

CHAPTER 4: DIMENSIONS OF DEPENDENCY: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SMALL COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

1. The concept of dependency

Dependency, like scale and isolation, is a relative matter and a composite concept. In other words there are degrees and variants of dependency. Academic discussion has been considerable, but focussed mainly on the question of economic dependency (1). This is of course very important to developing nations of all sizes, but the task here is to consider the educational implications of dependency in a positive way, especially as far as small countries are concerned. This means that variants and implications such as interdependency and international co-operation come to the fore.

- 1.2 As with scale and isolation the Commonwealth countries considered in this monograph vary too greatly to be considered as one group in respect of a discussion of the dimensions of dependency. On the other hand, in one important respect for the examination of educational issues, they are quite comparable in the style of the educational legacy of colonisation. Nonetheless the emphasis in this section will be on the two main regional clusters of small Commonwealth states, the Caribbean and the South Pacific, though not to the total exclusion of others. One of the consequences of smallness occurring in the context of island clusters is the obvious opportunity for co-operation that is presented in each area. The more negative way of viewing this - and one which is certainly taken by some countries in each region - is that one of the problems associated with the regional concentration of small island nations is that co-operation with one's neighbours is difficult to avoid.

2. Economic dependency and educational provision

- 2.1 The small countries of the Commonwealth result from the Imperial adventures of Britain which centred around maritime strategy and sea borne trade. In the case of small island colonies in particular, some were taken as potentially useful additions to the Imperial plantations, others for their prime strategic locations, and yet others merely to deny them to rival powers.
- 2.2 For small nations associated with plantations there are important differential effects of the Imperial system for human ecology and educational development. Plantations with or without slavery have major consequences for land ownership, population distribution and related accessibility of schooling. For example, in many small Caribbean countries this means that the bulk of the rural population is concentrated on marginal hilly land, unable to reach the levels of subsistence affluence that the prime valleys could support if they were not occupied by plantations. So in general, the plantation system heightens rural disadvantage and promotes internal disparities within small countries. At a national level, the overwhelming concentration of economic activity into one or two areas of primary production creates a vulnerable and inflexible economy unable to respond effectively to adverse economic or physical pressures. The employment structure is correspondingly undifferentiated and almost completely unrelated to the content of formal education, which as has been noted in respect of Malta and Barbados is best suited as a general preparation for work in a diversified and compact economic situation. Furthermore the instability of such economies does not make them attractive partners in bilateral or regional financial commitments to educational projects.

- 2.3 Despite the brittle basis of limited and vulnerable economies these small countries have, as newly independent nations, felt it necessary to expand their formal systems of education in accordance with the growth of their populations.

3. Dimensions of educational dependency

- 3.1 Three main dimensions have been selected for discussion here: old metropolitan, new metropolitan and new regional.
- 3.2 Old metropolitan influences comprise the various on-going educational links between small Commonwealth countries and their former colonial masters. They are a form of neo-colonialism, but are on the whole welcome and necessary components of small country systems. Such influences take three main forms. The first is the continued operation of denominational schools, especially in the secondary sector. Such schools are often highly esteemed in the countries concerned and provide an educational route to higher education and professional careers. Although the governments of small countries now provide some of the funding, these schools are usually subsidised to some extent by their sponsors. More significant perhaps is the continued existence of a model of schooling to which most parents subscribe even if their children are unable to secure a place by selection. As Kennedy (2) rightly indicates, the original staffing of such schools had no real appreciation of the local communities and cultures and to that extent the schools remain alien. However, they have provided a valuable general education for those indigenous people now governing and administering small Commonwealth countries in an increasingly complex international situation.
- 3.3 Secondly, these old metropolitan influences are maintained by the continued utilisation of external examination agencies especially in technical and vocational fields. It is difficult to cater for such examinations locally or even regionally. This may serve the purpose of maintaining known standards but in many areas it also requires a study of skills well above those required by the national employment market. It is quite commonly found that holders of British and similar metropolitan qualifications are unwilling to accept lower level jobs. They may possibly find employment in another country, but what is increasingly needed in small island nations are inventive workers at the level of technology appropriate to local needs and resources.
- 3.4 The third old metropolitan link is that of providing staff development opportunities in colleges and universities. Students return home with more than just an enhanced education and a certificate. Obviously it is the very small countries which need these aid programmes most, because of their 'topless' education systems, and a significant proportion of scholarships and bursaries go to such countries.
- 3.5 New metropolitan influences in education come in the form of interest shown by nearby countries or others seeking potential gain in offering assistance of one kind or another. This may be felt in terms of employment opportunities, higher education outlets (e.g., the training of some Seychelles doctors in the USSR), or more direct political overtures. In the Caribbean for example one may cite the keen interest of the USA, Canada, Venezuela and Cuba in the educational programmes of various Commonwealth nations. In the South Pacific the involvement of Australia and New Zealand is of longer standing, while in the Indian Ocean, Australian, Indian and East African links operate at individual and official levels.

