EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN BARBADOS
IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

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Introduction

This chapter deals with educational reform in post-war Barbados, the most easterly of the Caribbean Islands. Barbados is located 435 kilometers (270 miles) northeast of Venezuela, and 300 kilometers (200 miles) northeast of Trinidad and Tobago. It is 34 kilometers long by 23 kilometers wide, and has a total land area of approximately 432 square kilometers (166 square miles). It had an estimated total population of 262,600 persons at the end of 1996. According to a recent Inter-American Development Bank Annual Report (1997), the population of Barbados grew at the negligible average annual rates of 0.4% during 1970-80, 0.3% during 1980-90 as well as during 1990-96. The average annual rate of population growth since the 1980 Census has been less than 0.5 %.

Barbados became a sovereign nation on November 30, 1966, after 339 unbroken years as a colony of Great Britain. In the post-colonial period, successive political administrations in Barbados have stated their commitment to the promotion of national development and to reforming the educational system to that end. But what are the policies that have guided the effort at educational reform in Barbados since Independence? What educational reforms have actually been implemented? What are the current proposals for reform? How meaningful may the actual and proposed reforms be considered to be in terms of (1) access and equity, (2) quality and effectiveness, (3) costs and finance, and (4) values and ideology, all in a country that has been struggling to come to grips with a history of centuries of colonialism and slavery?

Let us make clear from the outset what constitutes the focus of this article. Firstly, the article focuses on the formal educational system. This is not to deny that the learning that is called education also takes place in non-formal and informal settings, and that non-formal and informal education are as important as formal education. Secondly, our concern is with the main reforms that have actually been implemented or are to be implemented. We do not seek to accomplish the impossible task of discussing fully all the actual or proposed reforms within the confines of the limited space available for this article.

On the matter of main reforms, it should be pointed out that while an effort will be made in this article to highlight those reforms that the government has considered as major, this author accepts the definition of "major reforms" that has been provided by Fagerlind and Saha. According to Fagerlind and Saha, major educational reforms are those that seek to redistribute power and material resources, and the term always implies a fundamental alteration in national educational policies (145). Thus, it ought not to be assumed that major reforms in the eyes of the Government and major reforms as defined in this paper are one and the same thing. Before attention is focused on educational reform in Barbados since 1966, it will be useful to provide a contextual backdrop by giving a short account of education in Barbados in the colonial period, and by highlighting in particular the main reforms which were implemented by the government in the two decades leading up to Independence.

Educational Policy and Reform in Colonial Barbados

For most of the colonial period, educational policy in Barbados was blatantly elitist. It reinforced the ugly racial and class divisions of the plantocratic social order that was still in existence at the end of World War II. It was a highly reactionary force that provided the White planter-merchant class and its allies with the skills needed to perpetuate their hegemony over the rest of the population and to perpetuate the values upon which that hegemony rested.

During the regime of Black slavery—which was set up with the introduction of the sugar crop to Barbados around 1640, and which lasted until the 1830s—the slaves as a group were denied access to schooling even though they comprised the bulk of the population. The Act of Emancipation of 1833 was followed by an effort
on the part of the British Government to provide some kind of schooling for the ex-slaves in Barbados and
the other British West Indian colonies. The British Government terminated its funding for education in the
region in 1845 and in Barbados the first State grant for popular education was provided in 1846. That grant
was in the amount of £750. It was increased to £3,000 per annum in 1850, to £9,200 by 1874 and to £15,000
by 1878. The continual increase in the size of the Government grant to education made possible the
achievement of mass primary education by the start of the present century.

Mass primary education was achieved, but education beyond the primary level remained the preserve of a
fortunate few. In 1900, there were 169 officially recognized elementary schools with a total enrollment of
24,145 students, but only eight secondary schools, with a total enrollment of 532 students (Ministry of
Education 1976-77 Report). By the end of World War II, the policy of primary education for the masses and
secondary and higher education for a fortunate few was still unchanged. The crowning glory of the system
was the single annual Barbados Scholarship that was available on a “murderously competitive” basis for
undergraduate studies at Oxford or Cambridge University, a competitive regimen that produced the “well-
known phenomenon of the colonial Oxonian only too often made unfit, by experience, for creative service to
his community” (Lewis, 230).

As the colonial era in Barbados entered its final phase after World War II, an effort was made to reform the
educational system, especially the secondary school system. With regard to reform at the tertiary level,
mention should be made of the opening of Erdiston College in 1948 with a view to making inroads into the
large number of untrained teachers. Attention should also be drawn to the increase in 1949 in the number of
Barbados Scholarships to four, and the reservation of one of those scholarships for girls. It was, however, at
the secondary level that the key reforms were implemented with a view to “democratizing” the system and it
is necessary to elaborate on this.

In 1959, the Black majority attained the right to vote. As a result of that development, four key measures
were implemented within the educational system during 1952 to 1966. They were:

- the introduction of Secondary Modern Schools (later renamed Comprehensive) in 1952, partly to
increase access to secondary education and partly to make the curriculum more relevant to the
needs of a modernizing and industrializing economy;
- the introduction of a Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for the Government Grammar Schools in
1959 to promote a measure of equity in the process of admission to those schools;
- the abolition of tuition fees in the Government Grammar Schools in 1962; and
- the provision of financial and other types of assistance to officially-recognized private secondary
school as of 1965.

