

Universal Secondary Education and Society in the Commonwealth Caribbean

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Abstract

This paper presents three general philosophical perspectives of secondary education and explores the specific philosophies that influence secondary education in the Caribbean. The author traces the historical development of secondary education in the region and brings us to the introduction and expansion of universal secondary education. He argues for a unifying philosophical perspective on secondary education for the Commonwealth Caribbean that would contribute to the competitiveness of the region in the global economy. Finally, the author offers suggestions as to how universal secondary education could be implemented on a regional level.

Keywords: universal secondary education, philosophies of education, Commonwealth Caribbean

Introduction

Universal secondary education (USE) has been high on the agenda of Governments of the Commonwealth Caribbean for the past decade. Indeed, the Montego Bay Declaration of the Heads of Government of CARICOM set 2005 as the date by which all CARICOM countries should provide school places for all students of secondary school age. In this regard, the Commonwealth Caribbean is pursuing a policy that is growing in acceptance across the world (Cohen et al., 2005). This paper attempts to examine some of the major issues related to USE within the context of Commonwealth Caribbean society.

Philosophies of Secondary Education

Concepts that have been used in implementing universal secondary education, internationally, have been rooted in the philosophy upon which secondary education systems have been built in the various countries. Given the fact that Commonwealth Caribbean countries have largely adopted and adapted policies from metropolitan countries, an appropriate starting point of any discussion of USE is a brief review of the philosophies that have guided the evolution of secondary education as it has been provided around the world.

Secondary Education as a Level of Education

The original philosophy of secondary education is that of being a level of education. This philosophy is based on two basic premises. First, that secondary education is that stage of education undertaken after mastery of the fundamentals of primary education, particularly mastery of literacy and numeracy; and second, that the purpose of secondary education is to prepare students for further education. The first premise defines the prerequisites for entry into secondary education. The second defines its goal and by deduction its standards and its content. This philosophy of secondary education highlights its intermediary status in the education system and its dependent relationships on both primary and tertiary education. From the perspective of this philosophy, non-mastery of the prerequisites of primary education excludes students from the secondary level. On the other hand, the standards and content of secondary education evolve and change with the evolution of tertiary education.

Embedded just below the surface of these two basic premises of this philosophy of secondary education is the notion that not every child has the ability or the capacity to advance to secondary education. Historically, primary education was deemed terminal to those who were judged to be without the ability to advance to higher education. Consequently, secondary education was for the elite who were deemed capable of going on to higher education. This conception of secondary schooling transfer from primary to secondary school was predicated on the basis of the achievement as measured by some form of performance testing. Originally, all secondary schools would set their own entry examinations, but in more recent times, systems following the British model opted for the famous, or infamous, common entrance or 11 plus examination, which selected the students for secondary schools.

Secondary school systems based on this philosophy, developed principally in Western Europe, have been marked by the following:

- Transfer from primary schooling based on academic achievement,
- Different types of schools offering types of secondary education,
- A clear distinction between academic and technical and vocational education, with the academic stream leading to university and the technical and vocational stream principally geared to the world of work.

In essence, this philosophy of secondary education is exclusive and categorical and is strongly related to the class structures of the societies. This philosophy of secondary education was spawned in Western Europe from which it has spread to other parts of the world largely through the colonial relationships between Western European countries and countries in the other continents of the world.

Secondary Education as Preparation for the World of Work

The second philosophy of secondary education is that of education beyond the primary level but which is directed to preparation for work in different occupations. In a sense, this philosophy shares some common features with the philosophy previously described. It requires mastery of the fundamentals of primary education. It is education beyond the primary level. However, at its inception the goal was preparation for the world of work and

not higher education. This philosophy emerged over time as craft guilds gave way to schools in the training of apprentices. A good example of this transition was the German Berufsschule which admitted apprentices, thus allowing them to combine formal education with training on the job. Trade schools, as they were called, became the precursors of technical and vocational secondary schools.

The industrial revolution demanded training in skills that were outside of the so-called academic curriculum. It also demanded that persons trained in these skills be literate and numerate. Hence it demanded education and training beyond the primary level, but in technical and vocational areas that were not included in the classical curriculum of grammar schools as they were called in Britain or the lycee in France or the gymnasium in Germany.

