

Chapter 9: Montserrat

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Population (1989): 12,000

Land Area: 103 square kilometres

Capital: Plymouth

GDP per capita (1988): US\$4,515

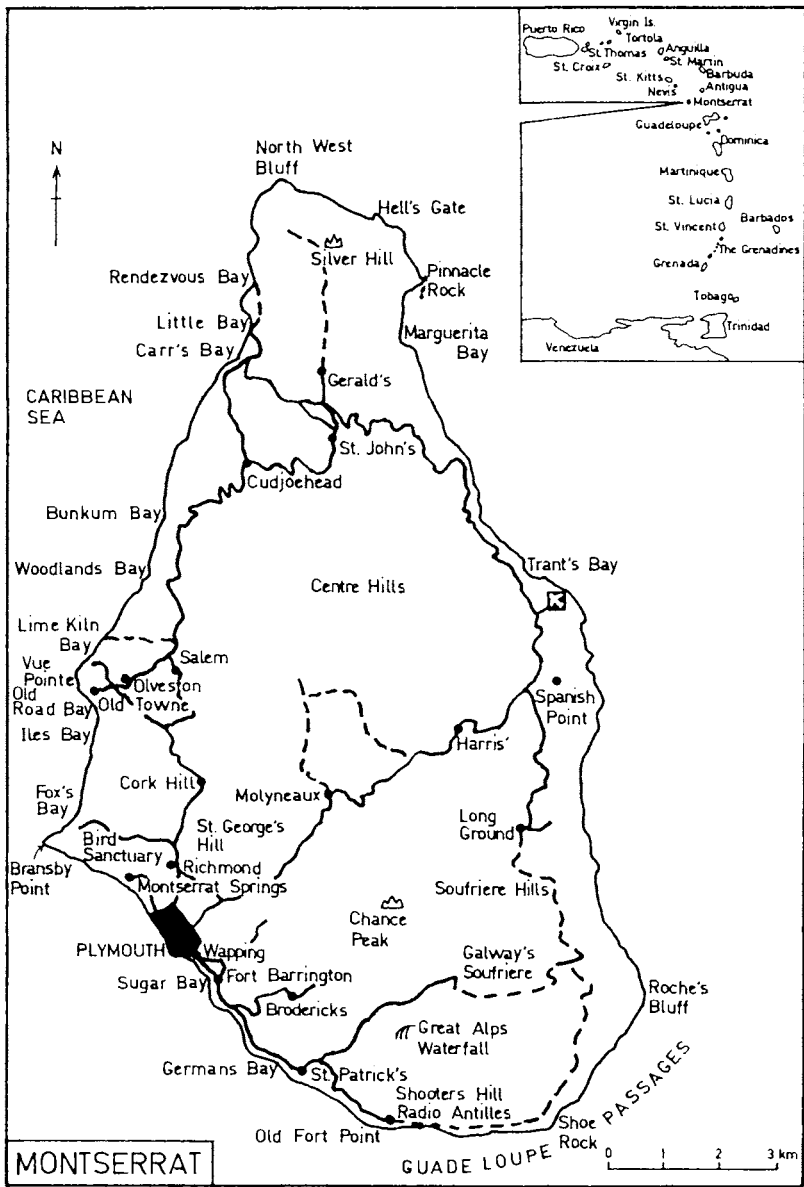
Primary School Enrolment Rate (1990): 100%

Montserrat is one of the few remaining United Kingdom dependent territories. In the Caribbean it shares colonial status with Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and the Turks & Caicos Islands. On several occasions the territory has received United Nations visiting missions which have been invited by the UK government, but after negotiations in 1966 the people elected to retain their existing constitution and not move towards independence (Fergus 1979, 1985). The strongest lobby for maintenance of the status quo comes from the mercantile community, which asserts that UK supervision promotes stability and is attractive to foreign investors. Nevertheless, the territory has a high degree of self-government and for the purposes of this case study is comparable with its sovereign neighbours.

The economy is based mainly on real estate development, tourism, assembly industries, subsistence agriculture, and off-shore banking. It is strongly import-oriented, and is therefore sensitive to the vagaries of the economies of certain developed countries. Despite its status as a British dependent territory, Montserrat is a member of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

1. System of Government

Montserrat has a ministerial system of government. Executive power rests with Her Majesty's Government, which is represented by a Gov-



ernor who presides over the Executive Council. The Governor has certain reserve and discretionary powers, but he normally consults elected ministers before using them. Essentially, therefore, policy decisions are made by the local political directorate.