Without doubt, then, there was significant reform activity on the educational front as Barbados prepared for
Independence. By 1966, the four reforms that have just been listed for secondary education had helped to
produce a total of about 18,000 secondary school positions or nine times the figure for 1945 (Layne 1993,
94). However, the inequities in secondary education continued to be serious indeed, at least in the following
areas:

- the different school leaving ages; the virtual monopolization of graduate
teachers by the Government Grammar schools; the reservation of the
positions in the Government Grammar schools for a privileged few, since the
CEE was too difficult for the average Barbadian child; the tendency to award
the bursaries to boys even though girls out performed boys in Part I of the
CEE; the relatively low per capita expenditure on the 1500 holders of
Government bursaries to Assisted Private schools; the virtual consignment
to oblivion of those students who failed the CEE; the monopolization of the
Barbados Scholarships by the first grade schools, especially Harrison
College and Lodge School; and the different management arrangements for
the older and newer secondary schools in the public sector. (Layne 1993,
By Independence, the system of education that was still in place was, basically, one that favored the few at the expense of the many. Admittedly, changes had been implemented, and those changes were not to be scoffed at from the perspective of educational justice and democratization. However, when major educational reform is viewed as implying a fundamental alteration in national educational policy, the reforms that were implemented did not go far enough or fast enough. Let us now move to the post-colonial period.

Educational Reform: The Post-Colonial Period

This section of the article deals with the main educational reforms that have been implemented since 1966, as well as with the current proposals for reform to the year 2000. It begins with an account of the main reforms that were implemented in the first two decades of Independence, and especially during the years 1976-86 when a new political administration with a very cost-conscious approach to education took over the reins of the government from the political party that had been ruling Barbados since 1961. The remainder of the article is devoted to an examination of reforms implemented at each level of the system during the last Development Plan period (1988-93), as well as the current proposals for reform at each level, all in relation to the four sets of policy issues mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The government’s proposed reform agenda for the period 1993-2000, as set out in the 1993-2000 Development Plan, will be dealt with, taking into account the reform agenda that has been very recently recommended by the National Advisory Commission on Education (NACE). NACE submitted its last report to the government in 1994. It has not been heard from since.

Educational Policy and Reform 1966-1986

Educational policy in Barbados during the first decade of Independence was expansionist. The nationalist government—that of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP)—considered continuous modernization and expansion of the educational system to be “central to the achievement of the developmental goals of the nation” (Barbados 1973-77 Development Plan 10-1). In the document just cited, which was in fact the most comprehensive Five-Year Plan formulated by the DLP administration, it was also explicitly stated that Barbados was undergoing and would continue to undergo rapid change from an elitist to an egalitarian society, as well as from a colony to an independent country, and that the educational system was expected to assist the society in making that transition a successful one (10.3). In that regard, the Government committed itself to providing adequate universal and free primary education, as well as to the goal of eventual free secondary education for all.

The DLP was defeated at the polls in 1976 and therefore was not able to carry out all of its plans for the period 1973-77. However, those projects that were not completed by the DLP were completed by its successor, the Barbados Labor Party (BLP). At the same time, the new BLP administration made it clear that while it would continue with the practice of substantial governmental financing of human resource development, educational policy would now emphasize cost effectiveness:

The planned developments for the Barbados economy during the decade of the 1980s will require substantial investment in the productive sectors. This strategy, of necessity requires a cost effective approach in all investments in the social sectors. It is expected therefore, that the rapid expansion of expenditures in the education sector in the past would become a gradual one with emphasis on the maintenance of the high standards attained.

(1979-83 Development Plan, 128)

By the time that it handed back the reins of government to the DLP in 1986, the BLP administration had brought about a significant reduction in the Ministry of Education’s share of the total public expenditure, as can be seen in Table 1. To be precise, that reduction was of the order of 3.2%. At the same time, efforts were made to improve educational quality. Several new primary schools were constructed under an
Agreement with the World Bank. Expansions were carried out at selected secondary schools. A new building to house the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic (SJPP) was completed and that institution was provided with a new faculty for Human Ecology to replace the activities formerly carried out at the Housecraft Center. The expansion of the building housing the Barbados Community College (BCC) was completed and at the BCC a Faculty of Hospitality Studies was established to assume the functions previously undertaken by the Barbados Hotel School. Erdiston College, a teacher training institution, was provided with a library, lecture theater, and resource center. At the same time, the residential arrangement for students at Erdiston College were discontinued and the entry qualifications upgraded. Much of the work connected with the “restructuring” of the (regional) University of the West Indies (UWI), intended to make that institution more responsive to the needs of the individual campuses and the non-campus countries, was completed.

Additional changes that were introduced and that may briefly be mentioned included the following:

- the proclamation of most sections of the Education Act of 1981-85, which repealed the Education Act 1890. (The Education Act of 1890 was, with amendments, the law of the land until January 1, 1983);
- the appointment of a National Advisory Commission on Education (NACE) effective March 1983;
- the introduction of “partial zoning” of the Government Secondary schools in an effort to rationalize the use of resources;
- the upgrading of the qualifications for the award of the highly prestigious Barbados Scholarships;
- the revision of the menus of the School Meals Program in an effort to improve the nutritional content of meals provided to the children in the primary schools;
- the training of several teachers in the teaching of reading and remedial education;
- the introduction of a course in Manufacturing Technology for Industrial Arts Teachers in order to strengthen Industrial Arts programs in Secondary Schools;
- the provision of all Secondary Schools with at least one computer;
- the creation of 26 posts of Guidance Counselor; and
- the provision of all public secondary schools and tertiary institutions with Boards of Management that would be responsible for the day-to-day functions, operations, and accountability of such schools and institutions.

The preceding list of achievements in the area of educational reform over the decade 1976-86 is impressive, but it would be a mistake to assume that the record of achievement was perfect. To begin with, the planned appointment of school committees for the management of the primary schools did not happen, and the Ministry of Education continued to rule the primary schools directly with an iron fist. Again, the National Advisory Commission on Education (NACE) submitted four reports to the Ministry of Education, including one on the future of the CEE, but there was no effective follow-up on those reports at the Ministerial level. Or again, the government's stated policy-emphasis on the use of the Inter-American Development Bank-financed Student Revolving Loan Fund (SRLF) to provide loans primarily for post-secondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) was contradicted by the heavy provision of loans for academically oriented undergraduate studies. Let us now have a close look at the present situation and plans for each level of the system, as set out in the 1993-2000 Development Plan, and beginning with early childhood education (ECE).

