

BACKGROUND TO EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

The Commonwealth Caribbean countries have suffered from the increasing instability of the sugar cane and tourist economies on which they used to rely, so that government provision of science teaching facilities has failed to match not only the demands of the modern curricula but also the standards that science teachers have come to expect.

Education systems in the region broadly follow the British pattern with a major examination (1) at the end of secondary education. Educators in the Commonwealth Caribbean have virtually no contact with the United States territories or the Spanish, French and Dutch-speaking countries of South America and the Caribbean. Although many Caribbean educators receive first or higher degrees in North America, there has been very little impact from USA and Canada on school systems and curricula.

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) has been welcomed as an opportunity to make Caribbean education truly Caribbean. The only science so far examined (and this is under trial) is a demanding integrated science seen as a filter for further studies in science up to A Level and undergraduate studies. Encountering all the difficulties of integrated science, well-documented in the literature on science education, CXC integrated science is agreed to be well suited to the Caribbean; and its syllabus, examination and test papers are an important resource for teacher-educators and secondary science teachers (2). A less demanding integrated science examination for the same age group, and biology, chemistry and physics for the more able 20% of the population, are under development.

There are two universities in the Commonwealth Caribbean, the University of Guyana (UG) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), the latter having three campuses, Mona in Jamaica, St Augustine in Trinidad and Cave Hill in Barbados. There are also University Centres in the smaller countries, these being administered by the Extra-Mural Department of UWI. Teachers' colleges, though government institutions, have academic links with the universities.

Science teachers' associations are an important resource. In addition to a number of national associations (Jamaica's, the oldest, is some 30 years old), the Caribbean Regional Organisation of Associations for Science Education (CROASE) is an association of associations. Of special note is the contribution of CROASE to curriculum development; the Caribbean Integrated Science Curriculum (CISC) is under development as a resource for schools preparing for CXC (3). CROASE has also provided a number of regional workshops and stimulated the formation of new national associations. A larger association whose beginnings can be traced to the Caribbean is the London-based Commonwealth Association of Science and Mathematics Educators; its membership is open to individuals as well as national associations. A still larger

association of associations is the International Council of Associations for Science Education (ICASE) of which CROASE and most if not all national associations are members.

Science educators in the Caribbean are indebted to a number of international agencies for professional and financial assistance. UNESCO, the organisation of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation have all given valuable help. The British Council in particular assisted UWI with the Caribbean Regional Science Project (CRSP), which developed and published the West Indies Science Curriculum, WISC (Adey, 1976), an integrated science course for the first three years of secondary education.

Collaboration among science educators of the Commonwealth Caribbean is excellent. The 1970s saw the growth of a dedicated and able group of teacher-educators who work closely with one another and with a significant number of classroom teachers and university scientists. Caribbean integrated science is probably at least as healthy as integrated science is anywhere, although a great many problems in physics education remain to be solved.