The legislature comprises seven members democratically elected every five years on a franchise of universal adult suffrage, two official members (the Attorney General and the Financial Secretary), two nominated members, and a Speaker elected by the Council from the society at large. Laws require the assent of Her Majesty's government, which has power of disallowance, but this veto is scarcely ever used.

The four ministers, who are normally drawn from the elected members, make up the Executive Council. The Chief Minister is usually responsible for finance, economic planning and information; another minister takes charge of agriculture, trade, lands and housing; a third is responsible for public works and utilities; and the fourth minister takes charge of education, health and community services. Most ministers are responsible for additional, usually related, matters not reflected in their designations.

2. The Ministry of Education, Health & Community Services

Education is administered by a composite ministry which also administers health and community services. The latter includes sports, culture, youth and women's affairs. Originally entitled the Ministry of Social Services, the title was changed in 1972 at the initiative of the department of education to Education, Health & Welfare to reflect better its primary focus on education and health. It was later entitled Education, Health & Community Services to escape the sterility of 'welfare', a term which subsumed the several social and cultural functions which the ministry served.

To put it negatively, the ministry embraces mostly those areas of government which do not fall neatly into the other ministries. To express it positively, there is a commonality factor in that it deals with the development of human and cultural resources and is sometimes perceived as an essentially spending ministry by other sections of government administration. There is a general appreciation, nevertheless, that education and health also constitute critical investment in the island's development. Indeed the notion of development is given some substance through attempts to promote income-generating activities among women and other community groups.

A single Permanent Secretary normally serves the ministry with all its departments. In 1988 the portfolio was split to make a Permanent

Secretary for Health & Community Services separate from that for Education. However, this was more an exigency of general government staff deployment than an act of deliberate policy, and a 1989 Commission on the public service recommended that in order to effect economies the ministry revert to a single Permanent Secretary as soon as convenient.

Current educational activities are dominated by a recent decision to restructure the education system to provide all children with at least five years of secondary education. Prior to this, secondary education was elitist in that students were selected through a type of 11-plus examination. A critical facet of the comprehensive-type structure is a strong pre-vocational programme which has just been implemented. Consultants from the United Kingdom (UK) formulated the framework of the pre-vocational programme, and a local teacher was subsequently designated as the coordinator and sent for training in England. This dependence on the UK for ideas and advice in education is a perennial characteristic of the system, but some efforts are being made to use regional personnel. Indeed it is heartening to note that curricula for the Commonwealth Caribbean region in the fields of technical and vocational education at secondary and post-secondary levels are now at an advanced stage of formulation.

The current emphasis is clearly on a more egalitarian system and on technical-vocational education. But even in official circles there is residual tension between the traditional discrimination in favour of academic learning and the struggle of pre-vocational education to gain parity of esteem. Some teachers fear that early streaming and rigid compartmentalisation may threaten the purpose of restructuring by creating a pre-vocational type, meaning the apparently less academically talented.

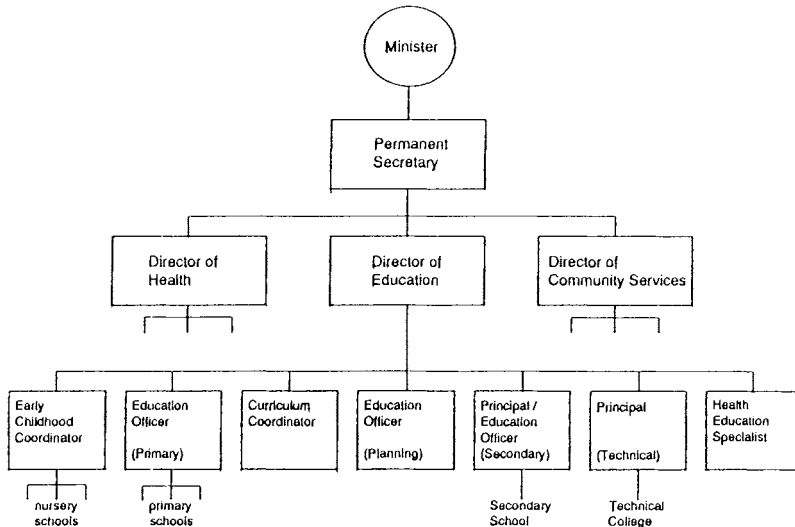
The official priority given to technical education is demonstrated in quantitative and qualitative development in the island's Technical College. In a recent address at the College's graduation ceremony, the Minister of Education stated (1989, p.2) that the "Technical College will be substantively upgraded so that it will become a truly post-secondary institution.... Steps will therefore be taken to move up to the provision of advanced and even to first year university level courses."

