

Teacher Training in Laos

The Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie

On February 18, 1958, a traditional Lao ceremony was held to commemorate the beginning of construction of the first building of a new teacher training school for Laos. The school, which is officially known as the Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie (though still called by many the National Education Center, or simply NEC), is located in a heavily wooded area nine kilometers north of the city of Vientiane. Its existence is a symbol of a practical, persistent American effort to help train Laotian teachers for Laotian schools.

Now, in 1964, over one thousand students are enrolled in the institution that grew out of the wooded site. This school has given Laos an effective foundation upon which it can gradually improve and expand training programs for its teachers. As stated by the Minister of Education at the time of the ceremonies five years ago, the fundamental goal of the school is "to bring to children of the remotest villages the knowledge which will enable them to escape from the vicious circle of ignorance, of illness and of poverty."

The entire student body of the ESP is in residence at the school. They make use of over fifty buildings, including the main administration building, 24 dormitories, nine classroom buildings, two workshop, an infirmary, an auditorium, a kitchen, three dining halls, and a demonstration school.

All of the buildings at the Ecole Superieure were constructed with counterpart funds provided by the American aid program. The total cost of construction, including water, electricity, and other utilities, was approximately \$1,000,000 in kips. Additional construction is programed for 1964, and some of it is already underway.

The Normal Schools

In addition to the Ecole Superieure, there are three other teacher training schools in Laos. Known as Normal Schools, they serve the country on a regional basis. One is located in Pakse in the south, another is in Luang-Prabang in the north, and the third, which constitutes one section of the Ecole Superieure in Vientiane, serves the central part of Laos. Each of the Normal Schools enrolled approximately seventy students during the 1963-64 school year.

The Normal Schools at Pakse and Luang Prabang were constructed with counterpart funds from the American aid program. Each campus has a five-room academic and administration building, two dormitories, a combined dining hall-auditorium, a kitchen, and faculty housing. A demonstration school is presently under construction at each center. The total cost of construction at Pakse and Luang Prabang was approximately 6,300,000 kips and 7,120,000 kips respectively.

<u>Increase in Enrolment at Teacher Training Schools</u>	
1949-50	22
1950-51	41
1951-52	49
1952-53	77
1953-54	72
1954-55	77
1955-56	102
1956-57	134
1957-58	180
1958-59	259
1959-60	434
1960-61	541
1961-62	763
1962-63	1058
1963-64	1311

Note: From 1922 to 1942 elementary teachers were trained for one year or less at certain demonstration schools in the country. In 1942, a two-year training course was established which later became a four-year program. In October, 1960, the old Ecole Normale in Vientiane was transferred to the Ecole Superieure (NEC).

The Training Courses

Three types of teacher training programs are presently available in Laos. They are familiarly known as the one-year program, the four-year program and the three-year program. The students in all these programs receive free room, board, and tuition and a small monthly stipend from the government.

The one-year program is offered at the Normal Schools in Pakse, Luang-Prabang and Vientiane. This is an accelerated course which qualifies the students to teach in grades 1 - 3 in the village schools. Students are recruited for this program after they have completed at least the sixth year of elementary school. They are accepted in the Normal Schools on the basis of a competitive examination. The students must be Lao citizens, at least eighteen years of age, and must have a medical certificate showing they are physically capable of carrying out the duties of a teacher. They agree that, upon completion of their training course, they will teach for at least five years, wherever the Ministry of Education may wish to assign them.

The four-year program is the principal training course at the Ecole Superieure. The selection of students is made from sixth grade graduates in a manner similar to the one-year program. Upon completion of this training course the students have the equivalent of a tenth grade education and are

qualified to teach in grades 4 - 6 in the elementary schools and sometimes grade 7 or grade 8 in secondary schools.

The three-year program at the Ecole Superieure is the highest level of teacher training presently available in Laos. Students enter this program after the tenth year in regular secondary schools or upon completion of the four-year program at the ESP. Their training, which is in either Arts or Sciences, qualifies them to teach in the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grades of secondary schools.