There are four important characteristics of this philosophy of secondary education that must be noted. These are:

- It is practical skills oriented and geared to the world of work
- It is work oriented and therefore considered to be terminal education for a large segment of its students, although some are expected to continue to higher education
- It is second choice secondary education geared largely to those who have not sufficiently excelled at the primary level to be selected for the more academic curriculum offered in grammar schools
- It is a level of education after the primary level parallel to the academic stream of education.

Secondary Education as Education for a Stage of Human Development

A third philosophy of secondary education is that it is education for a stage of human development. As such, secondary education, which is education for an intermediary stage in human development: adolescence. Hence, secondary schooling should begin for students of about 12 years olds and ends at about 18 years old. The role of secondary schooling is to provide for the holistic needs of students at this stage of human development: physical, intellectual, social, emotional and cultural. It is also to produce citizens with wholesome values irrespective of their intellectual capacities or level of educational achievement.

Within this philosophy of secondary education, transfer from primary to secondary education is assumed to be automatic for all students, based on the age of students. There are no performance criteria that are required. All students should progress from primary to secondary education just as all children become adolescents. Indeed, transfer from elementary to secondary school is an institutional marker of the transition from childhood to adolescence.

In this philosophy, secondary education is offered in one type of school, the public or common or comprehensive school. These secondary schools are by and large located in the neighbourhoods in which students live. The curriculum in the early grades of the secondary school is common to all students who are exposed to virtually all subjects. The curriculum of the later grades of the secondary school usually includes a common core which includes at a minimum the official language and mathematics and electives chosen from among

foreign languages, sciences, history, geography, social studies, technical subjects, vocational subjects, the visual and performing arts and physical education. The school caters to students of varying abilities, aptitudes and interests.

From this perspective, secondary education is the right of all students and must cater for students of different capabilities, levels of attainment, aptitudes and rates of development within the same institutional framework. This view of secondary education is inclusive and adopts as its *modus operandi* universal design education, which manifests flexibility in designing instruction appropriate to the varying needs of students in the societies in which they are located. This philosophy of secondary education is largely American in origin.

The main pitfall of this approach is that by not requiring the attainment of standards as the basis of promotion from one grade to the next or from primary to secondary school, performance and merit as the bases of progress are either undermined or compromised. Further, illiterate students are automatically transferred from primary to secondary school.

It should be noted that these three philosophies of secondary education are in the main philosophies of the providers of secondary education. In the majority of countries of the world, the State has been the major provider, with religious groups and private entrepreneurs being adjunct providers. It should not be assumed that the participants in secondary education, students and their parents, necessarily share the philosophy of the providers. Complications arise where the providers offer secondary education based on one philosophy and implement secondary education policies based on that philosophy, and where the participants demand or participate in secondary education based on another philosophy or vice versa. Numerous permutations and combinations of fit and cross-purpose between supply and demand for secondary education are possible with different practical outcomes. The point is that like all other levels of education, secondary education requires investment by both the providers and the participants. Both actual and opportunity costs are involved.

A Brief Sketch of Caribbean Secondary Education

Formal secondary education in the Commonwealth Caribbean dates back to the mid 19th century. However, several secondary schools in the Commonwealth Caribbean began to operate as educational institutions long before 1850. For example, schools such as Combermere, Queen's College, Foundation, Harrison College, and Lodge in Barbados and Wolmers, Mannings and Rusea in Jamaica have operated continuously as schools for more than 250 years (Miller, 1990; Newton and Sandiford, 1995). The explanation for this seeming inconsistency is that these schools were founded as elementary schools, but were later transformed into secondary schools in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

It is important to note that most secondary schools that were founded before the 1850s were operated by religious bodies and charitable trusts. Indeed, up until the 1950s very few secondary schools in the Commonwealth Caribbean were founded and operated by Governments. Governments' history as a major provider of secondary education through the building and operation of secondary schools began in the 1950s and 1960s. Invariably, these

Government built secondary schools were part of loan funds from various donor institutions such as the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank and marked the period when Governments' policies were to significantly expand access to secondary education.