3. Formal Organisation of the Ministry of Education

As indicated in Figure 9.1, the Permanent Secretary is the chief administrative officer in the Ministry with the Director of Education as the chief professional officer. Until 1983 the Director was known as the

Chief Education Officer. With a professional staff of only seven persons, job activities are flexible and job descriptions are not adhered to rigidly.

Figure 9.1: The Ministry of Education, Health & Community Services, Montserrat (1990)



The Education Officer (Planning) is a recent addition to the Ministry staff and is officially responsible for "statistical work, preparation of project proposals, liaison with donor agencies, and organisation of external examinations". The need exists, it seems, to articulate more clearly the role of an EO (Planning) in a micro department. Most of the critical planning is described as a collective function of senior staff led by the Permanent Secretary and the Director. Lack of appreciation for the vital role and functioning of the EO (Planning) office could well determine the fate of the post. After the first holder resigned to undertake overseas study, the Ministry of Finance blocked the move to replace him. At the time of writing, therefore, the fate of the post is uncertain. The Ministry of Education is fighting to retain the post, but the Financial Secretary and the Permanent Secretary (Administration) wish to cut it.

The newest position in the Ministry, that of Curriculum Coordinator, is designated sufficiently vaguely to allow the holder to create and administer assessment instruments for junior school classes, provide

guidance on and evaluation of new secondary school curricula, and be responsible for in-service teacher training. This was the originally recommended remit. In fact according to the information received from the Ministry what this officer does includes:

- a) coordinating workshops that are curriculum-based,
- b) developing and revising syllabi and curricula for Forms 1, 2 and 3 in the secondary school in collaboration with teachers,
- c) collaborating with the EO (Primary) in organising and administering national assessments for primary schools,
- d) disseminating and implementing the University of the West Indies (UWI)/USAID primary curriculum, and
- e) taking responsibility for all overseas examinations.

Given the small number of officers and the absence of a teacher trainer in a situation in which some 50 per cent of the teachers are still untrained, this flexibility in task assignment is necessary. A recent move by the Ministry to redesignate the post of EO (Curriculum) was not motivated, it seems, by a desire to focus more finely on curriculum creation. Rather the move aimed to raise the salary of the post and place all Education Officers on an equal footing to allow for greater rationalisation and scope in their deployment.

Of all the Education Officers, whether so designated or not, the EO (Primary)'s job is the least generalised. Various styled Supervisor of Schools and Inspector of Schools, the holder advises primary teachers on teaching methodology, evaluates their teaching, and monitors the progress of the schools. The pressure of office duties had in recent years reduced the time spent in each school and in inspections. Some persons in the society even alleged that standards had fallen due to this situation. Steps have now been taken to involve the EO (Primary) more intimately in the life of the schools.

One problem with this kind of specialisation in primary education is that no single person necessarily possesses all the skills required to manage such a complex and multi-faceted enterprise. To address this problem the Ministry tries to make full use of the expertise of head teachers, particularly in the areas of curriculum formulation and in-service training. Another strategy contemplated by ministry officials is to have Education Officers relate to subject areas rather than to specific levels. This could be a more effective use of available skills, since some element of specialisation is involved. And this does not necessarily jettison the coordinating and general supervisory function exercised by a single officer for a particular level of education.

The system of department heads in the island's single comprehen-

sive secondary school enlarges the administrative pool since they are responsible for "professional matters arising from syllabuses". The nearest the Ministry gets to a specialised post is that of Guidance Officer who, significantly, occupies a teaching position rather than an independent substantive one.

Some functions of the Ministry of Education are contracted out to other Ministries. Education staff are paid through the central Treasury Department in the Ministry of Finance, and school statistics are collected and processed in part by the Statistics Unit of the same ministry. Until 1988 the building and maintenance of schools were the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Communications & Works. Jobs were often contracted out, but it was the Ministry of Communications & Works which assigned, supervised, approved and disbursed. This system has now changed, though the Ministry of Communications & Works still has overall responsibility for school and indeed all government buildings. A team of three is attached to the Ministry of Education to work full-time on building maintenance. This is a welcome development. It is hoped that these persons will in time acquire special expertise related to school buildings. At any rate, their location in the Ministry facilitates close consultation with education personnel. The Ministry of Communications & Works is too small to have many specialists, and there is usually no one particularly equipped to deal with school buildings and their requirements.

Again until recently, the government through the Ministry of Education supplied free textbooks to secondary school students on a loan basis. Since 1986 students have been required to purchase their own texts. The school undertook to procure and sell, but found the process cumbersome and wasteful of time. The business has now been assigned to a private firm.

The process of securing education supplies has always been vexing. The Ministry used to be obliged to order through the British Crown Agents. The pound yielded less because of the middleman's profit, and orders commonly took six months to procure. Only supplies of a limited value used to be purchasable locally, and for this the permission of the Ministry of Finance was required. The Crown Agents are still used, but there is now greater flexibility.

