

EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Since Independence in 1966, I have been deeply concerned with the failure of the Barbados and Caribbean governments to solve the failure of the formal education system and the callous disregard for what takes place informally outside of the classroom. Year in year out, parents and the public at large have expressed their concerns with the 11+ exams that moved children from primary schools to secondary schools. The increasing numbers of failure at the primary school level was reflected in the annual exams and nothing was being done to stem this spoilage and rot. I wrote on this question in the 1990s. Professor Ian Boxill from the Sociology Department at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, was launching a new journal IDEAZ and he interviewed me for the first issue of the journal. This the interview as it was published.



What do you think about the state of education in the region?

I have a somewhat different concept about education. I go beyond the usual formal education of the schools, institutes and universities and include the non-formal and informal education, and include those channels, places and situations where learning also takes place and which can and do influence the culture of a people. And obviously by culture I mean behaviour, creativity, performance and quality, for example

In most Caribbean societies, teaching was the prerogative of the whole community with, in some cases, clearly defined roles for schools, the church and the community at large. I learned to read and write in primary school. I learned cleanliness and public health measures in primary school and at home from public health inspectors. I learned moral values and ethics from the church even tho I have no uses for the Anglican Church and its history of hypocrisy. I learned about my environment, respect for people and the past traditions from a community of friends and strangers. I also recognize that this education took place in a context of a different time where there were extended families – blood lines as well as myriad honorary aunties, uncles and nin-nins. Much of this support system does not exist today and therefore it is imperative for the re-creation of community institutions to undertake the reconstruction of a holistic education that is for the common good. Communities need to be re-invented.

What are your views on the current formal system of education?

Across the Caribbean formal education must be planned and managed in a way to maximize the potential of all Caribbean people. This management should be based on benchmarks set by our human resource departments so that we know what we want to achieve in 5, 10, 15 and 20 years. And even beyond. By this I mean that we must set

national targets for all areas of our education. For example, do we want 100% literacy in English and in mathematics (numeracy?) Do we want 50% literacy in Spanish, 30% in French, 20% in Chinese and Portuguese, and 10% in German? Do we want 50% literacy in hospitality studies, in chemistry, in physics and in information technology? Do we want 40% capability in art and crafts and 10% in music? These are just arbitrary figures but are we not capable of putting in place such national targets? How many trained teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, architects, managers, accountants, technicians, etc will we need. They may be guesstimates but at least we will all have one common objective.

What strategy would you use to ensure that children, teachers, parents and the public at large understand the significance of these targets?

Each one of these targets can be defined graphically by a distribution curve that would set the theoretical model for all and sundry to see and understand. Again I am talking about involving teachers, parents, public and private sector management and workers and a heavy public-affairs use of the media so that everyone is involved. I want to emphasize here that we are on a course of development which has not yet been fulfilled. Because of this, all segments of the society should be prepared to play a major role in this national strategy of educational development. The public affairs role of the media would be to deliver to the general public the information related to the national strategies. In other words the public must first be prepared to read and understand the distribution curve and all the colour codes that will be used. This can only be achieved by continuous repetitive promotion and explanation of these shared national objectives. Along with the national target, distribution curves would be identified by colour for each subject.

How would this change the existing procedures for testing and evaluation?

Testing would be done every six weeks in primary and secondary schools. The results of these tests should then be fed into the national grid at the Ministry of Education using a dedicated program on the school's computer. From this information, the Ministry, the schools and teachers, the parents and students will be able to see the performance of each school, each class and each student with respect to the national theoretical model. What this does is to identify the weaknesses of the students at various levels and allow for special remedial squads to go in and deal with those students and bring them up to par. This is not a penalty against teachers and schools, but a tool to allow needed assistance to be given in a timely manner to correct a problem that usually manifests itself at the 11+ and CXC. The purpose of this type of intervention is to nip spoilage, or to put it another way, misunderstanding or incomprehension, quickly and prevent it from demoralizing the child, allowing he or she to get too far behind, and to prevent frustration and failure. It is important to note that even tho reports will carry marks, they will also include distribution curves showing the child's performance in relation to the national objectives as well as to other schools and other classes. However, it also allows the Ministry and teachers to plot and identify repetitive problems and allow them (the teachers) to be provided with remedial training focusing on those problematic areas.

