

COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION

Although the 1970's was a time when individual member states of the New Commonwealth exercised increasing initiative in determining school curricula, it was also a period of growing bi-lateral and regional co-operation. Of the many different initiatives that have taken place perhaps the most common is the borrowing and adoption of subject based and integrated courses especially mathematics, science and the teaching of languages.

At the regional level, notably among the smaller states of the Commonwealth there have been a number of initiatives to co-ordinate elements of the curriculum development process. This may take the form of co-operation for the development of a syllabus for a specific subject as, for example, in agriculture in countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in Southern Africa. In the Caribbean a new regional examinations council has been established and in the Commonwealth Pacific a regional assessment board will now assist member states to develop their national examinations and assessment procedures. Linkages of this type often continue to draw upon the expertise of the Old Commonwealth. Institutional and examination syndicates offer advisory services where these are appropriate to self determination in the area of curriculum development.

The experience of the metropolitan countries is still valued and a number of curriculum projects, particularly in mathematics, integrated science and English as a second language, have made considerable impact. However, even in such cases, foreign models are often adapted for local use. There is now a growing awareness that innovations which suit the particular circumstances of the countries of the Old Commonwealth may not be suitable for very different conditions elsewhere. Moreover, many countries express interest in learning about the outcomes of projects from countries facing similar social and economic problems, an indication that borrowing and adoption is done with greater discrimination than in the past.

Potential for Commonwealth Co-operation

The responses to the questionnaire suggest that there is ample scope for increased co-operation between Commonwealth countries bi-laterally, regionally and collectively. The survey has revealed that the major area of need where co-operation within the Commonwealth would be most useful is that of training.

Staff Training

If curriculum development is to be institutionalised in order to ensure continuous progress and renewal, a major need is for training that is wide both in scope and range. One implication of this is that curriculum development should be a team effort. Consequently, all members of the team need orientation and training in order to fulfil their tasks efficiently. Thus training

must involve the following categories of personnel.

1. Curriculum development officers both centrally and locally based.
2. Inspectors, supervisors, examinations officers and advisers who oversee the work of schools.
3. Teacher trainers at both the pre-service and in-service levels.
4. Administrators at national and local levels who have the task of facilitating curriculum development.
5. Teachers identified as leaders, by schools and subject associations who will undertake curriculum development as a major task.
6. Teachers at the initial training level.
7. Teachers involved in curriculum renewal or development as part of their in-service training.
8. School managers and other interested community members.

Types of Training

Different members of the curriculum development team need different types and levels of training. The specific "mix" depends on local conditions. The variables here are whether the training should be: in-country or overseas, long or short, general or specific to a particular need, or whether it should be carried out by means of courses, attachments, workshops, conferences, seminars or individual study leave. In organising training programmes, the special needs of the various categories of personnel participating in them should be specially catered for. Some of these are:

1. The planning, management and administration of curriculum development for officers of central and local authorities.
2. All aspects of the process of curriculum development - planning, design, implementation, and evaluation - for teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, inspectors, advisers, examination officers, etc.
3. Teaching methods appropriate to particular syllabus designs and general aspects of pedagogy for curriculum designers, teachers and teacher trainers.
4. The design and production of appropriate learning materials and equipment for teachers and teacher trainers.

The Role of the Commonwealth Secretariat

The ability of the Commonwealth Secretariat to facilitate co-operation of the

type described above has been demonstrated through a number of programmes. These activities have not sought to take a broad view of curriculum development but have concentrated upon recommendations adopted at regional meetings, specialist conferences and Commonwealth Education Conferences, which relate to particular subject areas, task areas and specialist roles. For example, attention is currently focussed on the production of low cost science equipment and the role of mathematics and science teaching in response to the social and economic needs of a nation; on book production; on the role of technical education in the school and the training required for technical teachers; on new forms of teacher training including the teachers role in curriculum development; on training for educational managers including the co-ordinating role which educational administrators must play in the curriculum development process and on the subject of teaching about the Commonwealth as one example of the ways by which international co-operation and understanding may be appreciated and developed in schools.

The results of the present survey suggest that the Commonwealth Secretariat could well undertake a promoting interest in the curriculum in a more integrated way, allowing personnel from different sectors of the educational system to appreciate and develop their interlocking roles in the process of curriculum development. The ability of the Commonwealth Secretariat to respond to the variety of needs which have been expressed will depend upon the resources at its disposal and upon the priorities established by member states at the Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference in Sri Lanka. The results of the survey and the specific requests and suggestions arising from it are now before the Conference for consideration.