- 3.6 New regional influences, perhaps paradoxically, seem to pose more difficult problems. This is understandable when the close relationship between the formal system of education and national identity is remembered.
- 3.7 Regional co-operation is self-evidently desirable, but in the South Pacific, the Caribbean and the three Southern African landlocked states there is enormous disparity between the various members of the group, not least in education. This leads to micro-hierarchies, bilateral dependency and the operation of a core-periphery model whereby the regional focus sucks in most of the benefits. Outlying members of the regional grouping are placed in a quasi-colonial relationship to the centre, and this offends against national identity with which individual systems of education are closely associated. In the Indian Ocean the weaker and by far the smaller of the small Commonwealth nations, the Seychelles, steers carefully clear of Mauritius and is adopting a policy of maintaining links with France and Britain, plus new links with other socialist nations throughout the world. In the Caribbean and South Africa, however, there is a great deal to be gained from schemes of mutual educational self-interest, and it is important to examine a number of distinctive sectors of regional co-operation.
4. Key areas of regional co-operation in education
- 4.1 Many of the key areas of co-operation are associated with the university which, of course, has to be a federal institution. Both the Caribbean (UWI) and the South Pacific (USP) have federal universities. The former has campuses on Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados, the latter on Fiji (Viti Levu) and Western Samoa. There was a third example in the form of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS), but Lesotho seceded from the Federation, taking the largest campus with it. There is a distinct possibility of the remaining two campuses becoming national universities in due course. This may well happen also to UWI.
- 4.2 The presence of a regional university campus on what is already likely to be a core, rather than peripheral territory, obviously provides relative ease of access for students from the same island. This is due to the increased cost of travel for those from remote fringes of the catchment area, and also to the larger number of applicants coming from the main islands. Nonetheless a proportionally large amount of intellectual talent has been drained from the smaller to the larger islands and boosts the reservoir of high level manpower at the core. Quite apart from academic considerations, these regional university campuses represent a growth industry providing many auxiliary jobs for the people of the main island(s). Add to all this the probably inappropriate structural and functional model for the university and its role in any developing country, let alone a loosely limbed chain of small independent island nations, and the whole operation appears to be dysfunctional, even socially divisive as far as the students' home communities are concerned.
- 4.3 This need not be so, provided the universities are willing to rethink their role. Consider for example the recently expressed views of Dr Ian Michael on the role of universities in developing countries. In view of the constraints on funding, he contends that such universities must choose clearly between attempting to meet international academic standards - which he rightly states are largely a fiction - and making their role more relevant to local needs. Of course local needs, including learning needs, may be differentially perceived as between academics, local politicians, parents, students and

communities. Nonetheless, Michael contends that a more vocational role for universities does not necessarily violate academic standards. Distinguishing between standards and levels, Michael states:

"Academic standards are expressed in the form of qualities such as intellectual integrity, mastery of facts, understanding of processes. Academic levels are expressed in terms of difficulty, complexity, abstraction, specialisation. The work of children at the primary level of schooling can possess (in the forms appropriate to it) the qualities which express standards. The academic standards commonly thought distinctive of university work are in fact levels: real academic standards can be obtained through good teaching at any level. To lower the level of academic work is not therefore to lower its standard. The enduring benefits to an individual of academic work include the development of analytical skill. The development of imagination, ingenuity and creativity; knowing when information is needed and how to set about finding it. A university can, without shame, undertake the education (not just the training) of competent and thoughtful craftsmen because their work, though at a low level, can be analytical, imaginative and well informed, and thus of good academic standard".(3)

- 4.4 This view would seem to express what is needed from the federal universities of small country consortia, but it will be very difficult to achieve in view of all the traditional and political pressures placed upon them by the expectation and aspirations of various social groups, not the least being their own academic staff. However, in the field of educational studies, through various extension services and other regional devices both USP and UWI are beginning to relate more closely to local needs. The very supportive attitude of the School of Education in UWI to the radical restructuring of teacher education in Grenada is a case in point. Numerous country papers from South Pacific nations involved in the Regional Advisory Workshops of the USP Institute of Education praise the efforts of the university to identify and confront local needs in education. But just as inter-ministerial co-operation is needed in national administration of educational provision, so inter-faculty co-operation in researching and developing new locally adaptive forms of education is also needed.
- 4.5 One important initiative in island regions would be to use distance teaching methods to allow degree and diploma students to follow as much of their course as possible in their home country. This could be boosted by regular short visits of tutors to individual country locations rather than very long periods of time spent away from home by students. Indeed the Open University model operated in Britain might well be worthy of consideration in such regions - though not of course its materials. It would be equally applicable to large low-density countries like Guyana and Botswana. Indeed the University of Guyana has already developed a system of shorter diploma and certificate courses to meet specific manpower needs; what such institutions need now is the technology and the political support - in the case of regional institutions - from member governments.

- 4.6 If the universities were willing to develop more flexible courses and study methods, they would also have to be acutely aware of the constraints of smallness of scale on the employment capabilities of contributing nations. The first wave of skilled local manpower will occupy key positions for possibly decades ahead, and courses will have to be discontinued whenever necessary. As Kennedy's analogy has it, the universities must not:

"... continue to teach fish spearing long after the lagoons have become clouded by pollution." (4).

- 4.7 The combination of local and internationally significant scales of educational operations can only be handled by a university, but a university wholly committed to the region it serves - a community school writ large. Just as community schools have been difficult for local groups to understand and accept, so the universities may well face opposition at all levels. Their traditional elitism is highly valued by significant sections of society in small countries as well as large. They would not be asked to discard the pursuit of excellence, merely to direct that excellence of standard to urgent issues of the day.

- 4.8 Although most small Commonwealth countries have developed some sort of curriculum unit, and remarkably useful work is being done at the primary level on the basis of scarce expertise and extremely limited resources, the regional universities have a vital role to play in stimulating, supporting and indeed recording local curricula initiatives. In all the small countries of the Commonwealth there are, hidden away, many self-effacing sometimes unqualified teachers who have for decades been using the local environment as a resource for learning. The term curriculum development is not preferred here in view of its connotations of a spurious orthodoxy of procedure that merely needs to be carried through. The particular context of groups of individual island nations has taken its toll of projects in both the South Pacific and the Caribbean. It is not only the close association between national identity and formal education systems that has caused problems of co-operation, but also the genuine individuality of each nation, even parts of nations, in terms of language, culture and economy. As the Terminal Report of the UNDP Secondary Curriculum Project somewhat ruefully observed in 1976:

"The existing project was designed to create a self-sustaining Curriculum Development Unit (at USP), and, after six years of activity, has not achieved that particular objective A new spirit of independence in these islands seems to have emerged since 1970, judging from the desire of several countries to take responsibility for their own curriculum at primary and secondary levels. Therefore it may be more useful to decentralise future assistance to the on-going work of local curriculum development units in several countries." (5)

- 4.9 This seems a sound reaction to the outcome of this particular project, but there arises a general question as to what sort of assistance is envisaged. What local units, administrations and individual teachers need is a new information base, not more curriculum theory. One of the problems

associated with small scale and isolation is the poor data base from which to proceed to construct a locally meaningful curriculum. The need is for the expertise to research and collect such a base, and present it at the appropriate level to link local and external systems. Some of this research could be done by pupils following simple tasks in a specially constructed social and environmental studies text developed between teachers and the university adviser in workshop sessions.