**Early Childhood Education**

The government of Barbados is on record as viewing the phase of education for children between 3 and 5 years of age as crucial for the development of the individual. It views the education of the preschool or nursery-age child as an important element in preparation for life. It sees early childhood as the stage at which stimulation can be given towards the acquisition of basic skills and concepts, as well as where there can be early identification of problems that inhibit development (1993-2000 Plan, 73). It has, therefore, stated a commitment to providing an expanded program of pre-primary education as a matter of policy, and to achieving that goal mainly through (a) building of a few more Nursery schools, and (b) continuation of the practice of allowing children of preschool age to attend those primary or Composite schools that have space
It may be useful to draw attention to the fact that over the past decade in the Commonwealth Caribbean as a whole, governments have made considerable progress in increasing access to preschool education. However, while most of the governments in question have stated a commitment to increasing access to, and improving the quality of, preschool education, it is unlikely that in the next decade that governments will be in a position to increase significantly their financial contribution to this sub-sector (World Bank, 53). As a result of the continuing climate of economic and financial austerity, private and community resources can be expected to continue to play a very important part in supporting the educational effort at the preschool level.

Getting back to Barbados itself, it is useful to point out that there are over 7,000 three- and four-year olds in the population. Of that number, about 3,700 (52.8%) are enrolled in nursery education in public sector institutions, that is, in the three Government Nursery schools and in the nursery departments of those Primary and Composite schools that have such departments (1993-2000 Plan, 73). The overall enrollment ratio for preschool education appears to be higher than 52.8% since, even though precise figures are not available, there is a significant number of nursery-age children attending private nursery schools as well as public and private day nurseries (Applewhaite 5).

The government has projected that the population of three- and four-year olds will reach 8,350 by the year 2000, and it plans to provide an additional 750 positions over the Plan period 1993-2000 (1993-2000 Plan, 73). This means that while the size of the population aged 3-4 years would increase by some 1,350 persons by the year 2000, the enrollment in public institutions would increase at a much slower rate than the increase in the size of the preschool-age population. It is doubtful whether access to ECE will be universalized in Barbados in the foreseeable future, and it will be useful to elaborate on this.

Over the Plan period 1988-93, enrollment in preschool education did not keep pace with the growth of the number of births. The Government has openly admitted that enrollments of numbers smaller than what it considered a “reasonable teaching unit” were not catered for satisfactorily because of the unavailability of funds to support that situation (1993-2000 Plan, 55). Indeed, the number of children enrolled in preschool education in the public sector declined during 1988-93 even though (a) the provision at the Government Nursery schools was maintained, and (b) pre-primary units were developed at four other primary schools. Greater access to preschool education in the public sector—or in the private sector for that matter—will depend on what happens within the economy. The economy of Barbados is now recovering after a period of serious decline during the first half of this decade. In 1990, US Dollars, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita in Barbados grew at average annual rates of 1.7% during 1970-80, 1.2% during 1980-90, and 0.5% during 1990-96 (IADB 1997). In 1990-92, it was put through a severe stabilization program that was backed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

NACE has recommended that ECE departments be established in all primary schools, or at least in strategically located ones. It views ECE as an area that should be given high priority since it believes that ECE can contribute significantly to defusing inequalities between children from qualitatively different backgrounds. NACE has made it clear that it recognizes that purpose-built ECE schools can be costly. Its position is that given the present economic constraints, the government should adopt the dual strategy of (a) ensuring that ECE departments of existing primary schools function effectively, and (b) actively encouraging the creation of others where physical plant and teacher resources permit. It views the main challenge as that of appropriate teacher training and effective monitoring of all institutions providing ECE, including those that are privately owned.

Over the period 1993-2000, the government hopes to achieve its two main objectives for ECE through implementation of the following strategies:

- Increased teacher training in ECE.
- Provision of additional supplies of teaching/learning materials and equipment.
- Continuing revision, and dissemination of the ECE curriculum.
• Provision of nursery aides at schools with large units of preschoolers (40 or more).
• Provision of early detection measures in areas of speech, hearing, and sight so that remedial action can be taken.
• Provision of an additional 750 positions at existing primary schools.
• Increasing the coordination and monitoring of programs in the private sector.

Primary Education

Barbados has an outstanding record as far as coverage of the primary school-age population is concerned. There are some 84 public primary schools, which are spread throughout the island, and a small number of private primary schools. Access to primary schooling is universal, with the net enrollment ratio at this level being 98%. There are about 28,000 students enrolled in the primary schools.

There are two key factors that have contributed to the achievement of universal primary education in Barbados. One of these factors has been the heavy investment by successive governments in education. The other is a declining school-age population that has resulted from successful demographic strategies.

The government views the provision of quality education for a projected enrollment of 28,610 students by the year 2000 as being the biggest challenge facing the primary education system. It has usefully outlined the nature of the challenge as follows:

Key factors contributing to weaknesses in primary education include deficiencies in instruction, shortage of textbooks and instructional materials/technologies, unsatisfactory physical facilities and shortcomings in the examination system. Primary school teachers need additional training to effectively diagnose and address learning difficulties. There is a shortage of school-based library resources although the situation is eased by the services of the two mobile library vans operated by the National Library Service. Substantial progress has been made in upgrading the physical plant in recent years. However, there are still a number of small, uneconomical schools in sub-standard condition, requiring attention.

There is also a growing recognition that the Barbados Secondary Schools’ Entrance Examination (BSSEE), better known as the ‘Eleven Plus,’ exerts adverse effects on curriculum, instruction, student achievement and ultimately, quality of education. In a real sense, its results tend to determine the type of secondary school a student will enter. Preparation for the BSSEE therefore tends to be associated with restrictive teaching methodologies, disproportionate time allocated to mathematics and English on the curriculum, neglect of students with learning difficulties, and limiting the creative potential of students. (1993-2000 Plan, 68-69)

The provision of quality education in the primary schools is viewed by NACE as a matter that should be given high priority and that should be pursued concomitantly with the proposed heightened thrust in ECE. NACE has been very concerned about the apparently growing number of students who complete their primary education without achieving the basic literacy and numeracy needed for effective living, and the resultant wastage of human and financial resources in the secondary schools and even in the post-secondary training institutions.