The English Section is a special training program offered at the Ecole Superieure. The students in this course graduate at the same level and have the same qualifications as the students in the three-year program but in most cases they are recruited after completion of grade eight and receive a total of five years of training.

Number of Graduates of All Programs						
YEAR	One-Year Program	Four-Year Program	Three-Year Program	English Section	TOTAL	
1962	60	-	-	-	60	
1963	180	180	-	6	366	
1964 (Est.)	215	185	20	5	425	

The Curriculum

American technicians have been closely associated with all aspects of the teacher training program in Laos, including the important and sometimes perplexing problems which arise because of differences in attitudes and concepts. These change slowly, but it is evident that changes are being made.

Americans have felt that the educational program was sometimes too academic and that it tended towards creating a white collar mentality that was not greatly helpful for the development of the country. For this reason, a great amount of support has been given to expanding the traditional curriculum to include gardening, animal husbandry, arts and crafts, woodworking, home economics and other practical arts subjects.

Productive work experiences and manual labor have been presented as an integral part of education, with the aim of emphasizing the dignity of labor and of cultivating skill in working with the hands.

Americans have supported those aspects of the curriculum which would preserve and develop Lao culture, including especially the use of the Lao language as a medium of instruction whenever feasible. It is recognized, however, that mastering a second language is an essential key to higher education.

Another primary aim is to encourage a love of country and a willingness to work hard and to sacrifice for the development of the country. Americans have emphasized the importance of receiving students into the training schools from minority groups in Laos in order to assist in the social unification of the country.

Stress is given to preparing students for a dual responsibility in the future: first, as teachers, and secondly, as community leaders. Basic moral and spiritual values are emphasized, and team sports and student government activities are encouraged in order to develop aspects of leadership and cooperation.

American support is being provided to build an adequate science program in the curriculum. An interest in science is growing and, by means of laboratory experience and problem-solving situations of various kinds, something of a scientific attitude is gradually being developed by many students.

The Staff

The teacher training program is under the direction of Mr. Souphan Blanchard de la Brosse, an official of the Lao Ministry of Education. Mr. Blanchard is assisted by two directors of studies (one Lao, one French) and an international teaching staff made up of 37 French, 16 Americans, about 15 Lao, three Thai, and two British instructors.

Fourteen of the American teachers are employed by the International Voluntary Service, under contract to US AID. IVS team members have been working with the teacher training program in Laos since 1959. They are primarily concerned with providing instruction in numerous practical arts subjects, but they have made invaluable contributions to all phases of the program.

Michigan University has provided another group of instructors under contract to US AID. Known as the South East Asian Regional English Project, this group has been involved with the teaching of English in Thailand and Vietnam as well as Laos. The group has been responsible for organizing and operating the English section at ESP. Only one Michigan University teacher is working at the center during the present school year. Two British instructors with the Colombo Plan and one American on contract to USIS are also assisting with the English language instructional program.

Most of the classes in the four-year and the three-year programs are given in French and are taught mainly by instructors from France. A few classes are taught in the Lao language by Lao instructors and by three teachers from Thailand who are working in Laos by agreement of the Thai government and with the support of US AID. Both Lao and Thai teachers give instruction in the one-year program where classes are conducted entirely in Lao.

Future Plans

In addition to the training programs previously outlined, two other programs are in an active planning stage. The first of these will be for either two or three years' duration and will eventually graduate students who will have the equivalent of the bachelor's degree and thus be qualified to teach in any of the secondary grades. The second of these programs will be for either two or three years' duration and will graduate students who will have the equivalent of the master's degree and thus be qualified to teach in the training institutions themselves. The first of these programs is planned to begin in September, 1964.

The teacher training sub-activity will be considered completed when Laos has developed the programs, staff, and facilities it needs to train teachers for all grades of the public schools and the teacher training schools. At that time, Laos will have a complete teacher training program which will be largely autonomous and self-sustaining. Laos can then use its native language as the medium of instruction and can determine the curricula for its public schools and teacher training institutions. It can then regulate the number of teachers trained annually to fit its fluctuating economic and social needs. When, and only when, these things can take place can the United States truly claim to have rendered satisfactory assistance to Laos in the field of teacher training.