- 4.10 Another aspect of curriculum development that would require regional co-operation is the infusion of technical education into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. It was clear from the survey of small Commonwealth states that the technological and technical expertise and capacity was the weakest strand of most systems. Developing separate technical institutions is an unnecessary cost and also maintains the image of technical education as separate and consequently inferior to academic. Better to effect the curriculum change and leave the superficial image of the school as it is - generally acceptable to local communities. At post-school level, the technical facility could be merged with the academic sixth form and whatever other tertiary elements exist (e.g., catering school, marine training college, teachers' college) to create a junior college affiliated to the regional university - another example of interdependence and co-operation in a small scale context, but linking local and external systems.
- 4.11 In order to gain control over the secondary school curriculum it is necessary for external validation and certification from outside the region to be replaced by local assessment procedures. This requires a great deal of co-operation and trust between the small countries concerned, and a considerable amount of expertise, and in view of this the creation and operation of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to date has on balance been a success. CXC began in 1974 with the object of replacing 'O' level GCE (Cambridge) and in the much longer term 'A' level also. The first examinations were held in 1979 in Caribbean History, English, Geography, Integrated Science and Mathematics. In 1980 Agricultural Science, Office Procedures, Principles of Accounts, Principles of Business, Typewriting and Spanish were added, and in 1981 English Literature and Social Studies. The following subjects will become available during the early 1980s: Industrial Arts, Physical Sciences, Music, Art and Craft, French, Home Economics and Business Education.
- 4.12 The lower 'basic' level of CXC is designed to link with the world of work and provide a suitable basis for employment at 15/16 plus. The higher 'general' level is intended as a foundation for further study. Predictably there has been a concern over equivalence of standard with the GCE 'O' level, and the readiness of employees and universities to accept CXC. The procrastination of the UWI in respect of recognition did not engender confidence in overseas universities and did the CXC an unnecessary disservice.
- 4.13 The problem now is the cost of recurrent expenditure on maintaining the considerable bureaucratic and technical support systems in both Barbados and Jamaica. In 1979 an agreement was signed with USAID to run the joint 'Caribbean Educational Development Project', which should maintain and considerably develop the system at least to 1983. It includes financial and staffing support for in-service curriculum renewal workshops throughout the region, with considerable teacher involvement. There is still some concern that in its need to exhibit equivalence, CXC has been pitched at too high a

level. On the basis of 1979 results of pupils taking both CXC and GCE, the former proved to be more difficult than the latter in all subjects taken, excepting Geography.

- 4.14 By any standards CXC has been a major achievement of regional co-operation within the Commonwealth Caribbean, but it must be remembered that it is mainly for the academic minority, and yet exerts pressures downwards throughout lower secondary and primary education that influence curriculum thinking away from the local concerns of the mass of the population in each country concerned.
- 4.15 In the South Pacific the aforementioned UNDP Secondary Curriculum Project did not result in an equivalent of CXC, and the region has continued with external validation, mainly New Zealand 'South Pacific Option' papers in the various subjects. However, in view of the reaction of member states to the UNDP project and the development of local secondary curricula in several countries it was felt necessary to have some sort of regional co-ordination and equivalence. Hence the establishment of the South Pacific Board of Educational Assessment in 1980. This is quite different from CXC in that the main objective is to provide training skills in assessment procedures. The headquarters facilities for the Board are provided by the South Pacific Commission and the cost is borne by New Zealand, Australia and Britain, in addition to local inputs by the island countries of the region.
- 4.16 That this is a service facility and not, as yet, envisaged as a regional examination board is a reflection both of the wider cultural range and greater geographic distance between component nations of the region. The options are still open for multi-national co-operation in the generation of a local and regional information base from which to build new curricula in each island state. Satellite communications across the region, if maintained and developed could greatly assist both general courses at tertiary level and individualised staff development. It could well be that the greater external and internal isolation of the South Pacific has provided the stimulus to involve the high technology that can simultaneously serve the local and international dimensions of island based survival and development.