To help improve the quality and effectiveness of primary education as well as to promote equity at this level, NACE has made the following recommendations.

• Students should be allocated to primary schools on the basis of the catchment area criterion that is supposed to be in force, and such a policy should be enforced.
Continuous assessment and diagnostic testing should be adopted in place of the CEE. There should be a common standardized national examination in the core areas of the primary school curriculum (English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) at ages 7, 9 and 11.

On the basis of such testing, student profiles should be developed showing the students' strengths and weaknesses.

Continuous assessment should be the sole basis for transfer to the secondary schools.

At the end of a transitional period of two to three years, zoning of schools should be implemented. In preparation for zoning, all secondary schools should be allowed to have an enhanced public image through improved physical plant and facilities, management practices, and instructional leadership.

During the transitional period, entry to the Sixth Form schools should be on the basis of parental choice and the performance of the student. Entry to all other secondary should be based on the principle of zoning.

Principals of primary schools should be provided with secretarial support in order to enable them to have the time and energy to address curricular and instructional issues as well as to deal with staff development and appraisal.

The government may take into account the recommendations made by NACE, but it already has its agenda for reform of primary education up to the year 2000. Starting from the defensible position that primary education in Barbados has been characterized by high enrollment and attendance, a qualified cadre of teachers, and improved physical facilities, but that certain reform measures are needed to ensure the further development of the system, the government has set itself three objectives for primary education up to the year 2000, and identified some 10 measures to be implemented to attain those objectives.

The three objectives are to: improve the quality of instruction and learning, build higher moral and spiritual values, and increase cost-effectiveness. It is planned to achieve these objectives through the implementation of the following policy-measures:

- reduction in the number of small, uneconomical schools through the amalgamation of eight primary schools into four new schools resulting in the replacement of 1,300 student positions and the provision of an additional 500 under the Primary Education Program;
- upgrading the physical facilities through adequate maintenance of existing plant and equipment;
- provision of a continuous assessment program for use as a diagnostic tool and the establishment of a system of cumulative records;
- training for teachers in specialized areas, including Early Childhood Education, Testing and Measurement, and relevant computer studies;
- adoption of a comprehensive teacher appraisal and staff development program;
- provision of an adequate supply of textbooks and other resource materials for use by teachers and students at this level;
- establishment of library and media resource centers at 15 Primary Schools;
- continued monitoring of school attendance at the primary level;
- strengthening the management system by the establishment of School Committees and the provision of office support staff; and
- completion of the phasing out of Senior schools and the senior departments of Composite schools. (1993-2000 Plan)

All of this will, of course, cost money, and it is appropriate at this time to comment on the financial situation as it relates to primary education. During the 1988-93 Plan period, work was completed on the construction of about eight new primary schools. However, that Civil Works activity was not problem free. The Project Implementation Unit experienced a shortage of funds during 1991-92 and again in 1992-93. That unavailability of funds resulted in:

- time overruns of approximately one year in completing construction work on the primary schools; and
- cost overruns on three primary schools (St. Stephen’s, Hillaby/Turner’s Hall and Black Bess/St.
The indications are, however, that the government’s priorities for educational spending have been shifting from the higher levels of the system to the primary level. To begin with, during the period 1986/87 to 1990/91, current expenditure on tertiary education grew by 13.6% per annum or just over 2 percentage points faster than primary, which was the next fastest growing level (Applewhaite 6). However, tertiary education experienced the biggest cut in spending in 1991/92 at the start of the economic stabilization program. As a result, the growth in current expenditure over the period 1986/87 to 1991/92 was exactly the same as that for secondary education, 7.2%. At the same time, statutory expenditure at the primary level rose by 14.2% on average, as against 12.4% for all statutory spending on education. When account is taken of the cutbacks in 1991/92, primary statutory spending went up by 9.2%, a rate that was still somewhat higher than that for the total.

Over the five years ending in 1990/91, the unit cost of education in Barbados grew on average by 12.2% per annum (Applewhaite 6). It is useful to note, however, that whereas unit costs increased by 11.4% at the secondary level and 10.3 at the tertiary, the unit costs of primary education rose by 12.7%.

It seems that, in terms of spending on projects in education during the current development plan period, priority will be attached to primary education, followed by the student Revolving Loan Fund for tertiary education. The program of activities of the Education Sector Plan for 1993-2000 is estimated to cost Bds.$117.6 million, with $29.4 million (30%) going to a largely Inter-American Development Bank-financed Primary Education Program, and $23.1 million (16.5%) to the Student Revolving Loan Fund (1993-2000 Plan 91). It should be mentioned here that this overall figure of Bds.$117.6 million is considerably less than the total planned expenditure of Bds.$350 million for the recently announced EDUTECH 2000 Project that is to run for seven years, and is to be implemented partly with financing from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank.

Secondary Education

Barbados has 33 secondary schools, of which 23 (or about 70%) are public. Coverage at the secondary level is excellent. The 23,000 students enrolled at this level represent 95% of the age group 11+ to 16+.

The government has projected that the secondary schools will have an enrollment of 22,621 students by the year 2000. This projected enrollment figure should be very manageable now that the construction of the St. Thomas Secondary School has been completed.

The coverage is excellent, but there continues to be serious inequities within the secondary school system. At the apex of the prestige hierarchy are less than a half dozen schools that receive the cream of the academic crop from the CEE. At the very bottom are those that are allocated students who score one-fifth or less of the maximum possible number of marks in the CEE. The data in Table 2 provide a clear indication of the stratification of the public secondary school system on the basis of their intake of CEE candidates.

