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Education For What and For Whom: A Third World Perspective

Marjorie Jones

...a great responsibility rests on the educational system. Its role should be that of a midwife to the emerging social order. Instead it is the chambermaid of the existing social order. "

Eric Williams, Education in British West Indies

Many countries assigned the nomenclature of Third World Countries, have shared a common experience of colonialism and from this source their current formal educational systems have emanated.

"...colonial educational policy was not clearly thought out. It was often a hasty response to an immediate crisis as was sometimes the case for the French in Indo- China and the British in Ceylon. It was often inconsistent and was frequently changed, depending upon the findings and recommendations of different royal commissions, and each colony evolved its own system independently. There was no blueprint for all the colonies. Too often analysis of colonial educational policy was based on policy statements and documents issued in London, Paris or the Hague, when the reality of what happened in practice was often very different from official policy statements, because local situations demanded local responses and because the character and temperament of individual officers in the field were so variable (Watson, p. 11)

Third World countries participated in, and in a sense supported through their participation, systems which did not necessarily promote the development of the majority of the local population. These countries faced a continuous dichotomous dilemma. They needed to participate in the system in order to access the educational provision, but at the same time this participation promoted the very features of education that were counterproductive to their own development. Their participation in the system was one way of declaring a level of legitimacy and viability for their sense of nationhood. Cognizant of the low levels of participation in the formal system and the high levels of illiteracy, the local leadership continuously sought to introduce into the educational system those features which would respond to local needs. But since the local participants lacked access to policy making and implementation machinery, the impact of any of these infusions was diluted. These infusions were never system-wide and therefore did not impact those most in need of an education related to local experiences and needs.

Further, in many Third World countries there was a significant number of foreign born children who participated in the system. There were schools specifically designed to

respond to this segment of the population. So third World countries worked diligently to educate their people in a system that was in essence counter productive to the major strands of their development.

The importance assigned to the activity of education and the belief that the outcome would be beneficial to individual and collective development caused a type of psyche to be ingrained into the people. The local populations assigned a high value to education but the school systems that were developed under the colonial power were essentially alien creations. They reflected the philosophy of their founders, whether the metropolitan power, the voluntary agency or the missionary society, and they were designed to serve the needs and interests of these groups as perceived by them. (Watson, p.26) As Becker (1972) noted, the educational legacy of colonialism was a sort of debilitating inertia, constraining local cultural initiative and developing a colonized condition of the minds of the people.

The fact that almost no educational facilities were established during the first and longest phase of colonialism in the West Indies, has determined the legacy of this period to be probably more profound than any other in educational terms. (Watson p. 26)

Education was provided by the government and by other individuals and agencies such as religious denominations and was compulsory to about age 14. Entrance to secondary schools was by a selective, competitive examination and students paid tuition. There were limited employment opportunities for those exiting the educational system at age 14, and they were employed primarily in the agricultural or 'manual' labor sector. Secondary education was for those who were successful at the 11+ examination and could pay the requisite tuition.

Noting the following features of the educational systems would further suggest who the systems were designed to serve. The systems:

were representative of the colonial power

had a large percentage of untrained teachers

were centralized

provided unequal urban-rural access

were elitist

were formalistic authoritarian and dominantly verbal in the instructional methodologies

were physically overcrowded.

In such systems, those exposed to an academic and social culture that mirrored the school culture could survive in the school structure with a minimum of difficulties. Those who lacked the academic and social culture were almost always locked out of the system. Those who worked diligently to acquire the requisite academic and social culture but

lacked the 'ability to pay' the fees were siphoned out of the system.

Thus the system provided an elitist, grammar type education mirrored from the colonial power for those who could afford it and produced workers, at the end of the secondary cycle, to staff the jobs in government offices. Race, color and class played a determining role in some employment opportunities, in those Third World countries whose inhabitants had come as 'masters', slaves or indentured servants from Europe, Africa or Asia

Most of the Third World countries that gained their independence during the decades of the 1950's and 1960's placed much of their faith for improving living conditions on the expansion of education. The political leaders of the Third World formulated plans for the development of education with the following expectations:

That better education would overcome ignorance and so open the way for individuals to lead richer lives, to establish better social relationship within communities, and so enable the local communities to gain in self-respect and become more democratic and responsible, more able to take initiatives for their own improvement and to become more outward looking.

