

issue paper no. 3

Teaching training Systemic issues and challenges

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December 2008

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About ZOA issue papers

The ZOA issue papers are a series of short papers focusing on current significant educational issues and strategies within the refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border. They are meant to provide brief, organised and coherent information, to generate questions and interest, and to add to public understanding of the challenges and positive outcomes of education in the refugee camps. They are written by researchers and practitioners and edited by an independent editor. The views expressed in the papers do not necessarily represent the views of ZOA Refugee Care Thailand.

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The bibliographic reference for this publication is

Steadman, J. (2008) Teacher training: Systemic issues and challenges. *ZOA issue paper no.3*. Mae Sot, Thailand: ZOA Refugee Care Thailand.

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Introduction

This paper outlines some of the current issues affecting teacher training in seven refugee camps - Mae La, Nu Po, Umpiem-mai, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Ban Don Yang and Tham Hin - along the Thai-Burmese border. It describes the current teacher training system and highlights the positive outcomes and challenges involved in implementing a teacher training system in difficult geographical, political and administrative circumstances.

The teacher training system is a crucial part of the education system, directly affecting the quality of learning in 63 camp schools. Approximately 1,600 teachers in the seven camps teach more than 38,000 students. The teacher training system in these camps is largely supported by ZOA Refugee Care Thailand (ZOA) and to a small extent, World Education.

This paper looks at the teacher training provided by ZOA in depth. Therefore, it focuses on the seven camps that ZOA serves. The teacher training system in the two Karenni camps is not discussed, as that is provided by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

In 2007, ZOA had in place a well established system of in-service training – no mean feat bearing in mind how dispersed the camps are. However, they felt that it was time to review the current teacher training system and to attempt to develop an improved system for the future. Thus, in 2007, a small team of UK-based researchers was asked to assess the current in-service component, and then to develop with ZOA, an improved training system and curriculum. The issues outlined in this paper are derived from the assessment made in 2007, and reflect a) what was seen in the camps and what emerged from interviews during 50 days of in-camp/in-country research in 2007 (Steadman, 2007) and b) matters raised during a workshop held at ZOA in Mae Sot in March 2008.

The structure of this paper is as such: first, it describes the formal system of education in the abovementioned seven camps, followed by a description of the current teacher training system. Then, a range of issues related to teacher training is discussed. Finally, some recommendations and future developments are considered.

The education system

In the refugee camps, every child has the opportunity to be educated. The education system consists of schools from kindergarten, through primary school, to secondary school. Table 1 shows the grade levels and corresponding age of students. It is important to note that the ages given in the table are approximate. For example, if progress is limited, pupils repeat an academic year. In other cases, some students join a year group lower than their chronological age if their education has been disrupted due to internal displacement within Burma or delays in school enrolment.

Formal education ceases at Standard 10 for the majority of the students. Those who achieve the highest academic grades are given the opportunity to continue their education in post-secondary schools, commonly known as post-10 schools. A variety of post-10 programmes exists, such as the English Immersion Programme (EIP) and the Teacher Preparation Course (TPC), among others (Oh *et al*, 2006).

Table 1 | Grades and corresponding ages

Level	Primary							Secondary					
Stage	Lower Primary				Upper Primary			Lower Secondary			Lower Secondary		
Grade/Standard*	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Age	5+	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17+

* In the camps, the term 'standard' is used to mean 'grade', so that grade 1 is referred to as Standard 1.

The curriculum, devised by the Karen Education Department (KED) and developed with ZOA's support, covers all educational levels. It has recently been reviewed. The KED proposes that the kindergarten curriculum includes Karen, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education. From Standard 1, the curriculum will consist of

- Mathematics – Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry
- Social studies – History, Geography and Social Studies
- Health and Physical Education
- Science – Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology
- Languages - Karen, Burmese and English

Thai is to be taught from Standard 4. Currently, there are some local variations, e.g., Tham Hin camp delivers Computer Studies at the secondary level.