The first ten schools listed in the table are, with the exception of the Louis Lynch School, all former Older Secondary or Government Grammar schools, traditionally the most prestigious of the secondary schools. The cut off mark (minimum CEE score required) for admission of boys to those schools this year (1994) ranged from 89.0A (Harrison College) to 59.0 B (Alleyne). This contrasted sharply with the situation at the former Newer Secondary or erstwhile Comprehensive schools where the minimum CEE score that was required for boys varied between 57.5C and 18.0E.

Note should be taken of the fact that in all but five of the nineteen coeducational schools in the table the cut off mark for girls was higher than that for boys. The five schools that used a lower cut off mark for girls happened to be those at the bottom of the prestige hierarchy within the public secondary school sector.
NACE has taken the highly defensive position that “an allocation system that consistently places students in a manner that ensures the underachievers cannot be justified (NACE 1994, 11). It has called for an allocation system that would enable each secondary school to have a range of abilities, a system in which students would go to the school for their zone. The schools involved here would be the ones that offer instruction up to the level of Fifth Form (Grade 12). In the eyes of NACE, the Sixth Form schools should be excluded from the zones and, in the interest of equal opportunity, access to such schools should continue to be based on performance and parental choice.

The government is in agreement with NACE that there are inequities in the distribution of student abilities among the secondary schools and that there are problems with the use of the CEE as the fundamental basis of transfer of students from the primary to the secondary schools. It has gone on record as saying that it plans to do something about this situation by the year 2000 through the implementation of “a new system of transfer from primary to secondary schools that will provide more appropriate organization and delivery of secondary education” (1993-2000 Plan, 76). The problem is that even though we know that there are plans to introduce both diagnostic testing in the primary schools and a system of cumulative records, the government has been vague in what it plans to do about the CEE. The CEE perhaps served a useful purpose when there was a shortage of secondary school positions. However, there now seems to be little justification for the retention of this highly selective device that is perhaps the biggest single obstacle to educational development in Barbados.

There are also inequities in the distribution of teachers with university degrees among the secondary schools. If we focus on those schools for which data are available, namely those in the public sector, we find that the proportion of the staff of the former Older Secondary schools that is made up of graduates is 87.3%, as compared with about 72.3% for the former Newer Secondary Schools (Table 3). These proportions do not tell the full story. While none of the erstwhile Older Secondary schools have a proportion that is less than 73.8% and some have proportions approaching 100%, only four of the former Comprehensive schools have proportions above 71.4% and some even have proportions under 60%. Admittedly, the gap between the two types of public secondary school is not as wide as in 1987 when the proportion for the Older Secondary schools was 1.7 times that for the Newer Secondaries (Layne 1987, 4). However, the fact that the proportion today is still higher for the former than the latter makes it difficult to accept the view that is held in some quarters that all of the schools in the public secondary system are equal.

Another major area in which inequities exist is that of recurrent per student costs. As can be seen in Table 4, the per capita grant to the former Newer Secondary school as a group is only marginally lower than that for the former Older Secondary schools as a group—a difference of Bds.$32.40. However, the per capita grant to Harrison College (regarded by many as the leading secondary school in Barbados) continues to be out of line with that for the other schools. The estimated grant of Bds.$4,123.30 for Harrison College for 1994-95 is 1.3 times that for the other Government Secondary schools and 1.5 times that for Coleridge and Parry School whose allocation of Bds.$2,839.24 is the lowest of all. Let us now turn to the matter of quality and effectiveness of secondary education and begin by providing an indication of what the government did over the last Plan period to help bring about improvements in this regard. A new school—Deighton Griffith Secondary—was opened. Queen’s College was relocated to a new building, and construction on a third school—St. Thomas Secondary. In addition, supplementary equipment and furniture were provided at Harrison College, work commenced on the upgrading and expansion of Springer Memorial Secondary School, and the St. Leonard’s Schools received extensive cleaning and refurbishing. Schools under the Second Education and training Project received upgraded facilities and media resources. Guidance Counselors were provided at all schools, and substantial progress was made in the use of computers in secondary schools.

Progress was made in the area of diagnosing problems in literacy and numeracy. In that connection, it should be noted that the Ministry of Education and the Organization of American States collaborated in a Basic Education Project under which 70 teachers were trained in diagnosing problems in the learning of Reading and Mathematics. Under the same project, four teachers were trained in Special Education over a
four-month period a the University of Louisville, Kentucky, U.S.A.

Other important measures that were implemented during 1988-93 included: a review of the Family Life Education Syllabus for Secondary Schools and the development of a new one; workshops for school personnel on drug recognition and on procedures to be followed in drug related cases; and workshops, seminars, and fellowships for teachers of Home Economics, Family Life Education, Agricultural Science, Business Studies, and Industrial Arts. This last set of activities was carried out with assistance from the Pan-American Health Organization, the Organization of American States, and the British Development Division.

On the other side of the balance sheet, it should be pointed out that only limited progress was realized in the search for a balance between academic and vocational education. Nor was the proposed systematic scheme of student record keeping implemented. It should not be inferred from this, however, that absolutely nothing was done. Some progress was made in launching a pilot prevocational program in six secondary schools, and the keeping of individual student records was an integral part of that project.

The achievements that have just been listed are not to be scoffed at, but this does not mean that there is not room for improvement in the quality and effectiveness of secondary education. There is the continuing issue of student selection mentioned earlier, with some schools receiving the academically gifted and more academically able students and others that are less prestigious receiving the less academically able students. Also, the graduates in the various academic subjects in the curriculum tend to be well trained, but the same is not true of the teachers of technical and vocational subjects. The academic output of the secondary school system also leaves something to be desired and the fact that the secondary schools are not catering adequately to the needs of all their students may have grave social implications. Indeed, this very observation has been made by the Ministry of Education itself:

On average less than 20% of the students taking CXC General Proficiency Examinations pass four or more subjects at any one sitting. This seems to suggest that the standard is beyond the reach of a significant number of secondary students. Moreover, with the curriculum and teaching being geared to CXC assessment a number of students find the system unresponsive to their learning needs. Such students are easy prey for mal-adaptive and other antisocial behavior. Many of these students leave school without any certification. (1993-2000 Plan, 69)

The government has set itself the task of further reforming the secondary school system over the period 1993-2000, planning to equipping students at this level with the knowledge and skills to participate more meaningfully in the development of the country. The reform agenda has four objectives:

- provision of technical and vocational education that would be more responsive to the needs of the national economy.
- enabling a greater number of students to be conversant in foreign languages.
- development and implementation of a system of national assessment.
- implementation of a new and improved system of national certification for secondary school leavers.