Between the 1850s and the 1950s secondary education in the sub-region was restricted to less than three per cent of the school age population and was accessed also entirely by the middle and upper classes. Adult suffrage and representative government in the 1940s and 1950s resulted in significant expansion of secondary education as the people elected their political representatives with mandates for fundamental change for the colonial past. Merit replaced parents' ability to pay as the criterion for entry into public secondary schools. Merit was determined by performance in Common Entrance Examinations which were instituted across the region.

When Governments entered directly and fully into the secondary sector in the 1950s and 1960s, with the exception of Guyana, they came to an accommodation with the religious bodies and charitable trusts to incorporate the secondary schools that those bodies had founded into the public secondary system. In Trinidad and Tobago, this accommodation came to be known as the Concordat. Government paid the recurrent cost of operating the schools although the religious bodies or charitable trusts continued to retain ownership. Essentially, Governments assumed the responsibility for operating secondary schools with the caveat that access to these schools would be open to all who qualified to attend.

Probably the most fundamental aspect of Governments' direct involvement with secondary education was the formal integration of public elementary schools with the secondary schools that had been founded by the religious bodies and charitable trusts. When the secondary school system was established in the latter half of the 19th century, their students came almost entirely from private preparatory schools. In the last decade of the 19th century, Governments took over the elementary school system from religious denominations and introduced free elementary education. In each country the Government established a few scholarships that allowed a very limited number of elementary school students to attend secondary school. This number gradually increased over the first half of the twentieth century. With the introduction of Common Entrance Examinations in the 1960s and 1970s Governments also introduced free secondary education. Hence, public elementary education became fully integrated with public secondary education and the main barriers that had constrained children from poor homes from gaining access to secondary education were removed.

While Governments did build a few secondary schools, or bought a few from private individuals or religious bodies that could no longer afford to operate them, Governments main efforts to increase the number of secondary schools came through loan programmes beginning in the 1960s. The schools built by Governments departed from the pattern that had operated for the previous 100 plus years. Beginning with the World Bank programmes, Governments built Junior Secondary Schools providing lower secondary education in Grades 7 to 9. The plan was for students who attended Junior Secondary or High Schools to go into Senior Secondary or High Schools to complete their secondary education. Only Trinidad and Tobago was able to fully implement the plan. The Junior and Senior Secondary or High

Schools offered an alternative form of secondary education to that offered in traditional high schools.

The three defining features of this alternative form of secondary education could be summarised as follows:

- Students entering Junior Secondary or High Schools were drawn from the pool of students who did not gain places into the traditional high schools through the Common Entrance Examinations
- Junior Secondary or High Schools were linked to particular primary schools, which became their feeder schools
- The Junior and Senior Secondary of High School System had a distinct vocational bias, especially in the curriculum of the Senior Secondary or High School.

By the 1980s, three characteristic features of Commonwealth Caribbean secondary education resulted from this history. First, the most sought after and prestigious secondary schools were those founded and operated by religious bodies and charitable trusts that traced their beginning as secondary schools to the 19th and first half of the twentieth century. For ease of reference, these can be labelled the traditional high schools. Second was the Junior/Senior Secondary School system which offered education to students who had not passed the common entrance examination. In addition, the curriculum of these schools had strong elements of pre-vocational and vocational education. This type of secondary education was seen as an option for students who did not have the ability to benefit from traditional secondary education. Third, the private secondary schools system became the option for children who did not gain a place in the traditional high schools, but whose parents did not accept the Junior/Senior Secondary School system and could afford to pay for secondary education offered in private schools along the lines of the traditional high schools.

Philosophies Guiding Caribbean Secondary Education

Traditional High Schools in the Commonwealth Caribbean were patterned on the Western European philosophy of secondary education as a level of education, that is, the step up the education ladder above elementary education. The Junior/Senior Secondary School system introduced in the 1960s and 1970s was premised on Comprehensive, Common School with a philosophy as education for a stage of human development, but it also had elements of technical vocational education. However, it was implemented in the context of education for those who had failed the Common Entrance Examination and, therefore, perceived to be less able intellectually. Hence, while the three philosophies became embedded in Commonwealth Caribbean secondary education in some form, they were embedded in circumstances in which secondary education as a level of education was generally perceived to be superior to secondary education as a stage of human development or preparation for the world of work.

