity Foundation we perhaps made the existence of a church in China and its involvement with China's society better known to our acquaintances. Of course, the students used to raise questions about Christianity, such as: What do you do in a church service? Or, who wrote the Bible? But most important for us was trying to live out a personal Christian presence. Sometimes students said: 'You are highly educated, and yet you believe in God?' We hope we gave them something to think about."

The Amity Foundation thanks the Metzlers and all its other teachers who have completed their terms of service. Amity is most grateful for their whole-hearted commitment and perseverance, and the meaningful contribution they have made to the development of China's education. We wish all of our teachers well in the years ahead.

International Fellowships
Meet in Chinese Churches

Ecumenical worship services for Christians from overseas have come into being in Nanjing and Hangzhou as an outgrowth of the Amity teachers project.

The international fellowship services, held on the second and fourth Sundays of each month during the school year, supplement the regular Chinese Christian Church service for the foreign teachers, students, and others who are not fluent in Chinese. However, many of them also attend the Chinese services, which precede the international fellowships.

"Ours is not just a club of foreigners who want to 'take a break from China' on Sunday mornings," one participant emphasizes. "As fellow foreigners, we try, together with Chinese Christians, to find our place as Christians of different nationalities in this country. It is important for us to do this in close contact with the Church in China."

Begun in Nanjing two years ago on the grounds of St. Paul's Church, the international fellowship services have grown to include foreigners from nearby cities and towns, and the congregation often includes Christian visitors from many lands.

The Hangzhou fellowship services, patterned after those of Nanjing, are held in a meeting hall of the Si Sheng Church following the Chinese service.

Both fellowships, though organized by Amity teachers themselves, are under the leadership of the Chinese Churches which act as their hosts and offer strong support.

In both fellowships, English is the main language, but some parts of each service are in other languages, including Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Swahili, and Swedish, as these are mother tongues represented in the congregations. The nationalities of the participants are even more diverse, and include several African nations, Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States.

The services, led by men and women volunteers, contain elements from many denominational backgrounds, and they express a unified worship of God from a diversity of people, languages, and creeds.
China’s Crisis in Education

Ting Yenren

In this newsletter, there are several reports on Amity’s work in the area of teaching. To help you develop a better understanding of the issues involved, we include excerpts from a report on the current situation of education in China. It was first presented at the Amity Teachers Mid-year Conference in Xiamen, January 1989, and has since been updated.

Mr. Ting Yenren is an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation and coordinates the Foundation’s educational programs.

The past ten years have witnessed profound changes and reforms in Chinese society. There should be no denying that these changes have brought forth significant progress in China’s education. The progress falls under the following areas:

1) Literacy education. In 1988, the primary school enrollment rate all over China reached 97.1%. At the same time, 1,326 counties, or 66.8% of the total, achieved universal education on the junior middle school level.

2) Vocational/Technical Education. The enrollment in secondary vocational/technical schools reached 5.42 million, or 42.1% of all senior middle school level students. The same ratio was only 7.6% in 1978.

3) Adult Education. While there is little spare-time education to speak of, more opportunities are available for those who wish to study. At present, 1.09 million people are receiving tertiary level adult education, and 11.128 million secondary level adult education.

4) Higher Education. The total of college undergraduate students reached 2.7 million, and that of graduate students 110,000. The universities and colleges have sent 3.24 million graduates into society in the past ten years, about the same number as of graduates over the first 30 years after liberation in 1949.

Despite these achievements, China has found its education in a serious crisis. As productive, especially industrial sectors are taking off, education has largely been left behind and has lost much of its material and human resources.

The following are problems China’s education faces with regard to the allocation of resources:

1) Insufficient funding in education.

The government spending on education was over 20 billion yuan (US$5.2 billion) in 1987. This was but a very small amount compared with the capital construction for the same year, which was as high as over 100 billion yuan, and compared with the import of automobiles alone between 1981 and 1986, which cost the State also 20 billion yuan or US$5.2 billion of hard currency.

This 20 billion yuan spent on education only made up 3.2%, or 2.51% as some people claim, of the GNP in 1987, below the world average of 5.7%. The per capita expenditure on education in China is US$11.2, the second lowest in the world.