The government is responsible for all but three schools in the island. There is one private denominational secondary school and two such primary schools. This is due to no inadequacy in the government's educational provision, but rather to the churchmen's desire to use the schools as indoctrination centres for their particular brand of religion. A third private primary school is fee-paying and geared to those seeking some exclusivism. In 1989/90, private schools catered for about 2.3 per

cent of primary school children, and about 4.9 per cent of secondary children. The denominational schools receive government subventions.

Although it has a Curriculum Coordinator, the Ministry lacks the funds for a curriculum unit, audio-visual aids centre or teacher training section. One solution, as noted, is to draw on the skills and services of teachers, although this reduces the time they give to their substantive tasks. In the secondary school, where students write regional and extra-regional examinations, some syllabuses come ready-made. The tasks of creating suitable curricula for the lower forms and of integrating these with overseas curricula still have to be attended to. This is a legitimate function of a curriculum office, however it is organised and staffed.

The Ministry, anticipating aid from the European Development Fund, has plans for a resource centre which will help address the need for audio-visual aids, curriculum development and in-service training. This will require at least an educator/librarian, a graphic artist and a clerk. Actually, there is no reason why a graphic artist could not in the present situation be attached to the office of the Curriculum Coordinator even if the artist also worked for other government departments. The culture section of the Ministry also needs the services of an artist.

As useful as a resource centre will be, it is not a near-perfect answer to the inherent manpower constraints due to size and the effects on vital educational operations. It will require a high degree of voluntary effort and time by teachers in an age of decreasing dedication and altruism.

Examinations relate closely to curriculum, and a special word on them is useful. The days when diagnostic tests were imported from another culture with all this means for validity and reliability are hopefully over. Tests administered at the end of primary school for entry to a streamed comprehensive secondary school are locally devised, but the Ministry has no testing and evaluation specialist. This task is currently performed by the Curriculum Coordinator who, in the words of the Ministry, "draws on the entire teaching staff at primary and secondary levels to set the tests". Although this wide participation guarantees general acceptability, questions of validity remain.

Some school leaving examinations are administered locally, but the certificates do not carry high status and are not normally acceptable as entry qualifications to the more prestigious overseas institutions. For example certificates of the UK Royal Society of Arts are considered to testify to quality achievement more than certificates from the local technical college. The Ministry is thus dependent on external examining bodies not only because of size considerations but also because of

the need for national and international acceptability.

Montserrat is evidently too small to publish its own textbooks. This is considered a cultural and educational disadvantage since it is desirable for children to identify with the content of these books if as a colonial people they are to develop a new identity indigenously rooted. Fortunately, although most of the books are produced by British-based firms, some are written especially for the Caribbean using Caribbean scholars as authors or collaborators. Nevertheless for educational and economic reasons it is still more desirable to have these texts produced in the Caribbean region. In such subjects as science, modern languages and English literature there is still a heavy reliance on North American and European books, but even here the Caribbeanisation process has at least started.

Because the Ministry is short of personnel, either it does not undertake certain activities or it uses generalists to do the work of specialists. In some cases the work devolves on regional or extra-regional organisations, and occasionally the Ministry draws on the regional university which sends individual specialists for short periods.

4. Ministry Personnel

In addition to the seven professional officers, the Ministry employs another 14 staff including clerical officers, office attendants, bus drivers, bus conductors and a cleaner. Being a small country with a small population, Montserrat supposedly has a small pool from which to recruit trained administrative staff. In fact, the Montserrat teaching service has a cadre of highly qualified persons, some of whom have B.Ed. degrees from the UWI, including programmes geared to educational leadership. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and the teaching service tend to provide other ministries with senior administrative personnel.

However, the government does import expatriates occasionally. Some would argue that this expedient stems from the lingering sense of dependence on the outside and the perception that the foreign person has superior competence. A recent example was the appointment of a retired Caribbean national as principal of the Montserrat comprehensive secondary school. The holder of this post functions virtually as an EO (Secondary) even though his base is physically outside the Ministry. In the view of the government, his experience, maturity and reputation for discipline gave him the edge over local applicants. This appointment led to tension and a significant element of passive resistance and even covert demonstration. In this type of situation the usual mollifying

official response is to designate the expatriate as a kind of adviser or to stipulate a definite tenure, adding that during this period a local would be 'trained' to take over.