Two formal examinations – designed by the KED - are taken at the end of Standards 4 and 7. A leaving certificate is issued at the end of Standard 10, but to date, there is no internationally recognised academic equivalent (Sawade, 2008).

The education system is administered by the Karen Education Department (KED), which oversees the recruitment of head teachers, teachers and resident teacher trainers (RTTs). It works with ZOA to facilitate teacher training.

The teacher training system in the refugee camps

Initial teacher training/pre-service training

In most countries, teachers are required to attend and pass a teacher training course before they start to teach. Course content and length vary, but all come under the umbrella title of 'initial teacher training', the implication being that further training will follow. More basic teaching preparation courses are often called pre-service training. Some are quite short, and they tend to concentrate mostly on methodology rather than educational theory.

For several years, four camps were fortunate enough to have a teacher preparation course (TPC). They were facilitated and funded by World Education. World Education has now passed the responsibility of running TPCs to the KED. The TPCs are now only running Year 2 of the course, and the first year of the course is now part of the Institute of Higher Education (IHE). A single TPC is now located at Mae La camp. The World Education TPC lasted two years and followed on from Standard 10. The pedagogical aspects and the educational theory content of the course were comparable to most initial

teacher training courses. There was a teaching practice component and students continued with their academic studies.

Schools in those camps with a TPC benefited greatly but, unfortunately, the numbers who opted to study in a TPC in any one year was low. Out of 700 students who completed Standard 10 in 2007, only 100 opted to continue their studies in a TPC. The Mae Ra Ma Luang TPC struggled to enroll 35 students in 2007 even though they abandoned the entry exam. Their 2006 cohort was down to just 13 from an initial group of 30 by 2007. When World Education was running four TPCs, the maximum output was 100 teachers. Even if all of the students completed the course, an output of 100 teachers per year could not meet the staffing demands of the 63 schools in these camps, bearing in mind teacher loss through resettlement or other reasons.

To date, for the teachers who have not had the chance to be trained in Burma or via a teacher preparation course (TPC), summer break training is the only pre-classroom training they receive. Of necessity, summer break training is theoretical. Thus, annually, in every camp, the majority of new teachers begin the academic year without any prior teaching experience. The last time they were in a classroom was when they were students. Unless they received training before they arrived at the camp or attended a TPC, they will not have had the opportunity to watch others teach or to try teaching part or whole lessons. Neither will they have been in the position where they had to establish order in a classroom. The new teachers observed in the study tried their best to be effective but no amount of hard work and dedication is a substitute for initial teacher training.

Unfortunately, not all new teachers attend summer break training. Due to recruitment difficulties, some new teachers are not appointed until just before the school year commences, or they join a school mid-year. They go into class completely untrained. Inevitably, the quality of teaching and learning is severely affected.

Off-camp training is not an option due to the constraints of refugee life, lack of funds and restrictions on travel. To address these restrictions and challenges, ZOA intends to reshape its training system from December 2008 by providing a month-long intensive pre-service induction course specifically for new teachers. A rolling programme of training will continue throughout the year so as to ensure that new teachers who join in the middle of the year will have the skills to be an effective teacher.

In-service training

All teachers are expected to develop their pedagogy and to either improve their subject knowledge or to keep it up to date throughout their teaching career. In-service training, i.e., training integrated into either the school week or the academic year, is the usual way of providing training whilst a teacher is employed. The teachers in the camps have the opportunity to receive nine or 10 days of training during the summer break, on-site in their home camps. Teachers in larger camps can choose between two levels of training – one level for new teachers and the other for more experienced teachers. ZOA takes full responsibility for in-service training. The majority of summer break training is facilitated by a thoroughly professional team of trainers employed by ZOA, who travel to the camps to deliver in-service training. They also deliver further training later in the year. Their training is supplemented throughout the academic year by resident teacher trainers (RTTs) who are assigned to particular schools and subjects. RTTs are selected and managed by the KED but they are an integral part of the ZOA-led training package. Table 2 lists the different components of teacher training.