The four objectives just listed are to be achieved through the implementation of the following measures:

- the establishment of a core curriculum in the lower section of the secondary school system;
- provision of training for foreign language teachers and equipping the language laboratories at all of the secondary schools;
- the use of diagnostic tests that will allow for the detection and correction of teaching/learning difficulties and achievement tests that will make for more meaningful comparison of student performance;
- implementation of a national certification system that will provide evidence of completion of
secondary education;
- implementation of a new system of transfer from primary to secondary schools that will provide for
  more appropriate organization and delivery of secondary education;
- adoption of a staff appraisal and development program as well as a program for institutional
  evaluation;
- continuation of upgrading of school plant and the completion of the St. Thomas Secondary School;
  and
- review of the two St. Leonard's Secondary Schools investigating their possible relocation.

The government’s reform agenda for secondary education may have been influenced by inputs from NACE. A notable case in point is the proposed introduction of a common curriculum during the first three years of secondary education (11+ to 14+). NACE sees the implementation of such a curriculum as having the advantage of helping to deal with the problem of curriculum overload while exposing each secondary school student to a sound general education that gives equal weight to aesthetics and technical/vocational studies now generally treated as “second rate” (NACE 11).

Attention should be drawn to the fact that while NACE may have had an input into the reform agenda to the year 2000, some of its proposals for reform of secondary education have not figured prominently (if at all) in the government’s plans. For example, NACE has proposed that all secondary schools should not have identical programs, and that each secondary school should offer at least one nontraditional area of concentration. What NACE is promoting here is the notion of “Centers of Excellence.” The idea is to cater to the variety of student abilities and interests in the secondary schools in a cost effective way. As NACE sees it, cost effectiveness and school strengths would determine the area of concentration of each school. The Ministry of Education would be required to ensure that (a) each zone offers the widest range of options that are practicable, and (b) students be allowed to move between zones where their interests and aptitudes lead them to “areas of excellence” that are not available at their schools.

Another important proposal by NACE that does not seem to have been given any attention in the current Development Plan has to do with Sixth Form Education. NACE has proposed that there be an increase in the number of Sixth Form positions as well as in the range of options at this level. It has stressed the need to include areas such as Technical/vocational Studies, Business Studies and Commercial Studies. It has strongly recommended that the options be expanded to include: Aesthetics (music, art, drama, dance) and Sports and Health Education. It is of the view that Sixth Form education should continue to be offered in the four Sixth Form schools—which should be outside the system of zoning—and at the Barbados Community College (BCC). This author is of the belief that the division of the secondary schools into Sixth Form and non-Sixth Form institutions has been one of the major causes of the tendency on the part of the Barbadian public to view some schools as “better” than others, and that part of the solution to this problem is to remove Sixth Form education from the secondary schools and put it in a single central institution.

Tertiary Education

We come now to tertiary education. There are four institutions at this level: the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic (SJPP), the Barbados Community College (BCC), Erdiston Teachers Training College (Erdiston), and the Cave Hill Campus of the (regional) University of the West Indies (UWI). In 1994-95, these four institutions had a total of 7,094 students enrolled. That enrollment was distributed as follows: 1,391 at the SJPP, 2,421 at the BCC, 400 at Erdiston College, and 2,883 (undergraduates) at the Cave Hill Campus (Ministry of Education Information Handbook 1996).

Data from a recent World Bank study indicate that the enrollment ratio for tertiary (including university) education in Barbados is about 21%. This ratio is the highest in the Commonwealth Caribbean and more than 2½ times the average for the region (World Bank, 115). What should be borne in mind though is that while Barbados has the profile of a higher income country with regard to its enrollment ratios for primary and secondary education, the same does not hold true for its enrollment ratio for tertiary education.
The point that is being made about the relatively low enrollment ratio in tertiary education in Barbados (and the Commonwealth Caribbean) may be underlined by highlighting the situation with regard to university education. Among Commonwealth Caribbean countries, the probability of entering university is highest in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. However, only 3 out of every 100 children entering primary school in these two countries enter a Caribbean university. The ratio is even lower in the rest of the region where it ranges from 0.25 to 2 out of every 100 primary school entrants (World Bank, 45).

Attention should be drawn to the fact that while the number of persons who enter university is still relatively small, the gender imbalance that traditionally characterized university education is being reduced. A look at the student registration figures for the Cave Hill Campus for 1992/93 reveals that of the 2,547 students who were registered at that Campus in that year 1,532 (60%) were women (UWI Statistics 1992/93). Of the 1,104 new students who were admitted to first degree programs, 719 (65%) were women. Women are still outnumbered by men in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, but have come to outnumber men among the new admissions to the Faculty of Social Sciences and even the Faculty of Law. Among the new admissions to first degree programs in 1992/93, women accounted for 77.2% in Arts and General Studies, 78.9% in Education, 45.7% in Natural Sciences, 67.1% in Social Sciences and 71.2% in Law.

Turning to quality and effectiveness, attention should be drawn to the efforts that were made by the government to improve the system over the last Plan period. Activities that were undertaken in that regard included: the completion of the physical expansion of the BCC in June, 1991; the expansion of the offerings in that institution’s Associate Degree Program to embrace, *inter alia*, Computer Sciences, Business Studies, and Foreign Languages; and collaboration between the BCC and several American or Canadian institutions. The North American institutions that were involved included: Penn State University in the area of Technology; St. Clair College in Canada in computerizing student records; the School of Mass Communications at Harvard University; and North and South Carolina Universities in Nursing Education.