Even when the island has an adequate pool from which to recruit senior staff, it is sometimes difficult to establish and uphold objective criteria for doing so. The society is so small that everybody knows everybody else, including their thinking, attitudes and politics. These and other extraneous factors may be taken into account when making an appointment. Senior Ministry of Education officials rightly aver that appointments are made by the Governor on the advice of a Public Service Commission following recommendations from the Ministry. However, this does not necessarily invalidate the point being made about objective criteria. In fact Ministers have been known to differ from their officials over appointees to senior education positions, and have personally intervened in the selection process. The result of a seemingly finely-tuned selection process can still be that the person best qualified for the job in professional terms is passed over.

Neutrality in recruitment is further affected by the tendency to promote on the basis of seniority, which is chiefly defined by years in the service. A recent appointment to the post of Curriculum Co-ordinator was to a teacher with an academic Bachelor's degree and a Diploma in Education instead of a candidate with a Bachelor's degree in Education with curriculum as his specialisation. The former candidate was a competent teacher and senior in years and teaching experience. Considerations of seniority apparently took precedence over the technical requirements of the job. In a small service where the officer is the sole person in a 'unit', the implications of this kind of recruitment can be serious. Problems can be reduced by providing training for the chosen candidate, but this is costly. One reason sometimes put forward for promoting on this basis is that the younger person has another chance. This is not an easy problem to solve since good administration has to take account of personal factors.

Job descriptions are attached to each Ministry job, but on recruitment a candidate's experience does not always match the definition precisely. This flexibility is functional in that it allows the kind of recruitment such as that of the Curriculum Coordinator alluded to above. Also the descriptions are sufficiently broad to allow for unforeseen activities, some of which emerge and evolve after appointment. There can be quite a divergence between a stated job description and the *de facto* one. At any rate, the phrase "and any other duties which the Permanent Secretary may assign from time to time" is supposed to legitimise the added work. For the EO (Planning), the added work in practice meant, in the view of one observer, meeting and

chaperoning visitors to the Ministry and being a general duties officer.

The Ministry has now prepared a small handbook of job descriptions for each officer. This is a valuable guide. Most job descriptions have evolved and therefore reflect to a great extent the current tasks of serving officers.

5. Professional Training of Ministry Personnel

No pre-service training specific to Ministry jobs is provided for Ministry personnel. Those with a primary teaching background are likely to have attended a two-year training course in a regional teachers' college, while secondary school teachers would have acquired a one-year diploma in education which is initial teacher training in the UWI for persons who hold academic degrees.

Education Officers usually come 'raw' to their jobs without any training or orientation in administration and supervision. The present Director of Education followed the usual pattern. With a degree from the UWI, she proceeded after some years of teaching to study for a Diploma in Education at the same institution. She later pursued a one-year course at the University of London, gaining an Associateship Certificate. From a teaching position in the secondary school, she became EO (Secondary) and later Director.

Similarly, the EO (Primary) undertook a two-year course at the Leeward Islands Teacher Training College in Antigua. He followed this up after some years with a one-year course in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), obtaining an Associateship Certificate. He then attained an academic degree at the UWI in Barbados. After two years of primary school headship and eight years as a junior secondary principal, he was appointed EO (Primary). He later received further professional training at the University of Manchester (UK), obtaining a Masters degree in education with teacher education as his speciality.

The first EO (Planning) had a degree and diploma in education but went directly from teaching into the new position. After for two years, he resigned to study in New York for a Masters degree in educational technology. The course seems to be directly relevant to modern educational planning, but there is no guarantee that this officer will rejoin the service after training.

This illustrates the tendency for officers to serve before they are trained and then either to leave after training or to be promoted out of particular positions. Retaining a stable corps of professional educators with specialised training for specialised positions for a significant period is extremely difficult in these circumstances. The Curriculum Co-

ordinator is another example in which training for the specialised position will come, if at all, after years of performance.

Most professional training, though general in nature, is obtained in Caribbean institutions. Even so, questions of social relevance are raised since Montserratians studying in Jamaica tend to research Jamaican problems. While the results have greater direct applicability to Montserrat than would studies on British society, the contexts and environments are not identical. Fortunately, educators in Caribbean institutions are conscious of the need to provide for this. Because of proximity and better transport connections it is easier for the Barbados campus of the UWI to make such provision than for the Jamaica campus. Most training for Montserrat is appropriately organised in or from Barbados or in training institutions in the closer sub-region.

This does not of course solve the problem that recruits for specialist positions often lack some of the necessary skills. One possible solution would be for the regional university to arrange short orientation courses analogous to those which any respectable local education department should mount if it has a policy of hiring untrained teachers. The assumption is that a similar problem exists in other territories served by the university.