Would you recommend any changes to the approaches to teaching/learning which our institutions of learning now accept as the norm?

Contemporary techniques of how the conscious and subconscious mind works should be taught to all teachers and instructors as well as to parents thru the PTAs so that, within the framework of the formal school, students are encouraged at all times to reach the shared national targets. Too often, pejorative remarks by parents and teachers harm hundreds of students in the region because of their lack of understanding of how the mind learns. The conscious mind depends on and benefits from the five senses. Knowledge is gained from education and experience. The subconscious mind believes what the conscious mind tells it. Confused as we are about our very human condition, our colour gradations and their perceived values, our behindness when compared to other people as we are wont to do, we are lucky that so many of us survive, succeed and prosper. So these things are not secret and should not be kept secret. There should always be an overflow of knowledge from the academies to the public at large so that we are best able to expand our consciousness and reinforce it to produce better products.

What sort of responses do you think this proposal will generate?

There are several questions that this proposal will raise. Will performance be restricted by handicaps – hearing (deafness or hard-of-hearing), seeing (dyslexia, blindness, etc) and speaking (stuttering, tied-tongue, etc)? One would expect that Ministries of Education to carry out the appropriate testing to identify the existence of these problems so that adjustments can be made for these children. The second has to do with the six weeks (mid-term and end-of-term) testing. What will the tests look for? Will they be standardized across the board for all schools and/or within schools? Will the questions be multiple-choice? What are the alternatives? Is it possible for all schools to follow a curriculum design? Should special schools be identified for those at the top and those at the bottom of the distribution curve or should one type of school fit everybody? The remedial squad takes care of those who fall behind. What about those who can move forward more rapidly, should they not be catered for?

How would the extracurricular activities fit into this system of education?

Extra curricular activities must become a real part of formal schooling. It has also been shown that students who do well in the arts and sports usually demonstrate an improvement in their self-confidence that overflow into their formal school work. It is one of the reasons why schools should integrate their participation in Arts Festivals particularly in creative writing (short story, poetry, essay) and story telling; art, sculpture and crafts; music and video production, so that these skills can be developed alongside those areas

used in multiple-choice questions. Competitive sports must be reintroduced at every level of the school to permit for the physical development of the child and to teach co-operation and group problem solving. Our failure to do this is clearly demonstrating itself in some of the anti-social behaviours across our societies.

So, this system of education would increase the awareness of learning outside the classroom walls?

A lot of learning also takes place in the community and informal and non-formal education should be integrated into the class room. This would require interfacing with what is seen on television and what is done in the community. These are spheres where children have the experience and can therefore be more authoritative on their own experiences in those situations. Too much of our formal education is divorced from the community and most teachers and instructors do not make the linkages. We are yet to solve the problem between urban and rural communities and the way in which the education system promotes one over the other. This raises the questions of curricula and text books. In this day and age, where technology has altered the production of study materials, is it not possible to produce materials espousing the same principles but using totally different examples culled from the differences between urban and rural conditions?

How would these changes impact on the family?

Social conditions in the Caribbean have changed. Mothers and fathers (where co-habitation exists) are usually at work from seven in the morning until seven in the evening. Most children are traveling between seven and eight in the morning and are on their own or floating between three and seven in the evening. What happens to our children during this period? Under whose care and supervision are they placed? Are they members of scouting or guiding organizations, youth groups, cultural groups, sporting clubs, imported social clubs (4-H, Leo, etc) or other indigenous clubs? In other words how is this time currently being used by school children and young adults (especially unemployed)?

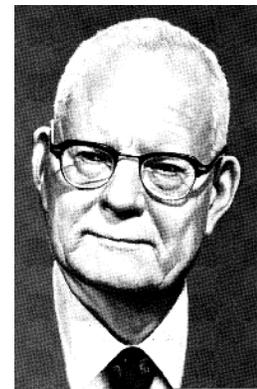
How would the required links between the Ministries of Education and the community organizations be established?