Table 2 | The elements of camp-based teacher training

Type of training	Name	Location	Funded by	Training conducted by	Duration	Participants
Specific Initial teacher training courses	Teacher preparation course (TPC)	Four camps	World Education	TPC teachers	Two years	Student teachers
Pre-service course	Pre-service course	Seven camps served by ZOA	ZOA	ZOA teacher trainers	20 days	Untrained teachers
In-service training	Summer break training	Seven camps served by ZOA	ZOA	ZOA teacher trainers	10 days during the summer break in camp	New and existing teachers
In-service training	Follow up training	Seven camps served by ZOA	ZOA	ZOA teacher trainers	Five days within the academic year	Mostly for RTTs and targeted groups of existing teachers
In-service training	Teacher training by RTTs	Seven camps served by ZOA	ZOA	RTTs	Through-out the year	Teachers
In-service training	RTT training	Seven camps served by ZOA	ZOA	ZOA teacher trainers	Through-out the year	RTTs

Under the present system, there is a second round of training part way through the year which lasts about five days mostly targeting secondary teachers and RTTs. The three secondary ZOA trainers (or an invited trainer) conduct the training. There are further occasional subject refresher courses, for example, a refresher course for Science RTTs. Additional *ad hoc* training is supplied by other NGOs or organisations, e.g., Creating opportunities for psychosocial enhancement (COPE). ZOA trainers responsible for the training of primary teachers have closer contact with individual camps. They also run additional training sessions. In general, the ZOA trainers focus on RTT training needs so that sound ongoing training is available for teachers throughout the entire school year.

Teachers are recruited from, and live within, the camps. The camp education committees have agreed guidelines to follow when selecting teachers. However, it is increasingly difficult to find prospective teachers who meet two of the criteria. The first criterion is that they have completed Standard 10; the second is a commitment to teach for two years. Also, new arrivals can no longer be considered as candidates, as there are restrictions on new arrival registration. Consequently, less than satisfactory replacements are found to maintain the size, but not the quality of the teaching force. Non-camp residents/expatriate teachers are not allowed to be part of the teaching team because of the practical and logistical limitations imposed on camps.

The KED pays the 163 camp-based teachers a small subsidy with incremental increases for extended service. This is funded by ZOA. The teachers do not have an official contract but the KED has established entitlements to cover sickness, maternity leave and designated holidays.

The academic level of teachers

Some (but not many) of the teachers have had the opportunity to complete higher education courses in Burma. A sprinkling of the older teachers obtained degrees when Burmese universities were in a position to deliver good quality degree courses. However, these teachers comprise a tiny part of the workforce. In 2005, only 2% of teachers had completed a university degree (Oh *et al*, 2006). In 2007, only four teachers out of 66 (6%) in Ban Don Yang camp and seven out of 153 (4.5%) in Nu Po (Steadman, 2007) had a university degree. Many kindergarten or primary teachers go straight into the classroom after finishing Standard 6 or 7, as seen in the example below:

- In Don Yang camp, 16 out of 40 (40%) primary teachers had been unable to continue their education beyond Standard 7.
- In Nu Po's three primary schools, only 23 out of 49 teachers (46.9%) had completed Standard 10 (Steadman, 2007). In 2005, the figure was 44% (Oh *et al*, 2006).

Usually, secondary teachers have completed Standard 10, but this is not the case for all (Oh *et al*, 2006). Furthermore, many refugee teachers have had a disjointed educational experience in less than ideal circumstances. Consequently, a significant number of teachers feel that they have insufficient subject knowledge; this results in teaching from the textbook using totally didactic methods. At best, some knowledge is drilled into students' minds, at worse, little learning takes place.

Unfortunately, the academic level of the teachers in the camps is far lower than what is currently expected of teachers in the rest of Thailand. On passing the entrance exam, Thai teachers begin training after they have completed 12 years of education, and have obtained Matayom VI¹. In Thailand, primary teachers train for two years and are awarded an associate degree; upper secondary teachers train for four years (or one year after completing their degree) and are awarded a full degree (Sedgwick, 2005). At secondary level, this is comparable with academic levels in the US and Europe where teachers either complete a three- or four-year degree level course before they start teaching or take a one-year postgraduate qualification after completing their degree.