Another solution, which does not preclude the first, is to have short attachments to an education department in the region with a more stable corps of specialist officers. Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad are possible locations for such attachments. This strategy could also help new officers to give functional meaning to the general statements of job descriptions, which is especially necessary when positions are new.

It is a hopeful sign that a considerable amount of in-service training of education officials takes place in the Caribbean region. Moreover training is given a Caribbean focus even when trainers from outside the region are involved. In any case, officers are expected to be mature and sufficiently sensitive to maximise the results of their training by adapting and applying new ideas to their particular situations.

While it is encouraging that much training is Caribbean-based, one suspects that much of it is *ad hoc*. The need still exists for systematic training for education administrators within some rational framework. Perhaps regional courses should emanate from a survey of needs as defined by the various Ministries. Technical assistance from overseas can be better utilised if the training addresses particular needs determined by the beneficiaries. The training can thus be incremental, serving specified programmatic goals over a period.

6. The Ministry Hierarchy

Because of the small number of officers in the Ministry, there is hardly any administrative pyramid and consequently extremely limited opportunity for promotion. The fact that the retirement age is as low as 55 helps, but creates another problem. Given the recruitment and orientation and training practices described above, it may take an officer a number of years, including two perhaps for overseas training, before he or she can operate with confidence and mastery.

Nevertheless, the problems of staleness and poor motivation remain. The Ministry has no positive policy for dealing with this except that when opportunities for promotion into another branch of the service arise the superior officer "will not stand in the way". At least one Permanent Secretary in the government service was formerly a Chief Education Officer. Sometimes the move is purely lateral, as with a former Education Officer who became Energy Officer in order to gain attractive perquisites and greater potential for advancement. Because quick turnover is likely to be endemic, appropriate orientation and training for educational management become a policy imperative.

Given the concept of seniority which prevails and its role in promotions, it is not common for specialist officers to be by-passed for generalists. It is possible, for instance, for the psychologist to become Director of Education, though she would then cease to function as a specialist. In this small society it would appear that personal interests prevail over professional and technical needs whenever the two conflict. In a management culture in which generalists are appointed to specialist positions, it is easy to treat the loss cavalierly. Stop-gap measures are part of the management style of this small ministry. The danger is that what is stop-gap is likely to assume an unwarranted imprimatur.

7. Extra-Ministerial Service

Some ministry officials serve on external government bodies and committees, but in most cases their work relates directly or indirectly to education. The Permanent Secretary is chairman of the Caribbean Institute of Applied Computer Technology (CARIACT), and serves on the government scholarship committee and on the Ministry's Committee for Social Security. The Director of Education is a member of the University Centre's advisory council; and the Health Educator serves in the Family Planning and Old People's Welfare Associations.

These involvements consume valuable time which could have been invested in direct educational administration, but they give Ministry

officials valuable knowledge of and insights into contemporary developments which impact on, and which are impacted on by, the educational enterprise. They can acquire a broader view of the environment and culture in which they operate. Indeed their own education is enhanced and their horizons widened.

8. International Linkages

Although Montserrat's colonial status prevents it from securing aid from some international organisations, being small it gets a relatively high amount of aid. The education department currently benefits from aid projects with the UK Overseas Development Administration, Voluntary Service Overseas, Peace Corps, USAID, Partners of America, CIDA, European Development Fund, and Unicef. The Ministry also has links with Unesco. The Caribbean Network of Educational Innovation for Development (CARNEID) assists Unesco member states in implementing innovation, and the Major Project in Education for Latin America & the Caribbean provides a monitoring service.

The aid comes in the form of technical assistance personnel (in scarce skills), equipment, buildings, scholarships, and attachments. It is a godsend to a poor country like Montserrat which is dependent on external financing for nearly all capital works. Overseas advisers and trained specialists temporarily augment the capabilities of the Ministry. The restructuring of the secondary education system would hardly have been possible without overseas finance for buildings and equipment. As observed above, while the pre-vocational programme was developed by local teachers, leadership was provided by British consultants. The Peace Corps and VSO provide manpower and technical assistance on an ad hoc basis. Some volunteers fill important gaps in areas like special education, music and the technical trades.

However, aid is not an unmixed blessing. Donor organisations have their own agendas which are often generalised to serve a number of countries and which may fail to take account of the needs of particular countries. Worse yet, some donated institutions derive from a donor country's frame of reference and come with an imported nomenclature and often curricular focus. This happened to some extent when the junior secondary system was introduced in 1972. Montserrat was among a number of countries in the Caribbean to which Britain with assistance from Unesco gave junior secondary schools. Up until they were phased out, they were never totally integrated into the existing school system.