That to improve education would contribute to economic growth, thus raising the general standard of living, and help towards better employment opportunities, health, housing, etc.

That education would improve the quality of rural life, especially the level of agricultural skills with the aid of literacy and the opportunities of richer cultural life.

That education would improve the training in skills for the development of industries, and also modern social services, increasing the readiness to learn new techniques required for innovation and change

That education would be the most effective means of developing a more equitable society, with better opportunities for individuals in the countryside as well as in towns, with less extremes of poverty and affluence, more responsible leaders and administrators.

That education would contribute to nation building, by fostering a growing respect for each nation's own culture and traditions, and by aiding the development of political maturity, which would be capable of combining orderly leadership with freedom of thought and expression, and respect for individual rights.

Through these goals, educational access has been expanded to include both urban and rural populations, to educate a greater majority of the population beyond the elementary level, to train teachers for instruction in a greater variety of disciplines, and to make provision for participation for those who are challenged by economic circumstances.

Challenges

With the achievement of independence, Third World countries have forged educational

priorities to respond to their national development. Their task is to educate their citizens for service in their own countries while participating in a global scenario. But more challenging than the transmission of skills for national development is the maintenance of values and mores necessary for the application of the skills-set developed by academic training.

Developed countries confront a range of challenges as they seek to promote national development. An impasse in 1996 between the President of the United States of America and the

Congress on a balanced budget amendment, is one such example. We might, therefore, reliably anticipate that developing countries would confront an even larger range and greater number of challenges as they seek to promote national development.

Two challenges will be presented here. The first relates to teacher education: maintaining adequate numbers and levels of qualified teaching staff to ensure the highest quality of education for the citizens and hence promote national development. The second relates to ways in which Third World countries do or do not participate in the technological development that has become part of the day to day interactions of developed countries.

The First Challenge

During the colonial period the countries of the Caribbean shared similar political, economic and social structures. Inadequate financial and human resources within each territory made it imperative for the countries to share some common resources. One of these was higher education, including teacher education.

The following outlines the design and content of teacher education in the decades of the sixties and seventies.

It has been a competitive and selective pattern of training, which has failed to produce the number of trained teachers to service the educational system;

It has been an expensive pattern of two years residential and non-residential training for a limited number of teacher trainees;

It has isolated the teacher trainee from the schools except for occasional forays for teaching practice;

Its program has not been geared specifically to equipping teacher trainees with the skills and competencies which are known to be necessary for them to perform efficiently in schools;

It has been college oriented and based on the professional hunches of college staff rather than on the realities of the classroom situations;

It has not always taken cognizance of the particular skills which teacher trainees would require to participate in the curriculum development and other innovative activities which

have been introduced into the educational system.

As a result of the failure of the traditional college pattern of teacher training to provide a sufficient number of trained teachers a pattern of in-service and/or on the job patterns of training at the pre-college and college levels with part-time attendance at a teachers' college or a teachers' center was introduced. This new in-service pattern of training tended:

To be less expensive, as teachers were not withdrawn from their schools for full time attendance at a teachers' college;

To produce a greater number of trained teachers;

To provide training which was more directly related to the skills which teachers required to perform their tasks in the classrooms;

To be more flexible in its attempts to deal specifically with suggested solutions to problems encountered by teachers in their uninterrupted teaching in the schools;

To provide regular feedback on the efficacy of the training in equipping teachers to operate efficiently in schools.

The training and adequate supply of qualified teachers was always recognized as one of the more serious needs of the educational system. When the Royal Commission traveled through many of the West Indian islands to analyze the causes of financial distress, the provision of education was criticized. The teachers, in particular were found to be inadequate in both quantity and quality of training. (Gordon, p.81) In 1966 in Guyana, sixty three percent of the teaching force had no professional training of any sort By 1973 74 the percentage of trained teachers in the system had risen by seven percent from the 1966 figure. Though the qualified teachers were dispersed throughout the systems some instruction was being undertaken by qualified personnel.