There is, however, one impact that the expansion of secondary education generally and the introduction of technical and Junior/Secondary or High Schools had on traditional high schools. That impact was the diversification of the curriculum of traditional high schools. Up to the 1950s the curriculum of traditional high schools was largely restricted to the classics,

foreign languages, humanities and sciences. By the 1960s, traditional high schools began to diversify their curriculum to include subjects such as Woodwork, Metalwork, Technical Drawing and Home Economics. Benavot (2006) points to the fact that this has become the trend in secondary education across the world.

The Status of the Implementation of Use in the Caribbean

Within the Caribbean context, USE is defined as students obtaining at least five years of secondary education beyond Grade 6, that is, students receiving education up to Grade 11. Essentially, the Caribbean follows the British model of secondary education with the terminal examination for secondary education coming at the end of Grade 11. In other words, USE is defined to include both lower and upper secondary education.

The first Commonwealth Caribbean country to implement USE was St. Kitts and Nevis, which did so in 1966. Barbados followed in the late 1970s. The Bahamas and the British Dependencies of Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands followed in the mid to late 1980s. Trinidad and Tobago implemented USE in 2000. In this first decade of the 21 century, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines implemented USE in September 2005 and St. Lucia followed in September 2006. Antigua and Barbuda admits into secondary schools all students who pass the Common Entrance at Grade 6 and an examination at end of Grade 9.

If USE is defined in terms of providing school places for all students of secondary school age in schools designated to be secondary schools, then thirteen of the 18 Commonwealth Caribbean countries have achieved USE. If USE is defined in terms of providing school places in secondary schools for all students who have mastered the fundamentals of the primary curriculum then fourteen countries have achieved USE. Antigua and Barbuda offers secondary education to all students who have mastered the primary curriculum. The four countries that have not yet achieved USE by whatever definition used are: Belize, Grenada, Guyana and Jamaica. If mastery of the primary curriculum is used to define USE, then these four countries are within reach of achieving USE. These four countries provide secondary education to more than fifty per cent of the population that are of secondary school age. These four countries are further away from achieving USE if the latter is defined in terms of all students of secondary school age.

Grenada's plan was to implement USE fully in September 2007. However, due to various reasons this goal is yet to be achieved. It is anticipated though, that with the steady increase in the number of children who are offered places in the secondary schools over the last few years, this target will soon be met. In the case of the other three countries, education is provided to all students up to Grade 9. It could, therefore, be said that in the four countries not providing universal secondary education to Grade 11, all students are provided with universal lower secondary education. However, this is a moot point since many of the students continue to Grade 9 in the same schools in which they received their primary education. Further, the curriculum offered in these schools in Grade 7 to 9 does not always follow the common curriculum offered in secondary schools and even if it does, neither the provision of teachers or facilities are comparable to those in secondary schools.

This controversy as to whether students enrolled in schools in Grades 7-9 are receiving lower secondary education goes back to the differences in conceptualisation of secondary education in the three philosophies outlined previously, and the legacy of the history of British form of education that has been followed in the Commonwealth Caribbean. From the inception of schooling in the Caribbean in the 17th century, elementary education ended at age 14/15 years. This is long before there was the concept of grades and primary education being defined as education provided in Grades 1 to 6, benchmarked in age as between 6 to 12 years. Elementary schools existed and operated in the region for more than 250 years before this definition of primary education became operational in the 1960s. With the introduction junior secondary/high schools when elementary schools, mostly in urban areas, were transformed into primary schools as their 12, 13 and 14 year olds were transferred to junior secondary/high schools.