Usually teachers who have completed initial teacher training courses, as outlined above, have a good understanding of their subject and thus when they start to teach full time, in-service training is mostly about developing their repertoire of teaching and learning skills. This is not the case in the camps. The ZOA trainers have to address both inadequate subject knowledge and minimal (or no) knowledge of basic teaching skills. This is a Herculean ongoing task for the seven ZOA teacher trainers even with input from resident teacher trainers.

The KED's plans to reshape the curriculum throws up new challenges. The requirement to learn Thai from Standard 4 has considerable training implications as it is unlikely that the camps have a large enough pool of competent Thai speakers. In addition, if the new curriculum is implemented, existing schemes of work will need to be overhauled to accommodate the new framework. The people best qualified to do this are the ZOA trainers but they are already struggling to find sufficient time to deliver their training. Unless carefully managed, the hasty implementation of the new curriculum could worsen

¹ The Matayom VI is the highest level of upper secondary education in Thailand. A Certificate of Secondary Education is awarded to students upon completion and this is used to gain admission to higher education. Internationally, universities require candidates to have an average 3.0 score in the Matayom VI examinations if they are to apply for an undergraduate course.

the education in the camps rather than improve it. Unplanned curriculum implementation can lead to teacher insecurity, or the delivery of a fragmented curriculum with some teachers teaching the old curriculum, others the new, or teachers being unable to deliver the new curriculum due to lack of training and textbooks.

Teacher turnover and resettlement

In any work situation, there is a certain amount of turnover. However, the turnover of teachers in the camps presents real challenges for training providers. Across the seven camps, 29% of teachers left during the academic year 2005/6. One camp, Ban Don Yang suffered a 61% loss of the teaching force, Tham Hin lost 43%, and Nu Po lost 44% of their teachers (Steadman, 2007). In 2008, two thirds of the total teaching force in Mae La camp withdrew from teaching within four months of the start of the academic year. The impact of the loss of teacher expertise and knowledge made on children's education cannot be underestimated. Students' education becomes fractured and disjointed, resulting in lower academic standards. The vital teacher-pupil relationship becomes weak or non-existent. Consequently, pupil motivation and engagement with learning suffer.

High teacher turnover also has considerable implications for teacher training. ZOA is trapped in a cycle of continuously having to train new teachers and new RTTs. The KED selects RTTs and ZOA has a commitment to training them but it is extremely difficult to provide off-camp training for RTTs due to travel restrictions. Empowering RTTs to take responsibility for the majority of in-service training is an uphill battle. Many have very limited teaching experience themselves or lack the confidence to train others. Some feel quite demoralised as they have to constantly train up an ever-changing group of teachers. RTTs are also leaving at the same rate as teachers. Whenever an experienced RTT leaves and is replaced by an inexperienced one, the overall quality of training is diluted.

Loss of workforce due to resettlement is an unavoidable trend. In 2007, according to Banki and Lang (2007),

- 130 out of 131 educators at Tham Hin camp had applied for resettlement
- 9% of teachers at Umpiem Mai camp had departed
- at Tham Hin camp, three RTTs departed; three more had applied for resettlement
- at Mae Ra Ma Luang camp, two RTTs departed; four more had applied for resettlement
- at Mae La camp, eight RTTs had applied for resettlement.

Currently (September 2008), there are estimates that about 500 to 700 teachers have applied for resettlement. The problem is compounded by the fact that staff leave for resettlement at almost any point during the school year. The head teachers and education committees make valiant attempts to keep the schools staffed, but random mid-year appointments place a person, not a trained teacher, in a classroom. Providing a planned, cohesive training package when one cannot predict either yearly or mid-year turnover is a major challenge. Banki and Lang (2007) provide some excellent recommendations outlining how the impact of resettlement on education can be managed. Crucially, they recommend that 'more predictable timing in resettlement – such as a minimum 3-month period after departure notification to prepare handovers and replacement staff' (Banki and Lang, 2007: 13). They highlight the need for the CCSDPT/UNHCR (Committee for Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand/United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) to have a comprehensive plan 'to address gaps in education in the camps eg higher education' (Banki and Lang, 2007: 13). They also made a very practical suggestion that if the number of subjects were reduced, fewer teachers/RTTs would be needed. One of the initiatives that ZOA is setting up to meet the challenge of resettlement, is to set up a rolling programme of induction courses specifically designed for new teachers.