The Influence of Immigration

Since the decade of the 1970s, Caribbean countries have experienced a significant exodus of its people to North America. Whether these persons are highly educated or not, they represent a drain on the human resources needed for the development of the country.

The following headline, "Unending Exodus From the Caribbean, With the U.S. a Constant Magnet," appearing in the New York Times of May 6, 1992 and written about events in the Dominican Republic, tells the story of the effect of immigration on the development of Caribbean countries.

"Before dawn on many days, in a ritual repeated across the Caribbean, long lines of people anxious to build new lives in the United States begin forming outside the high white walls of the American Consulate...

Hit by hard economic times and seduced more than ever by influences like mass tourism

and satellite television this region (the Caribbean) of 15 independent countries and a smattering of dependencies of the United States and European countries, with a total population of only about 33 million, has been consistently exporting more of its people in percentage terms than any other area of the world...

Tiny states like St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and Belize are sending 1 percent to 2 percent of their citizens to the United States every year, meaning that they are exporting all of their population growth to us (U.S.)...

Between 1981 and 1990, the four Caribbean nations that supply the largest number of immigrants together accounted for nearly 12 percent of all legal immigrant admissions to the United States, according to Immigration and Naturalization Service data. The Dominican Republic sent 251,803 people to the U.S., Jamaica 213,805, Haiti 140,163 and Guyana 95,374. In 1990, 111,000 citizens of Caribbean countries already living in the United States, applied to become legal residents." All of this data is naturally swelled by the number of illegal immigrants.

In Caribbean countries where appropriate post-secondary education and training for specific professions does not exist, citizens migrate for educational purposes but then seek to remain in the developed countries. In some instances their reluctance to return to their home countries is due to the struggle they face in applying their training acquired in the milieu of a developed society to their work in a "developing" context or there is the urge to improve their economic status.

In all of these scenarios there are always a significant group of persons who are teachers at the elementary and secondary level in the technical fields and at the university level. With the loss of trained teachers and others who can add to the knowledge and instruction base of the people, either through direct instruction, modeling or by their input into the lives of the people, these Third World countries are now faced with a dilemma of educating their citizens for participation in an ever advancing world while they lose the human resources which they need to carry out the task.

The Second Challenge

The second challenge relates to the decisions that Third World countries must make in relation to the technological advances that are taking place around the world.

Third World countries are impacted by the concept of the global village. Mass communication brings nations together in a matter of seconds. Mass communications facilitates the transmission of both information and culture across the globe. These advancements in science and technology in the developed societies send a clear message about the placement of the developed countries and the developing countries in the world order. How does the Third World participate in a scientific and technological world? How does the Third World participate in the global village and maintain those aspects of

their national identity that are critical to their self-definition? Can Third World countries choose how they will participate?

Science and Technology

Within the colonial structure of education, instruction in science and technology was either non-existent or was present at a very basic level. When there was instruction in Biology and Chemistry the laboratories existed on the barest minimums as a significant number of the tools and materials were imported. Post independence brought about renewed efforts to include science and technology in the education of the population in an effort to keep pace with other sections of the world population. The concept of colonialism has been removed as a descriptor of the relationship between developed and developing nations but the relationship between the two sets of nations continue to suggest a level of dependency from one quarter and a level of governance in terms of 'dictating' the course of events from another.

In the United States, the use of the computer and computerized systems are a part the everyday experience of a significant section of the population. Shopping in a supermarket no longer requires a clerk to read labels and enter prices and it doesn't require the shopper to present cash or a check to pay for purchases. Many of the ways of doing business are changing from an old order to a new order. I use the example of the supermarket as most people will be exposed to this experience and modeling is a significant part of learning.

There are schools in the United States that provide instruction in computers beginning at the kindergarten level. College students are able to access, free of charge, the Internet and the World Wide Web. They are able to receive and exchange information with students across the nation. They are able to access their teachers after the regular school hours to get assistance with homework or to raise questions. In addition to newspapers and magazines information is shared through electronic mail and fax machines. What is the decision for third World countries in this technological milieu? Can they keep up? Should they try to keep up? How far behind is an acceptable distance?