5. Summary

- 5.1 A number of areas and degrees of dependency have been mentioned here in relation to the educational problems and initiatives of the small Commonwealth nations of the South Pacific and Caribbean regions in particular. Although strong legacies of colonial dependency remain, especially in the economic and cultural fields, the dimension of dependency which is of most significant now, in such clusters of small nations, is that of regional interdependence and co-operation. This carries with it areas of tension and rivalry, the full extent and effect of which have yet to be seen, but at the centre of the web stands the set of issues associated with the regional university.
- 5.2 Guyana has long since developed its own university, but is in any case a large land based nation on the periphery of the island zone of the West Indies. However, it is not at all unlikely that the three existing campuses of the University of the West Indies will become independent national universities. Trinidad and Tobago is on its way to achieving this particular goal, utilising its oil wealth to establish second schools of medicine and law

within UWI. The original plan of the regional institution was to concentrate highly technical and/or professional subjects at one or other of the three campuses - medicine in Jamaica, engineering and agriculture in Trinidad and law in Barbados. It would seem that the federal co-operation necessary to sustain the institution as a fully regional facility is breaking down, and this will of course hit the small island nations hardest by placing them in a more dependent position than previously. Maintaining and developing CXC will continue to be a considerable burden in terms of finance and expertise, unless the current assistance from the USA becomes indefinite, in which case a new dependency is created in that area.

- 5.3 In the South Pacific, not without similar tensions in some areas, regional co-operation and curricula flexibility seems more likely to develop, with USP playing a crucial role in providing technical services and assistance to enhance local expertise even in the remotest locations.
- 5.4 Elsewhere among the small nations of the Commonwealth, the question of higher education dependency crops up in different forms. The countries of Southern Africa have employment links with the Republic of South Africa that affect their entire educational situation including the potential role of the two universities. In the Indian Ocean, Mauritius and Seychelles exhibit little co-operation - they are neither geographically nor ideologically close - and Seychelles being very much the smaller is anxious to avoid a regionally dependent position. It prefers instead to adopt a policy of multi-dependency in higher education as a means of avoiding too much control by any one outside power. Mauritius is dependent on the outside world only for the highly technical area of human resource development. There is already established both a university and an Institute of Education. A full, if complex, educational infrastructure is in operation but the relatively modest level of the national economy constrains further sophistication in terms of both finance and relevance. Cyprus has until recently adopted a policy of dependence in higher education, probably arising from its cultural identities being so strongly and divergent as between Greece, Turkey and Britain. However there is to be a national university, envisaged by the Cyprus authorities as becoming an institution of regional importance. Once again Malta comes top of the league illustrating that small geographic size can be an advantage if combined with a good location and a diversified economy. The rationalisation of the two universities, while probably in the main a political move, will nonetheless be able to respond even more effectively to the employment needs of this compact nation, which even enjoys the cultural security of a unique yet serviceable language.
- 5.5 The question of clear political direction is very important, and for very small countries this must incorporate the local culture and language in a positive way. As Carrington has rightly stated in respect of the Commonwealth Caribbean culture's continued reliance on externally derived models of education:

"The philosophical vacuum reduces educational planning to an exercise in arithmetic".(6)

- 5.6 If indeed, through the educational neglect of genuine local cultures, closely related to delicate ecosystems, the approach to educational provision became a merely quantitative exercise then, by definition, the problems of scale, isolation and dependency would be endemic and insoluble.

References

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