The root of the controversy grew from the fact that the grading system was introduced in those schools that remained as elementary schools. These schools now had students in primary education in Grades 1 to 6 and students who had failed the common entrance remained in the elementary school in Grades 7 to 9. The name elementary school was dropped. In Jamaica these were named All Age schools; in St. Lucia and other countries of the OECS they were designated: Combined Schools. Because students in Grades 7 to 9 were not engaged in secondary education in some countries, Grades 7 to 9 was designed as the Senior Primary Division. In more recent times, Jamaica, for example, introduced a limited amount of subject teaching in some All Age schools and renamed these schools Primary and Junior High Schools.

Given the different philosophies of secondary education, some comment is appropriate with respect to the approaches adopted when CARICOM countries began to implement universal secondary education. St. Kitts and Nevis was not only the first Caribbean country to implement universal secondary education, when they did so in 1968, but they also switched philosophy at the same time. Hence, St Kitts and Nevis introduced comprehensive secondary education at the same time as it was introducing universal secondary education. In the capital, Basseterre, it built both a Junior Secondary and a Senior Secondary School to offer lower and upper secondary education while in the rest of the country the curriculum of traditional high schools was diversified to offer the entire range of subjects that students could choose at the secondary level. However, within a decade of its implementation, the Basseterre Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools were transformed into single cycle secondary schools because of some of the social problems that became associated with the two cycle pattern of secondary education.

Barbados followed St. Kitts Nevis and began to implement USE in 1976 by providing secondary school places to all students who 'passed' the Common Entrance Examination. Students who did not achieve the 'pass mark' were retained in Senior Schools and could be admitted to secondary schools at a later date if they achieved the required standard. As the numbers of students of secondary school age in the population declined in the 1990s, Barbados switched its philosophy of USE from all students who had mastered the primary school curriculum, to providing places in secondary school to all students of secondary school

age. Indeed, a special secondary school was built to provide education to students who were deemed to be incapable of following the regular secondary curriculum.

The other Commonwealth Caribbean countries that have implemented universal secondary education have all done so in a more gradual manner than St. Kitts and Nevis, and Barbados. Apart from implementing USE in a more gradual manner, the twelve countries have also taken somewhat different paths. St. Lucia introduced Junior Secondary Schools into the secondary system in the 1970s. However, by the mid 1980s, St. Lucia began to convert Junior Secondary Schools into single cycle high schools, patterned on the traditional high schools. USE was gradually achieved by building more single cycle secondary schools.

Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Montserrat, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines all arrived at universal secondary education by following a different path. They achieved USE by gradually increasing access to single cycle secondary schools. The new and more recent high schools were built by Governments to increase access to secondary education. In the case of Dominica, Grades 7 to 9 in the elementary schools were converted to Junior Secondary Divisions of those schools which then were renamed Primary and Junior Secondary Schools. Hence, lower secondary education was offered within the context of what were previously elementary schools. At the end of Grade 9, students in the Junior Secondary Divisions sat an examination which allowed them entry to high schools if they performed at the required level. The point is that Dominica introduced lower secondary education, but not in a separate institution.

The Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago arrived at the implementation of USE at different times but followed the same path, which is different from the three paths described previously. Both countries added two cycle secondary education to the single cycle system that previously existed. Hence, the public system of universal secondary education now consists of both traditional high schools and junior and senior secondary high schools.

In reviewing the implementation of USE to date in the Commonwealth Caribbean countries, two observations appear to be in order. First, with the exception of St. Kitts and Nevis, the implementation of USE was facilitated by declining school populations of secondary school age. Live births in Caribbean countries reached a peak in the late 1960s and 1970s. By the end of the 1980s there were more students leaving primary schools in Grade 6 than entering them in Grade 1. As this demographic shift worked its way through the population with expansion of the existing secondary system, countries have been able to offer a school place to all students of secondary school age.

Second, the smaller countries of the sub-region with some small variations have achieved USE by offering secondary education through single cycle institutions of the same type, which have diversified their curriculum to be more comprehensive in scope than was characteristic of traditional high schools. In other words, these countries have offered USE in a single type of secondary school which offered both lower and upper secondary education in the same institution. On the other hand, the two most affluent Caribbean countries (Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago) have achieved universal secondary education with different types of secondary schools and separate institutions for lower and upper secondary education.