Third World countries have sought to extract the wealth of their land using indigenous technologies. We have witnessed the multinational corporations introduce technologies that render the indigenous processes obsolete, and remove from local population the ability to compete or keep pace.

Third World countries cannot keep pace with the technological developments of the developed world. What can these countries do to participate in ways that they need to? It is useful for their own development to be able to access tools and information. It is useful for their development to be able to communicate and participate in the generation and dissemination of information. If Third World countries are ill-equipped to participate in the communication pace, the information they disseminate can in certain situations become obsolete before the information is even received. And so, as the countries grapple

with developing their economies they face a serious challenge of deciding about their participation on this information highway. A further challenge of this participation is that the information transmitted, particularly through the television, is not censored and so can and does clash with the promulgation of indigenous values and mores. So, often, there are sets of behaviors and expectations, defining quality of life, that are transmitted via the media to Third World populations that are not available in the day-to-day experiences of the people, but they become familiar to the people and are transformed into magnets of desire.

Visions and Realities

"A healthy, well-trained and educated population is pivotal to development and growth .."
(Miller, ed. p. 15)

Third World countries make significant investment in education as education is regarded as the mechanism through which the nation can forge goals for development.

Their vision is for the provision of early education to both urban and rural communities. The greatest challenge is the provision to rural communities where there is neither a wealth of human or material resources and where some areas are not easily accessible.

Efforts continue in the provision of secondary education to a greater proportion of the population. The schools themselves seek to provide training in areas that related to national goals so that opportunities for employment might be expanded. As these educational goals are pursued, the countries seek to provide health and nutritional services that ensure the population's ability to participate fully and effectively in the educational system.

The possibility of realizing the visions of the Third World relate not only to Third World aspirations but are deeply influenced by the political and economic power of the developed world. Among the visions would be:

Equitable access to the world's resources

Freedom to use one's resources for one's development

Freedom to define one's path

Fair share of the world market

The vision for the development of the Third World revolves around the concept of self-determination. If the developed world believes that all nations and all people are capable of development, the development posture would be one of support, not for the further enhancement of the already developed sections of the world but for the enhancement of the lives of the people who inhabit the Third World.

The ultimate hope is therefore that no country would dominate another, that the wealth of small nations would be perceived as true wealth by the larger nations. That money and

services would be aspects of wealth in addition, other resources, particularly those which exist within the natural resources of Third World countries, would be included in the definition of wealth. The well-being of all nations would be determined by the interrelationship of political economic, social cultural and physical health That small would not necessarily represent weaker.

As the 21st century approaches and as the information age explodes, the educational principles of Paulo Freire, a Third World educational philosopher assumes greater significance for the self-determination of the people of the Third World. Freire notes that education is not neutral whether it occurs in a classroom or in a community setting People bring with them their cultural expectations, their experiences of social discrimination and life pressures, and their strengths in surviving. Education starts from the experiences of people, and either reinforces or challenges the existing social forces that keep them passive. (Wallerstein, p.33)

In Freire's terms, the purpose of education should be human liberation, which takes place to the extent that people reflect upon the relationship to the world in which they live. And...in conscientizing themselves, they insert themselves in history as subjects (Freire, 1971). This goal of education is based on Freire's view of the learner and of knowledge: the learner is not an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher, nor as an object of education. Learners enter into the process of learning not by acquiring facts, but by constructing their reality in social exchange with others. (Wallerstein, p. 34)

The possession and control of economic wealth coupled with the possession of the infrastructure that provides ready access to goods and services bestows power on the developed world. Third World countries are therefore always at a disadvantage if their development is to be measured by the identical development principles and practices as the developed world. Third World countries are faced with the reality of always having to work harder to achieve what might be considered to be less, by the world's standards, but these achievements must be measured in the context of their own political, economic and cultural spheres and as related to their self-determined goals.

Though extremely challenged by the unavailability of resources to purchase the necessary resources on the world market, Third World countries must continue their unrelenting drive to educate their people based on the concepts of self-reliance and self-determination, seeking to foster a more "liberating" experience throughout the educational process.

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