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the Colonial government or Ministries of Education took over the role of public formal education in the Caribbean. There are still many private religious schools across the region offering specific education to their membership. In spite of the fact that there was a sense of community then, resources were allocated to assist communities in developing groups for one purpose or another. I am arguing that even tho these resources may be administered through community development departments or special foundations and commissions, the content and *raison d'etre* behind them should be within an integrated policy coming from the Ministry of Education. There are many programs administered by community development departments and independent public volunteer groups and other departments of government that do not now mesh because they do not subscribe to the national

objective. Let me cite some examples: day care centres, HIV/AIDS Awareness groups, child care, adult education, adult literacy programs, Neighbourhood Watch, Drug Awareness Programs, heritage groups, cooking classes, Planned Parenthood, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Leo, Conservation, Fair Trading, Ombudsman, Agricultural training programs, First Aid, Emergency Relief, Legal Aid, Consumer Affairs, Citizens Rights, National Galleries, Museums, Citizenship, Libraries, Public Health, Sporting organizations, etc. Any or all of these agencies can develop with Ministries of Education modular programs to interest young people and adults and offer meaning to the concept of development. Are the Ministries of Education prepared to accept this broader definition of education?

You mentioned briefly the idea of technology, but do you see it being used in your ideas of future education?

Of course the computer is a major weapon to be used in educating ourselves. It is for that reason that I am arguing for the use of the bell curve, statistics, and educating the public about these things. Remember that William Edwards Deming, the American statistician achieved wonders with Japanese workers and management during the fifties in Japan to increase the quality of products. Once people understood how to avoid spoilage the rest took care of itself. So I see the computer as a tool to be used to help people grasp and understand their own condition. The region becomes a contiguous land mass connected by the internet.



But my main concern is the use of two much older technologies radio and television. One of the areas that is certainly misused and abused is radio. Nowhere in the region do we have access to educational programs on radio. Of the over one hundred FM stations in the Caribbean, not one is dedicated to news or to education. There are no networks for news. There are no networks for education. The University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, has an FM station that used to broadcast 4 hours a day, from 12 noon until 4:00pm. This has now been changed to 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. From Monday to Friday, Radio Mona broadcasts 14 hours of Euro-classical music, 2 hours and 45 minutes of Jazz, 2-3 hours of World music, 3 hours of Caribbean music, 1 hour of news from the USA, 15 minutes from the public relations department of the UWI, Mona and the occasional report from the students at the Campus. Weekend fare is much the same with some concessions to some historical Jamaican program for about 30 minutes.

Now alternately what should the premier university of the West Indies be doing. First it should be a non-commercial station, an educational station, matching its charter and mission as an educational institution. Secondly, it should be operating a network of UWI FM stations in each territory of the Caribbean. Thirdly it should then be using this medium to reach the public in the Caribbean with the fruits of its research using its highly paid staff to do so. Fourthly it should also be utilizing its awesome archive of public lectures and recordings that its audio-visual department collected over the last 50 years to educate the public and fill the gap that is so evidently missing from our formal educational system. There can be no justification in playing music like the proverbial juke box, without

identification, that fails to educate listeners as to what they are listening to, and competing with over ten other stations that are doing the same. The University of the West Indies is not a secret society nor a fraternal order nor a religious sect. It is an educational institution born out of our peculiar historical circumstances and therefore has more than just a passing obligation to demystify knowledge by making it accessible to all. And there is no better medium that can do that and reach the whole Caribbean at very low cost than radio. So who is listening to 14 hours of Euro-classical music?

More difficult to implement but just as important is television. The world, especially the American world, has invaded our mind space with its pervasive images against ourselves. In most cases, all the wireless TV stations in the region, primarily because of costs, claim they have been unable (and unwilling) to solve this problem of educating us about ourselves with our own self images. That is except the wild-card unpredictable, unforeseen, ragamuffin cable operators of Jamaica who are doing it without sanction and without credit. Here is a technology that is mature but we are unable to use it for our own development simply because of the contradictions created by the precedence of how to use it. We broke the rules in the recording industry in Jamaica, in steelband development in Trinidad, and moveable expandable shelter in Barbados.

Television is but an extension of the video image. The production of that video image is going to be dependent not only on the technology, but the self-confidence of the user and the eventual content and images presented. In spite of the readily accessible video camera, particularly digital camcorders with the capability of being edited and produced on computers, there are no provision in any of the arts festivals across the region for video presentations. The only limit is our imagination. Our education should be about releasing that creative energy.