From the foregoing discussion of USE, it is evident that the Commonwealth Caribbean began to implement USE long before USE came to the fore as a central policy question globally. Indeed, at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990, the Commonwealth Caribbean argued strongly for secondary education to be included as part of basic education and, therefore, part of the EFA mandate. Further, it is apparent that the Commonwealth Caribbean is not far from achieving USE as a sub-region, no matter how it is defined. As such, the Commonwealth Caribbean is not far shy of achieving so-called developed or industrialized world standards for USE. Finally, the substantial expansion of access to secondary education in the Commonwealth Caribbean has been achieved over the last 50 years, largely as a result of policies implemented under full internal self-government of the dependencies and political independence on the part of others.

The Way Forward for the Caribbean

Commonwealth Caribbean countries have a long history of education and of secondary education. For more than 150 years Commonwealth Caribbean countries had organised secondary education on the philosophy of secondary education being as a level of education beyond the primary level. In more recent times, several countries have superimposed on this philosophy the other philosophies of secondary education as education for preparation for the world of work as well as for a stage of human development. The co-mingling of these philosophies of secondary education without any attempt to resolve their contradiction has led to a lack of conceptual clarity and several contradictory arrangements and expectations. At the root of this dilemma is the common practice within the Commonwealth Caribbean of adopting, adapting and implementing ideas of education from elsewhere and only infrequently critically reviewing their effectiveness in achieving the stated goals.

The position taken here is that it is necessary and almost obligatory for Commonwealth Caribbean countries to take a hard critical look at the bases upon which they have expanded access to secondary education and implemented universal secondary education. Almost all major educational reforms in the last 50 years have included in their objectives equitable access, equality of opportunity and social justice. The stated intentions have to rectify and reverse the inequalities and injustices that have marked the colonial histories of these societies. The question is which policies and reforms have actually delivered on their promises. For example, a strong case can be made that the so-called older secondary schools, often labelled the elite secondary schools, have done more to facilitate upward social mobility on the part of the social segments that have been historically marginalised than the newer secondary schools. Indeed, most of the countries of the sub-region have abandoned the 'junior secondary – senior secondary' model promoted by the international development assistance agencies in the 1960s and 1970s, and have patterned their institutional arrangements for secondary education on the five-year secondary school. Indeed, the two countries of the sub-region, Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago, which have retained the junior secondary, senior secondary model, are the countries that because of their economic strength, were able to fully implement the reform premised on this institutional arrangement.

In addition, the position taken here is that the Commonwealth Caribbean must abandon the practice of adopting and adapting ideas for secondary education developed elsewhere and instead critically analyse its existing situation and, from first principles, devise the ideas that will inform continued reform of education, particularly the continued implementation of USE. In this regard, the remainder of the paper attempts to sketch the broad contours of the further development of USE in the sub-region.

Towards A Commonwealth Caribbean Philosophy of Universal Secondary Education

Commonwealth Caribbean countries should consider adopting a philosophy of USE based on two basic premises; first, that secondary education is a level of education beyond mastery of the fundamentals of primary education, second, that five or six, years of secondary education is the right of all persons resident in the society age 11 years or older, that have mastered the fundamentals of primary education.

There are several bases upon which the first premise can be justified and supported. To begin with this concept of secondary education is definable in educational terms and has clear meaning within the education system and, therefore, is understandable to professionals, parents and pupils. This is the case because it is generally agreed that the end result of primary education is to produce students who are literate in the official language of their society, numerate and who possess some basic understanding of their physical and social environments. To say that secondary education is that level of education beyond mastery of the primary stage at least defines its starting point as the end point of the first stage of the education system.

On the other hand, the concept of secondary education for the adolescent stage of human development is fraught with conceptual difficulty because its central axiom is about a stage of human development that is socially and culturally constructed and therefore has different meanings and manifestations in different cultures and societies (Bradley, 1999; Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1928). What is appropriate education for this stage of human development becomes so culturally relative and societally specific that it poses substantial problems in determining the content of education that is appropriate to this stage of human development, and therefore, raises the question, what exactly is secondary education within this conceptual framework?