Trainers

ZOA is fortunate that it has a dedicated, thoroughly professional, hard-working team of trainers. Each has a solid academic background plus a wealth of training experience. However, there are only seven ZOA trainers – three who focus on the teachers in secondary schools and four on teachers in primary schools. The secondary trainers' responsibilities cover all seven camps, three of the primary trainers are responsible for two camps each and the fourth primary trainer is responsible for Mae La camp (the largest camp). The training load of ZOA trainers is considerable. The three subject specialists have to cover, among them, all areas of the curriculum, and act as subject advisers across all the age groups. Primary area trainers have to have a full understanding of education from early years to the end of primary school as well as knowledge of appropriate pedagogy for all the related age groups. All are responsible for the training needs of large numbers of teachers. For example, one primary area trainer is responsible, with the RTTs, for 326 teachers.

A team of approximately 70 resident teacher trainers (RTTs) (who are refugees themselves) deliver the ongoing training in the camps. Again, this is a small number comparatively. The model of delivering ongoing training via RTTs is an excellent one, but the training delivered is only as good as the expertise of the trainers. Few RTTs have had the opportunity to explore differing educational theories in depth. Some do have sound subject knowledge but that does not automatically equate with an extensive teaching repertoire. Several are responsible for both primary and secondary teachers; RTTs may understand the content of the curriculum but it is unlikely that they would have enough knowledge of appropriate pedagogy for all ages. If the Thai authorities would at least allow the RTTs to visit neighbouring schools to observe good practice, they could pass on what they have observed to their training group.

It is difficult to recruit enough RTTs with the right skills and subject knowledge. In 2007, there were 70 RTTs as opposed to 75 in 2006. In Ban Don Yang camp, in 2007, they were without an RTT for English, Burmese, Maths and Science. In Nu Po, they were without a Science RTT; in Mae Ra Ma Luang, they had no English RTT and in Tham Hin, the English RTT was also the assistant head teacher of the only school there.

RTT expertise is in demand not only in the schools. In 2007, the teacher preparation course (TPC) in Mae Ra Ma Luang camp employed two RTTs (out of a staff of eight). Consequently, RTT availability for training was reduced.

ZOA intends to further enhance RTTs' training expertise by running a series of camp-based training programmes from August to September 2008, with a view to enabling the RTTs to provide induction courses for new teachers. The success of this venture may be affected by the RTTs themselves departing for resettlement.

ZOA has attempted and will continue to attempt, off camp-training when necessary, e.g., Montessori² training in Kanchanaburi and RTT training in Mae Sot, but obtaining travel permits is a major difficulty.

Due to the constraints of living in a camp and restrictions on travel, teachers and RTTs have no opportunity to pursue their educational studies independently. Distance learning would be difficult to introduce as the camps lack the technological infrastructure and even a postal system. The lack of internet access means that the whole world of e-learning is a closed book. Fortunately, ZOA trainers have more opportunities to keep up to date. ZOA allocates each trainer an individual personal training budget and the ZOA training managers utilise the expertise of outside trainers whenever appropriate and when funding is available.

² Montessori education is a child-based approach to learning where the teacher facilitates/offers learning experiences rather than directs.

The training environment

Every effort is made to ensure that the training is inclusive. Access to in-service training is problem-free as far as the participants are concerned as it is held centrally at each camp. Parents who are unable to arrange childcare bring along their children. Course materials are provided for summer break and second round training with some of the material translated into Burmese and English. Participants also receive a lunch subsidy.