This is all linked with the temptation to take aid simply because it

is given. Some projects create new tasks for Ministry officials, and sometimes teachers are taken from their classes. This does sometimes help to keep local educators abreast of new thinking; but in many cases the end value is doubtful. Also, the government does not always have the funds for the new recurrent costs which are required to sustain projects. In short, aid can be costly. It is refreshing to note that the Ministry now refuses projects of doubtful value and in particular projects which keep teachers away from their classes with unnecessary workshops and seminars.

The key regional organisations which relate to the Ministry are the UWI Faculty of Education, and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). The university provides advice and training on and off island, and since the institution belongs to the entire region Montserrat has an administrative voice. The Ministry of Education represents the government in the university's administration. This is usually done by the Permanent Secretary, while the Director relates to the Faculty of Education. On a small island it is useful for these officers to meet Caribbean colleagues and become aware of new developments in institutions which impact on their work.

Many visitors come to the Ministry for various purposes and lengths of time. The majority come to provide needed specialist skills or services and to assess the ongoing work of the Ministry. It is difficult for sensitive officers not to glean from them some knowledge of what obtains elsewhere. This helps to enhance the general awareness and 'critical climate' of the Ministry.

The CARNEID programme promotes cooperation through the exchange of documents and experiences, and facilitates understanding of the processes and practices of educational exchange. While Montserrat is no longer a 'member' of Unesco following the UK's abandonment of that body, CARNEID includes the island in its programmes. Montserrat has benefitted from workshops in education planning, computers in education, and documentation techniques. Moderate funds are expected soon to be available to develop cultural kits for schools.

As mentioned above, Montserrat also participates in Unesco's Major Project in Education for Latin America & the Caribbean. This project checks on countries' internal functioning in areas like literacy, minimum years of schooling, and general efficiency and quality. However, Montserrat has been involved in only a limited way, partly because of lack of finance to attend meetings.

Apart from supplying the education services with scarce professional skills, UWI and CXC personnel provide indirect in-service training for Ministry officials through their periodic discussions of professional matters. UWI personnel, and to a lesser extent CXC staff,

bring research data and new ideas to bear on their work and counsel. They also assist in areas like testing and curriculum planning in which the Ministry is short on competence. In the curriculum area, the work of CXC is particularly important in this anglophile colony because the CXC seeks more and more to Caribbeanise educational content and so root curriculum more firmly in the culture.

Another international connection is with a Canadian body called Organization for Cooperation in Overseas Development (OCOD). This body helps with workshops for in-service training of teachers. By providing materials for the workshops, the organisation also supplements the Ministry's slender budget.

Although the advantages accruing to a poor country from these institutions are considerable, not forgetting the cross-fertilising effect of relating to other colleagues in the region who are being similarly helped, there is something fragmentary and unfocused about it all. The Ministry perhaps needs a development plan into which as far as possible the guidance and assistance will fit. It also needs a Planning Officer to coordinate it all and to relate closely to the overseas bodies to ensure local input and conformity with harmonious growth and development. The OCOD practice of using local counterpart tutors and involving them at the planning stage is valuable. Even so, a national framework within which to plan is necessary. Without some coordinating and stabilising principle the various currents could be conflicting, heady and only marginally effective.

Responding to the notion of a master plan for the education sector, senior Ministry officials have pointed out that the restructuring of secondary education is their major current activity and that it has entailed consequential changes in the primary and even the technical college programmes and structures. Further, "plans have been made to begin a full-scale planning exercise to reflect the direction for the next 10 years ['post-Hurricane Hugo'] covering the full range of the education spectrum from pre-school to post-secondary". Perhaps account of the need for a coherent programme of continuing education might be taken in such a plan. It is expected that personnel from the Government Development Unit will be involved in the planning process, since for obvious reasons educational planning cannot be isolated from the economic environment.

The UK through the British Development Division (BDD) in Barbados is a major aid donor generally, and a major supporter of education. The UK supplies education buildings, equipment and technical assistance. While one has to be grateful for this lingering mother-country generosity, one has to be careful not to reinforce the culture of dependence already so pronounced in this country. It is now

the established practice to ensure that visiting experts understand the local environment and do not dictate development from their own untempered perspectives. The locals must be a source of basic ideas and must help to determine what counts as relevant and valid knowledge. If this is taken to its logical conclusion, the case for a regional publisher of Caribbean textbooks and support material becomes even stronger.

Like other countries large and small, Montserrat is besieged with requests for information from international organisations. It is estimated that putting together such information can consume an eighth of the time of an education official. Indeed the post of EO (Planning) was originally proposed to deal with this kind of request, thereby freeing the Director to devote more time to professional duties. In short, these demands add to the burden and consequently the cost of administration. Perhaps more of the responsibility for statistical information should be assigned to the Government Statistics Department in order to free key professional officers from what is a chore even though it makes intellectual demands.