The point that must not be missed is that secondary education conceived as a level of education beyond the primary stage does not in any way preclude talking about the stage of human development of the students to whom it is delivered, nor does it exclude adjustments and adaptations to the culture and society in which it is delivered. In other words, secondary education conceived as a level of education beyond the primary stage can be configured appropriately for children, adolescents and adults in different cultures and societies. While secondary education as a level of education can readily accommodate the basic premise of secondary education as education for a stage of human development the converse is not true.

Then again, secondary education as a level of education beyond mastery of primary education is widely held and understood within Caribbean societies given its long history and practice on this basis within the region. Given the fact that voluntary participation is vital to the achievement of USE, it is important for the philosophy on which it is premised to be readily understood and readily accepted. It should be noted that in those countries that have gone ahead with placing students that have not mastered the fundamentals of primary education in secondary schools, there has been significant difficulty in convincing many education professionals, parents and the general public of the wisdom of such an approach.

Before proceeding to justify the second premise, it is necessary to elaborate on the content of this premise. By declaring that five or six years of secondary education is a right, this premise is asserting that the State has an obligation to provide five or six years of secondary free of cost to those to whom the obligation is due. By saying it is the right of all persons resident in a country that are 11 years or older, this premise is asserting that the obligation of the State is owed to that universe of persons that are reaching the age of 11 years and also to those who have passed the age of 11 years and are resident in the country, but who have not received five or six years of secondary schooling. In other words, the premises include in its definition of 'all', adults as well as adolescents and citizens and non-citizens, once they are resident in the country, who have mastered the fundamentals of primary education, but have not had five or six years of secondary schooling. Finally, the premise asserts that this obligation is based on merit and achievement. The achievement of mastery of the primary level of education by the individual, obligates the State to provide that individual with the opportunity of continuing education at the secondary level when he or she reaches the age of 11 years or at any later age. In other words, the provision of secondary education is a social contract between the individual and the State. Once and whenever individuals perform their part of the contract, the State is obliged to meet its obligation.

The reason for making 11 years as the threshold for the establishment of the right to secondary education is by no means asserting that there may not be some students who master the primary curriculum before that age. Indeed, the Caribbean has long allowed entry into secondary school before age 11 years. However, such arrangements are not binding on either the State or parents or schools but are permitted on a case by case basis related to the particular circumstances and the specific student. The right is set at age 11 years because on a normative basis students are engaged in primary education up to that age.

The justification for this second premise is that if the State defines secondary education in terms of being that level of education that follows mastery of the primary level then fairness demands that all persons who achieve this mastery should be provided with access to this further level of education. Further, equity demands that, whenever this right is accorded to students of school age, it should also be accorded to all those who previously attained this mastery of the primary level but who were not provided with access to this further level of education when they reached the age now specified. Equity would also demand that this right be accorded to persons who achieved this mastery of the primary level, after they had passed the age of 11 years. Justice and human rights require that the State affords this right to all persons that it allows to reside within its borders. This is of particular significance

in circumstances in which CARICOM has established a single market and economy which allows the free movement of people between countries within the CARICOM community.

There are at least three sets of practical circumstances that demonstrate the necessity for specifications set out above. First, in almost all Caribbean populations there are adults, or even some adolescents, who mastered the primary curriculum but for reasons of school supply at that particular time were not able to benefit from secondary education. Second, all Commonwealth Caribbean countries now operate school systems that provide students with education until age 15 or 16 years. Students mastering the primary curriculum after age 11 years should have the right to proceed to secondary education. Third, while it is generally accepted that the obligation of the State to provide its population with primary education ends at somewhere between 15 and 16 years, there may be individuals, whether on their own or with other assistance, master the primary curriculum at some later age. At that point, they too would become eligible for State provided secondary education. This approach would give new meaning to 'education for all'.

The case could be made to the fact that the history of education could be written in terms of the re-definition of 'all'. The Athenians first declared education to be the right of all free men of the City of Athens. This excluded free men of other cities, women and slaves (Miller, 2003). Even major education reform has involved a revised definition of 'all' so that it becomes more inclusive by including groups that were previously excluded. The most inclusive definition of 'all' in education is the World Declaration of Education for All, which includes all children of the world without exception. However, this is restricted to primary education. The philosophy of universal secondary education proposed for Commonwealth Caribbean countries has the potential to become the most inclusive definition of secondary education for all.