To make matters worse, the state funding earmarked for education has often been used by local governments to build offices, purchase cars and cover other sorts of office expenses.

2) Pursuit of development in higher education at the expense of primary and secondary education.

In the 10 years between 1978 and 1987, the number of institutions of higher learning doubled, jumping from 598 to 1,063; the enrollment also doubled, rising from 867,000 to 2,079,000. The rapid development has drained much of the funding into capital construction and facility purchase for new schools. It is argued that the funding would otherwise be used more effectively at the further development of the existing institutions.

But most detrimental to our education is the fact that the opening of new universities and colleges has drained resources that could otherwise be allocated to primary and secondary education. In 1987, the spending for each college student was more than 2,000 yuan, for each primary school student less than 50 yuan and for each secondary school student less than 130 yuan. An extreme case would be the figures in Ningxia Hui Minority Autonomous Region in 1985: the budget for secondary education was 2.93 yuan per student, and that for primary education 1.20 yuan per student.

3) Skewed resource allocation in favor of relatively developed cities in coastal areas.

Our higher education is not directly benefiting rural development. Over 70% of China’s total work forces are located in rural economic sectors. But of the rural work forces, college graduates only make up a negligible 0.01%, secondary school graduates 26.29%, primary school graduates 37.14% and finally the illiterate and semi-illiterate 36.56%. Of all the graduates of agricultural colleges over the years after 1949, only a third were still working in the field of agriculture in 1979.

The “third world” within China is suffering the “brain drain” of the coastal cities. In Yunnan Province, only 0.1% of the population is made up of college students; only less than half of the best students, whom the province sends to study in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou every year, would return to the province. In recent years, 22,000 college-trained personnel have left Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai and Gansu in northwest China and moved back into cities in better developed areas. So, universities and other research institutions are benefiting from the state investment for educational development in economically less developed areas.

The educational crisis is a crisis for the entire nation.

1) Partially due to the low budget for primary and secondary
China's Crisis in Education

education, illiteracy remains a problem 40 years after liberation. According to the statistics released by UNESCO in 1988, 229 million Chinese were illiterate or semi-illiterate (knowing fewer than 1,500 characters).

In China, the primary school enrollment is high. But so is the dropout rate. An average Chinese stays in school only for less than 5 years.

This figure does not include those who do not go to school in the first place. At present over 3 million school-age children are not even nominally enrolled in primary school. Six million primary school graduates cannot go on to junior middle school.

It was estimated that, in 1987, 18.8% of children between age 7 and 12 in Anhui Province were not going to school; plus elder non-school-goers, the total came to 1.16 million in that province.

2) It is worth pointing out that women and minorities have to bear the brunt of the under-development of education.

At present, only 45.4% of primary school age girls are going to school. Of the 2.7 million children between 7 and 11 who did not go to school in China in 1987, 83% were girls. Then, 70% of the over 200 million illiterates in the country are women.

As for the ethnic minorities, it is estimated that the illiterates and semi-illiterates above age 12 make up 42 percent of the adult minority population in China.

3) The funding shortage has greatly affected the quality of education.

The primary and secondary schools in China are short of classroom buildings. It was first reported in 1983 that 12.5 percent of classroom buildings in primary schools in China and 10 percent of those in secondary schools were classified as "unsafe buildings" that in theory either should be renovated immediately or be torn down and replaced by new buildings. It was reported in 1985 that, all over the nation, classrooms were still short of 37 million sets of desks and chairs and that one out of five primary school children had no desk or chair.

The shortage of other facilities is also severe. According to 1983's figures, those that have no or little lab equipment make up 80% of the middle schools in China. Library resources are next to nil in many schools.

4) The shortage of funding has impaired the morale of teachers.

Although the average teacher's salary reached 1754 yuan per year in 1988, teachers are still among the most under-paid. It is estimated that one third of the primary and secondary school teachers in cities are suffering from housing shortage.

As a result, many teachers are no longer interested in their work. Altogether in China there are over 50 million middle school students and 128 million primary school students. But there are only 8.59 million primary and secondary school teachers. The situation is worsened by what might be called the "teacher flight," in which many teachers leave school for other jobs.