The ZOA trainers are skilful facilitators, successfully managing large groups, e.g., 130 and more, in a training environment consisting of a large space and a board. There are no dedicated training facilities. Summer break training participants encompass all levels of experience and include primary and secondary teachers. Fortunately, some of the trainers can speak both Karen and Burmese but not all are equally confident with both the written and oral aspects of the two major languages. ZOA trainers can bring in pre-prepared training materials but RTTS are totally dependant on in-camp resources. Consequently, RTT training has to be chalk and talk supported possibly by home-made visual aids, as there are no reprographic facilities in camp.

Unfortunately, there are extremely limited opportunities for teachers to see and experience good practice. Whilst there is access to TVs/VCRs/DVDs, there are no training videos available in Karen. Due to travel constraints, teachers are unable to observe good practice outside the camp so their sum knowledge of teaching is their own experience, what they have been told or have read about, what they see around them and what they have experienced as a student. Developing effective practice in the closed community of a camp is a major challenge.

The pattern of training

The pattern of in-service training is heavily influenced by logistics and geography. Sometimes, training has to be curtailed in the rainy season, as access to the camps and within the camps can be problematic. Scheduling training is difficult as there are only seven ZOA trainers to provide in-service training in seven camps that are spread over a large geographical area and where access is limited and controlled by the Thai authorities.

From the logistical point of view, block training is sensible but from the educational point of view, block training is not ideal. Training is most effective if it is delivered in 'small doses', followed by opportunities to try out new ideas, then consolidated via structured opportunities for reflection. Concentrated blocks of training can result in teachers forgetting many of the new ideas before they have the chance to try them.

RTTs train teachers throughout the academic year concentrating on ensuring that teachers understand what they have to teach and have some idea of how to teach a topic. To date, there is no uniform pattern as to when that training takes place. Some teachers are fortunate that it is within the school day; others have to sacrifice part of their weekend. Also, there is sometimes a conflict of interest when refresher courses or second round training occurs. On occasion, classes have been left untaught or unsupervised to accommodate training, or teachers have to give up five days of a short break to attend training. ZOA is attempting to gain agreement with the KED, head teachers, camp and education committees on incorporating ongoing training by RTTs into the school day. It is also hoped that a second block of training will be scheduled separately from the mid-year holiday so that there is no conflict of interest between home and school commitments on the part of the teachers.

Once month-long induction courses start for new teachers, it is quite likely that RTTs will be unable to offer the same amount of in-service training for experienced teachers as at present. However, staff turnover varies from camp to camp and month to month. ZOA intends to monitor and review the impact of any changes to the training system but currently, the need to train cohorts of new teachers is paramount.

Constraints of the teaching environment

Even a highly trained teacher would be challenged to deliver effective lessons in some of the current teaching spaces. Classrooms are crowded and grouped closely together either with no dividing panel between one teaching space and another, or with a very thin partition. ZOA and other NGOs working on providing services to the camps ensure that schools have basic supplies but resources are very limited. It is hardly surprisingly that rote learning is the most commonly adopted teaching method. Hopefully, the Thai authorities will ease their present restrictions on school building materials so that better learning spaces can be created, enabling teachers to try out some of the techniques they have experienced via in-service training. As a start, ZOA plans to update, funding permitting, 85 classrooms in 2009, so that there is better separation of one teaching space from another and that the learning environment is more comfortable for students and teachers e.g., smooth concrete floors, non-leak roofs, flat surface movable desks, chairs rather than benches, and large good quality blackboards.

Coordinating teacher training development and educational development

Teacher training, the curriculum, and the communities' expectation of teachers are all interlinked. It is essential that all educational partners develop a common view of the purpose of education. There should be no mismatch between the type of teaching and learning advocated in teacher training and that expected by the KED and the community. The training, based on how students learn, strongly advocates modern teaching methods which attempt to develop the thinking and social skills needed in the workplace in the 21st century. It will be a major challenge for some members of the camp community to accept modern teaching methods. Currently, the only cross-camp indicator of educational success is performance in two KED examinations that mostly test fact acquisition. A forum is needed to explore other more appropriate ways to recognise student achievement.