The New Philosophy and CARICOM Competitiveness in the Global Economy

Adopting a philosophy of USE which includes the adult population in Commonwealth Caribbean is not a matter of philosophical nicety, but a matter of greater practical necessity and urgency. The reasons for this can be enumerated briefly as follows:

- Commonwealth Caribbean economies are not only going through the transition to service type economies that are quite widespread, but their traditional trading partners, particularly in Europe are phasing out preferential agreements related to several mainstay agricultural products like sugar and bananas, which have been large employers of labour in the sub-region. The implication of the loss of trade preferences are substantial. Commonwealth Caribbean economies must become more competitive in traditional areas as well as to identify and move into new areas where the region may have some advantages.
- It is the current labour force, particularly workers of prime age within this labour force, upon which Commonwealth Caribbean economies must now rely to become the 'first responders' to the challenges of becoming more competitive. However, in most countries of the sub-region, large numbers of such persons missed out on secondary education largely because of school supply shortages which existed

at the time at which they were of school age. Strategies to improve and increase economic competitiveness in almost all Commonwealth Caribbean countries should include the provision of general secondary education as well as specific technical/vocational training related to particular industries, to members of the existing labour forces.

- While the provision of school places for all students of secondary school age who have mastered the primary curriculum is an essential means of consolidating any effort of increased competitiveness within the global market place, Commonwealth Caribbean countries cannot rely on school leavers as the primary strategy of meeting the educational levels they must achieve in order to maximise opportunities that may be available to Caribbean economies.

In addition to the above, adopting and implementing a policy of universal secondary education that applied to all members of the society without exclusionary clauses and restrictions related to age could set in place the circumstances that could assist in determining whether the previous philosophy and strategy of providing opportunities for educational advancements only to the young, is part of the genesis of societal dislocations that have had widespread implications for family and community life. Put another way, providing opportunities for social and economic advancement not only to children but simultaneously to their parents may result in different relationships within families and communities as well as across generations.

The Institutional Arrangement and Modalities of Delivery

Universal secondary education based on the philosophy outlined above would require adjustments to the institutional arrangements and modalities by which secondary education is now delivered by states of Commonwealth Caribbean. Briefly the following could be considered:

- The continued operation of secondary schools that accept students at 11 plus years who have mastered the primary curriculum.
- Designating particular secondary schools to admit students at any age up to say 15 years and allowing those students to continue in school until age 20 or 21 years. The schools would be allowed to admit or be allotted sufficient students each year such that these students could be organised in classes related to their age group. This, indeed, was successful practice in some Caribbean countries before secondary education was rather rigidly defined by age in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Purchasing places in community colleges for adults to commence and continue their secondary education. While some community colleges across the region now offer secondary education programmes, they are invariably programmes of continuing education which assumes that students had previously received some secondary education or had failed the CSEC examinations. The proposal here is that some secondary programmes in community colleges could commence at Grade 7 where they admit adults who had recently or previously only achieved mastery of the primary curriculum.
- There are several secondary schools that offer secondary education through evening programmes. Invariably, these are privately financed. Where the circumstances of their lives only allow some adults or adolescents to access

secondary education through this modality, and if they fall within the definition of which the State has obligations, then the State should bear the tuition cost of their participation in such programmes.

- The creation of distance teaching and on-line programmes of secondary education which would offer access to secondary education to those adolescents and adults whose circumstances do not allow them to attend face-to-face programmes or who opt to receive it through this modality. Given the advances that have been made in information and communication technology, one or two high quality on-line programmes could be organised on a sub-regional basis.

There can be no question that what is involved will require generations to be implemented. The long-term nature of the enterprise to be undertaken cannot be in question. Probably the starting point is the acceptance of a CARICOM philosophy of USE. From that beginning, the reform of the existing institutional framework, the introduction of new modalities and designs, development and institutionalisation of instruments and mechanisms to measure mastery of primary education could follow over time.

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