5) The neglect of primary and secondary education affects the development of higher education.

Teachers colleges are now having a hard time recruiting students. Nanjing Teachers University planned to admit 435 students in the summer of 1988, but only a little more than 100 who had applied reached the required standard. The school had to lower the entry requirement again and again.

Measures have been proposed in order to tackle these problems. The following are the few that are most commonly talked about:

- Increase and re-allocate the expenditure in education.
- Develop secondary-level technical education.
- Attract college graduates to underdeveloped, remote areas.
- Reform education itself.
- Carry out political reform.

Political reform in the direction of socialist democratization is necessary for China's education to develop. The over-spending on the construction of big hotels, on the import of Japanese cars and on the purchase of expensive durable equipment is only a problem on the surface. The short-sighted craze for the quick buck and the lack of concern for long-term social development and public welfare actually reflects the defects of our not-yet-developed socialist system, a system still in the process of taking shape. In theory, socialism is a system of public ownership of means of production; such ownership makes it possible to plan the economy in accordance with the long-term interest of the public. But in practice, "central planning" is done centrally by a few, without much consultation with the public. The public has limited access to administrative processes and decisions is limited. On the one hand, it is very easy for the few who are running the economy on behalf of all to become accountable only to their superiors, still fewer people, with little concern or interest in the long-run welfare of all. Short-term achievements often become the index of success for these few individuals. On the other hand, those without access to the process of decision-making may also become alienated from the long-term goals of society and become overly concerned with the quick return on their own input. Consequently, education as a long-term investment is not given priority.

Educational development is not possible if no one cares for the future of society. We therefore need a system whereby political and social participation is truly meaningful to every individual, a system under which workers are their own managers, employers and the governed their own governors, with the full power of making decisions.

In summary, the way out of the crisis lies in a profound and extensive reform. The changes have just begun to happen, but it is becoming a common understanding that the school must serve the needs of society, and education must be combined with production and research. To be of use to society is at present the school's answer to the calling of the reform.

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Funding Sought for Christian Middle School

Amity is currently seeking US$70,000 for a new classroom building for the first and so far the only church-run middle school in post-liberation China. It is located in Longquan County, 400 km south of Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province. By starting their own school, local Christians responded to a severe lack of schooling facilities in their region.

Only 65% of the primary school graduates in Longquan County can enter lower middle school. Government plans to build an additional middle school have been unsuccessful, as 95% of the county budget for education is needed for teachers' salaries. The initiative of the church was therefore most welcome.

With the help of local Christians who repaired and furnished an old building belonging to the church, the new Yangzhen ("bring forth true knowledge") Middle School was opened in September 1985. The first class graduated in 1988. Of 14 teachers working at the school, 8 retired teachers have been recruited by the church, 2 are seconded by the county government and 4, who are employed by the county middle school, help out occasionally.

However, the building currently in use is not at all adequate for existing needs. The over one hundred students who come from the countryside and have to live at the school stay in one room inside the church, where space is less than two square meters per person. The school has almost no teaching equipment and no sports facilities.

Hence, the Longquan Christian Church has asked the Amity Foundation for assistance. If you want more information about this project, please write to our Overseas Coordination Office in Hongkong.

A look into the present dormitory of Yangzhen Middle School

Xu Xunfeng Reports on New Trends in Amity’s Work

In selecting project partners and carrying out its development policy, the Amity Foundation increasingly adopts and lives out a Christian profile. This was pointed out by Mr. Xu Xunfeng, one of Amity's Associate General Secretaries and head of its Social Welfare Division, in a recent interview in Hongkong. He explained the recent progress of the Foundation and some new trends in his work.

"When Amity first started four years ago," Xu said, "we did not channel any funds to church-related projects because we tried to avoid the possible misunderstanding that Amity would be regarded as a church organization whose primary interest was supporting church growth. Now Amity is well accepted in society, and time has come for us to bring in more and more involvement with churches. As a matter of fact, when we consider new projects, we give special attention to church sponsored or Christian initiated projects. It is our hope that more and more Christians will join us by committing themselves to social progress and development."

