

## INTRODUCTION

1980 opens the door to a new decade. It is, therefore, a suitable time to pause and ponder over the trends and patterns of educational development of the 1970's.

The pages that follow set out the policies, plans and programmes for curriculum development in secondary schools which member countries of the Commonwealth have initiated over the last ten years. The range and scope of reforms are a testament to the fact that there is no one best way to the realization of particular educational aims. There will be trials and errors and degrees of success and failure. Moreover, every reform effort is unique in its context. Sharing of experience from country to country gives insights and provokes the imagination but unthinking and wholesale adoption of what works in one country often proves that it does not work in another. This, if nothing else, is a lesson which has been learned and accepted in the recent history of curriculum reform.

If, by the time this is read, the facts and issues described here have already been overtaken by events, it is partly because the pace of change in secondary curriculum reform has gathered momentum in almost all Commonwealth countries over the last ten years and is likely to continue to do so.

Why have governments paid so much attention to reform of the curriculum at the secondary level? The reasons lie in the expectations countries had, and still have, that education systems can play a large part in national development programmes.

### Primary and Secondary School Expansion

The 1950's and 1960's were times of massive achievements in the expansion of education throughout the world. In the years after the Second World War Commonwealth countries put their energies into the provision of secondary schools in an attempt to build up their middle and higher level manpower. The human capital concept of educational development justified the higher proportion of education budgets devoted to secondary and higher education on the grounds that there would be a high social return on the investment.

After the UNESCO regional conferences of the early 1960's governments added to their commitments a vow to extend primary level education to all. Primary education thus became competitive for public resources with secondary and higher education. Meanwhile, the rate of growth of secondary education in many countries actually increased. This growth rate accelerated as a new generation of primary school leavers filled the classrooms of the lower secondary schools. Today most countries are committed in the interests of social justice to working towards a nine or ten year minimum basic education for all, if they have not already achieved this.

If the 1960's and early 1970's were years of massive educational expansion, they were also years of heavily rising costs. Between 1965 and 1972 alone the percentage increase in public financing of education world-wide was

11.6 per cent. Most countries were affected by rising school-age populations and a slowing down of economic growth. Capital expenditures in the early days of the expansion of schooling are high. Recurrent expenditures impose a continual burden on the public purse. Secondary education costs per pupil are much higher than primary.

### Schools and National Development

But rising costs were not the only reason why governments took a long, hard look at secondary education. It was becoming apparent that many of the products of the traditional academic secondary schools were ill-suited and unwilling to meet the needs for scientific and technological manpower and for developmental leadership. Schools were adapted to preparing students for entry to higher education and not to preparing the majority of students for the world of work which they would enter after leaving school. Moreover, at the lower secondary level the backwash effect of selective entrance examinations to upper secondary education led to a neglect of the sort of curriculum which would prepare students to become well educated and productive citizens. Students were schooled but often not educated.

The difficulties faced by secondary schools in providing a curriculum which was relevant both to the needs of individuals and to wider social and economic goals was partly the reason for high rates of wastage - drop-outs, repeaters, examination failures, unemployable school leavers - from the lower secondary schools. Wastage is costly. The 1970's has seen much debate about the efficiency of schools - the quality of their work in relation to the cost of providing them. This is why there has been so much effort of late to improve the quality of secondary education through reform of the curriculum.

The question which governments, planners, teachers, parents and employers have been asking is: What should our young people learn? This central question involves a number of others:

What knowledge, skills, values and attitudes should the schools attempt to teach in order to equip the school leaver with all he or she needs to fulfil his or her potential as an individual and to lead a productive life in the community?

How far should basic education prepare the school leaver for a vocation in the context of his immediate environment and how far should it prepare him to meet the challenges of a changing world in a flexible and adaptable way?

These questions mainly focus on the majority of young people who will end their formal schooling at the lower secondary level. The following questions mainly concern the students who will continue their schooling at the upper secondary level and perhaps beyond:

What basic learning does the student of high potential need in the early years of secondary schooling in order to prepare him or her to meet the challenge of advanced study?

What measures need to be taken in order to identify and encourage the ablest students?

How can the able students receive a well-rounded education at the same time as fulfilling the demands of specialized study at an advanced level?

The larger questions follow on from these and have been fundamental to debate on curricular issues. They are these:

How can schools ensure that what their students learn is relevant to their lives as individuals and as social beings?

How can schools ensure that the curriculum pays due attention to the needs and interests of all students, regardless of ability, socio-economic status, race, religion and sex?

How can schools organize the curriculum to enable all students to learn to their full potential, at least cost to the taxpayer?

These issues of relevance, equality of opportunity and efficiency underlie most of the programmes and projects described in the following pages.

### National Development Planning

Many of the countries of the New Commonwealth have produced national plans for development which see education as an integral tool of development. Though the Old Commonwealth countries have not produced comprehensive national development plans, they have paid attention to educational development. Common to all Commonwealth countries has been a tendency to concentrate first on the quantitative expansion of secondary school places in order to enrol all children in school for nine or ten years. Targets set for education in earlier development plans reflected this concern with the expansion of educational opportunity. More recently goals for education have also been framed in qualitative terms, reflecting national priorities for manpower development, national integration and social justice.

Many countries have re-structured or adapted their school systems to cope with increased enrolments and the needs of special groups of students. In their attempts to meet the challenges of all the goals set for them in national plans, schools have had to set priorities, seek compromises where goals appear to conflict, and search for strategies which would translate plans into reality.

Here we are not so much concerned with the structure of school systems except in so far as they influence what students learn. The focus of attention is the intention and ability of curriculum planners to translate national goals for education into concrete plans for the curriculum of schools. However rigorously set out, the goals cannot contain within them fool-proof strategies for their attainment. However elegant they are on paper, curriculum plans have to be translated into the reality of syllabuses for school subjects, learning materials, timetables, examinations and training for teachers.

### Terminology

This report covers both lower and upper secondary levels of schooling, with the emphasis on the former. However, it would be counter-productive to put forward a definition of these two categories. No single definition would entirely fit all the variety of ways in which the concepts are translated into practice in Commonwealth countries. It may be helpful, though, to dwell briefly on some of the main criteria by which lower and upper secondary levels of schooling are distinguished in practice. This will enable the reader to interpret more easily particular cases as they occur in the text. Though they are listed separately here some categories overlap in practice.

Years of Schooling: Lower secondary as the extension of schooling from perhaps five or six years (now primary) to perhaps eight, nine, ten, even eleven years.

Age-Group: Provision for schooling which is intended to be appropriate to older children and young adolescents; say ages nine to thirteen or eleven to fifteen.

Basic Education: An extension of basic education which is terminal for the majority of students. This is conceived as providing a "survival" curriculum with a large element of pre-vocational preparation. This concept often goes with the two above and becomes explicit in educational planning as schooling is universalized.

A Preparation for Upper Secondary Schooling: The lower secondary school acts as a bridge between primary and upper secondary schooling for those who can cross it and as a ladder from whose rungs those who cannot climb it progressively fall off. As we shall see lower secondary schooling in this sense often exists alongside the other types.

Upper secondary schooling tends to begin at whatever point along the ladder the greatest number of students leave school once a minimum of say eight or nine years schooling has been achieved. This often occurs after a major public examination such as the Lower Certificate of Education in Malaysia, in year nine, after Form Three or after the General Certificate of Education or the Certificate of Secondary Education in year eleven, at the end of Form Five in England and Wales. Upper secondary level schooling tends to be characterized as the text shows, by increased specialization in the curriculum in preparation for higher education though there is some signs of a trend towards extending general education into this level as well, for countries which have achieved universal lower secondary schooling.