During 1988-93, there was a significant expansion of the evening programs at the SJPP. Also, the SJPP joined the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) in pursuit of its objective of forging closer links with other regional and international institutions. In addition, twelve members of the teaching and administrative staff attended St. Clair College in Canada for short periods of training.

The main achievements at Erdiston included: the training workshops that were held to assist teachers who were involved in specialist training in the Primary School Project; the establishment of two computer laboratories and a Business Education Center; and the development of the College’s library as a professional library for teachers.

Teacher training remained the focus of the former Faculty—now School—of Education at the Cave Hill Campus of UWI.

A special comment should be made on the Student Revolving Loan Fund (SRLF), since this source of financing of tertiary education cuts across the issues of coverage, equity, efficiency and financing, and quality and effectiveness. The SRLF was set up in 1977 with assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and has provided Barbados with a mechanism of loan-grants to reduce the financial burden of governmental provision of scholarships, grants, and awards for post-secondary education. Under the SRLF, repayable credits are made available to qualified beneficiaries to finance studies in specific professional and technical careers identified by governments as being of primary importance to the social and economic development of the country.

The SRLF is currently at Stage III. Without going into excessive detail, it should be pointed out that SRLF Stage I lasted until about 1983, during which period some 292 loans were approved for a total of Bds.$4.6 million (see Ministry of Education and Culture 1986, 75-78). However, that program experienced at least two serious problems. Firstly, a number of delinquent loans had to be referred to the SRLF’s Attorney. Secondly, the funds allocated for technical and vocational education were underutilized even though the SRLF had been designed with the understanding that there would be a substantial demand for funds for that type of
education. Among the reasons for the under-utilization was the very poor response from students at the BCC and the SJPP.

The problems with SRLF Stage I did not prevent the Government and the IDB from entering an Agreement for a Stage II loan. The loan contract giving effect to that agreement was signed on February 1, 1984. SRLF II ran for about five years and had a total cost of over US$3 million. Of that the IDB contributed $2 million. SRLF II was designed principally to:

- expand post-secondary technical and vocational education opportunities to qualified needy applicants by providing new resources for that type of education;
- increase the internal efficiency of those institutions participating in the program by reducing their drop out rate;
- increase the external efficiency of the post-secondary education system by assisting students in the areas of greatest demand in the economy; and
- establish a consolidated SRLF with a loan-grant financing mechanism in which the cost of education would be shared between the student and the Government.

SRLF II had mixed fortunes. On the positive side of the balance sheet, it should be mentioned that a substantial number of loans was made available to needy applicants. The loan ceiling was raised from US$15,000 to US$25,000 and the maximum repayment period from 10 to 12 years. In addition, the objective of increasing external efficiency was met since the great majority of the SRLF graduates found employment in Barbados in the field for which they had studied or in related fields. However, there were several difficulties with the Stage II program.

Firstly, and as with SRLF I, SRLF II was marked by (a) the failure of the number of loans committed to reach the number of loans projected, and (b) a heavy demand for Undergraduate education rather than technical and vocational education at the SJPP, BCC, the National Training Board, or some such institution. Secondly, the objective of increasing the internal efficiency of those institutions participating in SRLF II was not met since significant resources were not directed to students in Barbadian institutions. Thirdly, there were difficulties with the objective of establishing a consolidated SRLF with a loan-grant financing mechanism in which the cost of education would be shared by the student and the government. The commercial enterprises were not very forthcoming in providing loans for educational purposes. The grant-loan mechanism combined with the difficulties associated with the processing of arrears to make the scheme somewhat ineffective and costly for the government. To address the problem of the high incidence of arrears, the SRLF required beneficiaries to sign forms authorizing deduction of payment from salaries on completion of studies. It also appointed lawyers to assist with the prosecution of habitual defaulters. In addition, the staffing situation was improved and a new Management Information System installed in order to help the SRLF achieve its program goals in a swift and effective manner.

The problems with SRLF I and II did not prevent the government from negotiating SRLF III with the IDB. SRLF Stage III was approved in November, 1989, with a total program cost of US$6.8 million. Of that amount, $4.7 million comprised a loan from the IDB. SRLF III has two main components. The first is a credit line that would provide subloans to eligible Barbadians for university education, together with technical/vocational training in IDB member countries and/or the national priority determined in accordance with the Credit Regulations. The other component consisted of consultancy services for the institutional strengthening of the SRLF, including helping the Fund to achieve financial soundness and sustainability.

The fundamental point that should be made about the SRLF is that while it is a financial plan that has been demand oriented and geared to facilitating studies in those fields where there are deficits in qualified human resources in the labor market, it has the laudable feature of being a mechanism for reconciling considerations of economic growth with those of social equity. As this author has commented elsewhere (Layne 1991, 69) too often in development policy one finds considerations of economic growth and social equity being in conflict when, in fact, there can be no real development if both sets of requirement are not met. Traditionally in Barbados, all but a small fraction of the direct costs of education have been paid by the
Government. As the SRLF develops it may well become a vitally important mechanism not only of cost recovery but also of consolidating the impressive educational achievement of Barbados. However, it is not clear at this point precisely what will become of the SRLF. It is not known whether the government has in fact drawn down the final installment of the Third IDB Loan. What is known is that the objective of the SRLF’s becoming self-financing has not been realized “due to the perennial problem of loan arrears,” which stood at $1.5 million in June 1994 (Government of Barbados 1995, 114). A Collection Unit was to have been set up from August, 1995 to deal with the collection of arrears, and the government plans on pursuing other options for the further financing of the SRLF (Government of Barbados 1995, 114).

We will conclude our examination of tertiary education by highlighting the main objectives and strategies in the government’s plans for tertiary education up to the year 2000. We shall not spend any time on NACE, since that body has apparently been devoting the bulk of its attention to improving the school system.