Xu also reported that Amity increasingly emphasizes work on the grassroots level, especially in rural areas. As to the policy of project implementation, Amity no longer transfers designated funds to projects all at once, but rather requires the receiving agency to separate the project into several phases and appoint a project coordinator to supervise the step-by-step implementation of the plan. Amity's experience has been that a phase-by-phase approach helps the receiving side to make better use of its own initiative and creativity, so as not to become dependent on Amity or on any Western funding agency.

According to Xu, Amity is also adopting a new policy of appointing coordinators for each project. They can be members of the Amity staff, the local church or a related institution.

Xu gave similar reports when he visited Amity's partner organizations in Sweden, West-Germany, Switzerland and Thailand. In April, 1989 he attended the CICARWS meeting in Bangkok, while already in November, 1988 he had taken part in the yearly meeting of the European Network of Amity Partners held in Stockholm. Expressing his personal view on the latter meeting, Xu concluded: "The willingness and sincerity of our European friends in helping us was very encouraging. I look forward to seeing this kind of coordination being established in North America before too long."
The Amity Rehabilitation Center For Mentally Handicapped Children

The Amity Experimental Rehabilitation Center for Mentally Handicapped Children was formally inaugurated on June 1. It is the first center of its kind in China and aims to enable mentally handicapped children and youngsters to become independent adults. It also has a program which endeavors to help other institutions with similar aims. Amity itself is directly involved in the decision making and in regular supervision of the project.

The center has on its board people who are highly qualified to facilitate the development of the project with its various objectives and training methods whilst also attempting to raise public awareness and provide possible employment. Included on the Board of Directors is Bishop Ting as honorary president, Han Wenzao as president and Tan Liying as supervisor of the program.

The Amity Calendar 1990

The upcoming 1990 Amity calendar contains twelve beautiful colour paintings by Chinese peasant artists, all of whom are unknown farmers. Their paintings reflect aspects of rural life in China. As usual, the format of the calendar gives space each day to record engagements and events. Calendars can be ordered from Nanjing. Donations for the calendar (US$6.00 per copy is suggested) will go towards the work of the Amity Foundation.

New Amity Overseas Coordination Office

The Amity Overseas Coordination Office has moved to its new location in Kowloon Union Church, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. The move was celebrated by an open house and service of Thanksgiving on Monday, May 29, 1989. The service was led by the Rev. Robert Dayton, Minister of Kowloon Union Church; the sermon was preached by the Rev. Samuel Wu, Pastor of the Mandarin Congregation at St. John's (Anglican) Cathedral; Prayers of Thanksgiving were offered by Ms. Yong Tin Jin, Secretary for East Asia of the World Student Christian Federation, and the Rev. Britt Tower, China Liaison of Cooperative Services International of the Southern Baptist Conference. More than seventy friends, representing many denominations and church organizations in Hong Kong, joined members of the staff in celebrating the official opening of the new offices.

Bible Printing and Distribution

The Amity Printing Company has issued the following production and distribution figures (to May 13, 1989):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Bible</td>
<td>788,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testaments</td>
<td>50,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>838,260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the total, 81% or 679,307 (including all the New Testaments) have already been distributed, 49,977 are ready for distribution, and 108,976 are still in production.

A painting by a peasant artist.
THE AMITY NEWSLETTER  
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The Amity Foundation Newsletter is distributed quarterly and keeps readers informed with up-to-date information about the Amity Foundation and its involvement with humanitarian projects. If you’d like to share the work of the Amity Foundation with friends and colleagues, we'll be happy to place them on our mailing list. There is no subscription fee, but contributions to our work are always welcome.

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“Introducing The Amity Foundation” is designed to give the viewing audience a comprehensive introduction into the life and work of the Amity Foundation. Produced in 1989, “Introducing The Amity Foundation” is a valuable educational tool for understanding how Chinese Christians are living their faith in society. This slide production has a viewing time of 15 minutes and consists of 77 slides. It comes complete with an audio cassette tape and written script in English language. Postage is included in the price: HK$230,— (US$30,—/ £20,—/DM60,—).

To order, send payment and completed order form to The Amity Foundation, Overseas Coordination Office, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Cheque and money orders should be made payable to “United Methodist Church Hong Kong China Liaison Office”.

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