On the other hand, scores of reports flood the office from Unesco, the Commonwealth Secretariat and elsewhere. These find their way to the offices, but are not systematically shelved or catalogued. Occasionally a title catches the eye and snippets are read for information or speech quotes, but education officers have very little time for this or any other kind of professional reading. As a result, very little practical use is made of the information. It might be useful to have someone skim through these publications and distribute them to persons including teachers who can use them. The Ministry started a documentation centre, but its effectiveness was reduced if not nullified by lack of staff to catalogue and maintain the material. The plans to develop a teachers' centre in collaboration with the University Centre's library may help solve part of the information problem. Even then some staffing will be necessary.

No formal provision is made in this Ministry for substitutes when an officer is absent. Generally, though, the Assistant Secretary acts for the Permanent Secretary and not the Director. This can have its professional impact, for while the Permanent Secretary usually is someone with some professional knowledge in education, the Assistant Secretary usually is not. The general practice though is for someone to cover notionally for an absent colleague and even to take urgent decisions. But even as in the case when the Coordinator of Early Childhood Education deputised for the EO (Primary) for three months, she was only able to deal with limited areas.

The business of education inevitably suffers when officers are absent from a small ministry, but good team work and record-keeping

can cushion the impact of absence. In the Montserrat Ministry of Education, meetings of senior staff are held at regular intervals, and minutes of the meetings are kept. Besides, senior officers are required to submit and keep monthly reports of work done and objectives achieved. If these policies function properly, it is easier for a substitute whether from inside or outside the office to cover for an absent officer.

9. The Culture of the Ministry

In a micro Ministry in a tiny island everyone knows everyone else intimately. When relations are good, this facilitates cooperative decision-making, quick consultation and the administrative process generally. It minimises formalities such as minutes and memoranda. But when relations get sour as sometimes happens, an officer may complain of being excluded from important decision-making and there can be accusations and counter accusations about poor work and high-handed governance. If an Education Officer is beleaguered or feels beleaguered, the work suffers as he nurses hurt or struggles with his superiors.

In a small Ministry, where officers are unable to avoid each other, personal rivalries can be particularly intense. Bray & Fergus (1986, p.97) alluded to a case in which:

Two individuals in particular have been in fierce competition for nearly a decade, and their tussle has gradually reached higher echelons as each has been promoted. Their personal rivalries have thus had increasingly severe implications for the entire system, and the issues have still not been resolved.

In a larger system it would be easier for such personal conflicts to be absorbed and redirected.

The regular staff meetings which the Ministry has now instituted should create better interpersonal relations. Officers are supposed to bring others up to date on what is happening within their own areas or responsibility, and the daily consultation between various members of staff is an on-going process (see also Kersell 1990). Perhaps efforts to have officers meet on a social basis could also assist.

A small ministry does offer scope for personal impact if there are persons with special gifts and competence. One EO, for instance, claims to have personally done much on his own initiative for the music programme of schools. But personal impact can also be perceived as negative. The same officer feels that his outspokenness, penchant for

arriving at his own conclusions, and tendency to be critical of processes and actions are generally unwelcome. If this is true, it is a serious problem since a small ministry can ill afford to stifle ideas and to discourage fresh thoughts. The same officer claims not to have known who was selected as the new principal of the secondary school until the person arrived on island. This shows that the process of consultation sometimes breaks down -- unless of course the particular officer was off island at the time of discussions.

What is clear, though, is that the top managers are aware of the strategies which make for good communication and harmonious relationships, and have obviously been putting some into practice. One officer, at least, would question the effective operationalisation of these. On the other hand the top ministry officials point to a number of management decisions and policies (some of which fall outside the remit of this study) which reflect an overall changing culture. People seem to be less talking at, and more talking to. Improvements include:

- (a) a major focus on parent-teacher relationships,
- (b) staff development programmes on the personal enrichment of teachers and enhancement of their operational knowledge,
- (c) an organised programme of staff training, and
- (d) plans for the training of senior managers.

If these accurately reflect and are an artifact of the environment at headquarters, then the auspices for a healthy management culture are favourable.

And yet the state of education continues to attract negative comment in the local newspaper. Criticism comes mostly from persons who hanker after the 'good old days' of selective entrance to secondary schools and who tend to blame all ills, including the incidence of illiteracy, on the restructuring of the system. It is significant that these include teachers, though they may be less outspoken. It would seem that the educational administrators need to acquire more tools and techniques to manage educational change. At the very least, effective methods must be found to involve teachers and opinion leaders in the process of change in order to secure their commitment and support.

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