Conclusion

It is vital that a system of pre-service training is established as soon as possible and that in-service training is expanded and developed. The majority of the students are currently being taught by teachers who themselves only had a short, basic education. On the whole, the teachers do not feel that they have sufficient academic knowledge to deliver the curriculum. Consequently, they slavishly impart whatever is in the issued textbook and consider drilling the students in its content to be teaching. The amount of training on offer to enhance their subject knowledge is woefully inadequate. Currently, RTTs and ZOA trainers are struggling to address deficiencies in the teachers' academic knowledge. This process is further handicapped, as many RTTs' own academic background is also weak.

Attempts have also been made to improve the pedagogy but training to date has had little impact on classroom practice. The existing training team, whilst being totally dedicated and extremely professional, is overstretched. Funding constraints serve to impact on the quality and quantity of training. However, when considering the students' classroom experience, one should always keep in mind two crucial facts: many existing teachers have had no training whatsoever and the high turnover of teachers makes it almost impossible to consolidate and build on previous training.

The withdrawal of World Education from TPCs may well have a detrimental effect on the supply of competent teachers. It is yet to be seen what difference it will make having the KED facilitating TPCs rather than World Education. Sadly, the KED is not in the best situation to ensure that up-to-date, good educational training practice is incorporated into their TPCs.

ZOA is far from satisfied with its current provision. It has conducted a major review of its training model and training materials and intends to re-orientate its training system to provide targeted training for new teachers and an enhanced training package for all. Teacher training is high on the list of priorities, as the quality of the education that camp residents receive is totally dependent on the expertise of the teachers.

ZOA's plan for a rolling programme of training, specifically for new teachers, is a significant development. Whilst a four-week programme can never be as good as a two-year TPC programme, it will at least ensure that teachers have some basic training. The pre-service course has the capacity to train at least 500 teachers per year. The course content should result in teachers utilising a broader range of teaching and learning strategies than they do at present. However, providing the training needs of a constantly changing workforce of approximately 1,600 teachers requires very skilful management as well as ongoing funding.

Funding is not only needed for training; the teaching environment has to be improved as well. Current classrooms and sparse teaching resources would tax the ingenuity of even a well-trained, confident, experienced teacher. ZOA plans to upgrade 85 classrooms but that still leaves another 600 requiring improvement

The capacity for development is there but appropriate funding is essential, if the amount of training is to increase and if the training team is to be enlarged. The trainers employed by ZOA are competent facilitators, but the team is far too small. The quantity of training needs to be increased. Ideally, in the long term, all teachers should have an extended period of pre-service training followed by a comprehensive in-service training package, supplemented by opportunities to see and share good practice both in the camps and in neighbouring communities.

Whilst there are significant factors that inhibit the provision of quality teacher training, the biggest plus factor is the commitment to education that exists in every camp and within the larger Karen community, but until there are sufficient competent, well-trained teachers, the children will not be able to realise their true potential.

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ZOA Refugee Care is a Netherlands-based NGO established in 1973. It provides support to refugees, displaced people and victims of natural disasters. ZOA works in various countries in Asia and Africa. At the moment, it implements projects in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand and Uganda. Since 1984, ZOA has been working with Burmese refugees living in camp settlements in Thailand. Currently, ZOA implements projects in seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border in the areas of general education, vocational training, and food and shelter.

Since 1997, ZOA has been providing support to Burmese refugees in Thailand to enable them to manage and improve their own community education system. This support is provided through the Karen Education Project (KEP), the fourth phase of which started in January 2006. The main intervention areas of KEP are in-service teacher training and support, curriculum and textbook development, institutional capacity building, community development, and the provision of operational services, such as school construction, payment of teacher subsidies and the provision of school supplies. The challenge for the future will be to assist the further improvement of the quality of education and to ensure sustainability of project interventions in a protracted refugee situation, with a considerable degree of uncertainty about future scenarios for the refugees.

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ZOA's teacher training project is co-financed by the European Commission and PRISMA and this Issue Paper is funded by UNICEF