As outlined in the 1993-2000 Plan, the main responsibility of tertiary education in Barbados as the twenty-first century approaches will be to promote economic development (82-91). Tertiary education is to be geared towards producing students for leadership positions in all sections of the economy. This will involve the reinforcement of training and research, the upgrading and modernization of instructional technologies, and the use of more relevant teaching strategies. Collaboration between the tertiary-level institutions is to be deepened and strengthened. It is expected that as a result of this closer collaboration there will be a substantial increase in the output of graduates equipped to deal with the changing economic environment.

During the current Plan period, the training institutions at the tertiary level are to focus on the creation of a highly skilled work force by strengthening technical/vocational competencies and by expanding training related to managerial and entrepreneurial needs. They are also expected to provide opportunities for retraining to allow for the re-deployment of skills for the unemployed, especially in technical and nontraditional areas within industry and commerce.

Space does not permit us to list all of the measures through which the government hopes to implement to achieve these objectives. It will suffice to highlight a few of the strategies that are to be implemented at each of the three institutions that are owned by the government. In this regard, mention may be made of the following in relation to the BCC:

- Development of more training for industry and on-site courses as required, and establishing an Industry Services Unit.
- Expansion of training in Information Technology (Computer Studies), Arts and Crafts, and Fashion and Design with emphasis on Design.
- Development and implementation of Associate Degree programs in selected new areas.
- Construction and equipping of a new Hospitality Institute.
- Expansion of the Language Center to double its enrollment.
- Expansion and computerization of the College Library.
- Developing an integrated Technical and Vocational Teacher Training Program (TVET) in collaboration with Erdiston College and the SJPP, leading to the award of the Bachelor’s Degree and the Diploma in Education.

The strategies that are to be implemented at the SJPP include:

- Modularizing all courses, using a competency-based approach.
- Provision of in-service training for instructors to ensure relevance of practical skills.
- Restructuring and expanding the evening program to respond to the growing demand for such a program, but at the same time making it more relevant and cost-effective.
- Developing national certification of programs to replace foreign certification.
- Improving the staff appraisal system.
Special mention may be made of the following strategies that are to be employed at Erdiston:

- Establishment of training programs in collaboration with other tertiary level institutions leading to the Bachelor in Education degree.
- Delivering the Diploma in Education and the Certificate in Educational Administration.
- Upgrading the competencies of the academic and nonacademic staff of the College.
- Developing and delivering programs for trainers.

Conclusion

On the basis of the information presented in the preceding pages, it is clear that the formal educational system of Barbados is not as blatantly elitist as it was during the colonial period. With Independence came a systematic attempt by the government to increase access to secondary and tertiary education, to tackle some of the long standing inequities, and to improve the quality of the education offered. We have seen, too, that the government has invested heavily in education and has been moving to achieve greater cost effectiveness in education now that the euphoria of Independence is over.

With the approach of the new millennium, the government has been trying to ensure that Barbados has an educational system that will help to equip Baradians to face the challenges of that millennium. It has produced a White Paper on Educational Reform (in 1995), whose overarching theme is "Each One Matters... Quality Education for All". No mention has been made thus far of this White Paper since, as far as this author is aware, there has been no official pronouncement by the present Barbados Labor Party administration that the 1993-2000 Development Plan, which was prepared by its predecessor, is not the current Development Plan. It would be problematic, however, to conclude this article without some direct reference to the very important policy document that is known as the White Paper, and so a brief comment on that document will be in order.

The White Paper on Educational Reform starts from the stated fundamental premise that “Each One Matters” and that there should be “Quality Education for All”. In this regard, it outlines the government’s position on a host of issues, and sets out reform proposals in the following areas:

- The Teaching profession (teacher empowerment, teacher training, teacher awards, and teacher appraisal).
- Curriculum Reform (a Curriculum Development Council, curriculum strategies, programs for low-achievers).
- Special Education.
- Preprimary and Primary education.
- “Senior and Composite” schools.
- Secondary education (national certification, Assisted Private Schools, “Children at Risk”, areas of excellence in public secondary schools, and co-education.
- Equitable access to Sixth Form (Grade XIII) education.
- Tertiary Education (Adult and Continuing Education, and the SRLF).
- The Audio-Visual Aids Department.
- The legislative amendments needed to improve on existing provisions.

As a statement of intentions, the White Paper is to be lauded, but we will need to wait and see precisely how it will be implemented. EDUTECH 2000 is a slogan to bring together the various elements in the White Paper, including the rehabilitation and computerization of schools. It has already been mentioned that EDUTECH 2000 is expected to cost some Bds.$350 million!

The problem is that while the reforms that have been implemented, or that are to be implemented by the year 2000 may be viewed as desirable from the perspective of the mass of the population, the process of social selection through the CEE continues apace. This occurs even though, as we have seen, the government
itself has recognized how the educational process has been distorted by the CEE. Until selection at the tender age of 11 and above becomes a thing of the past, and until such time as certain sections of the population do not see themselves as having the divine right virtually to monopolize the positions in the "leading" secondary schools, it would be difficult to accept the view that there has been a fundamental alteration in educational policy in post-war Barbados.

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NOTES

1. In his Budget Speech of September 2, 1998, the Prime Minister who is also the Minister of Finance announced that Cabinet had recently approved the EDUTECH 2000 Project, which would be the single largest Government project over the next ten years with its projected cost of Bds.$350 million. Partial financing is to be sought from the Inter-American Development Bank before the end of this year (1998). The Project will have four main components:
   - Rehabilitation of primary and secondary schools at a cost of Bds.$110 million.
   - Installation of computer hardware in all schools at a cost of Bds.$122 million.
   - Training of teachers, Ministry of Education Officers, and technical assistance in Information Technology-related areas.
   - Institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Education, including a National Education Evaluation Center which is to be set up in conjunction with the School of Education at the Cave Hill (Barbados) Campus of the University of the West Indies.

2. The letter after the number refers to the grade received by the candidates in the Essay Test that is used as a tie-breaker.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


