Education and Development in the Third World

A revolutionary project in Cuba and an evolutionary project in Jamaica have implications for the rest of the world.

JOHN J. COGAN

Although at different stages of economic development, all countries are engaged in a struggle for decent, human survival (Wilson, 1980, p. 1). Life in Third World countries is very difficult. Although these nations account for three-fourths of this planet's population, they produce less than one-fourth of the world's goods and services. The poor in these nations are the poorest of the poor.

In order to understand the development of Third World nations it is essential to understand the origins and nature of their educational systems. Colonial past. The colonial educational heritage permeates nearly every Third World society today, with disastrous consequences for these poor nations as they attempt to develop in a rapidly changing world.

The predominately French and British schools that exist all across Africa and Asia are reminiscent of an earlier era. In the home countries, the educational systems underwent changes over the years; in the host countries, these systems were preserved intact to such an extent that many countries find themselves today with a retrospective school system whose perspective begins in the nineteenth century. The host countries chronically seem to lag at least one or two reforms behind the colonial powers (Botkin and others, 1979, p. 71).

Rural vs. urban schooling. One of the direct outgrowths of the colonial educational system is the tremendous imbalance between schooling in rural and urban areas in less developed countries. Colonial power was established in urban centers; inhabitants of rural areas received little to no schooling but instead were put to work on the plantations of the wealthy colonizers. This educational gap remains today.

The [rural] school itself, in many cases amounting to no more than a common room inadequate to house all the primary grades, is often too far away from where the people live. The teachers are less qualified—if they are qualified at all—than those in urban areas. They are frequently unprepared for their job and unfamiliar with the socio-cultural environment. As they begin to become more effective after some experience and practice, they are moved to the cities. The teaching facilities and materials are very rudimentary. The divorce between the curriculum and the needs of the rural community may be almost total (Botkin and others, 1979, p. 62).

Access to the system. Another major problem faced by Third World countries, and also closely linked with their colonial past, is the highly selective nature of the educational system (Cogan, 1981). Most children in these nations go only to primary school, if they go to school at all. Admission to secondary schools is reserved for those who do very well at the primary level and is generally determined by external examinations—assessment measures prepared and graded in the former colonizing country. These exams, to a large extent, determine not only what is to be taught, but to some degree how it is taught. As a result, children learn little that is relevant to their own cultural, historical or sociopolitical heritage other than the role of the former power in determining their present status.

Teacher training. Teachers in these countries are often poorly trained. Primary teachers generally receive some specialized teacher training in secondary school or several years of preparation in a training college. Secondary teachers are prepared in training colleges or in some instances at the university level, the latter being the exception, not the rule. In rural areas as the better students finish primary school, they begin to teach younger children in school.

Often, after one or two years, teachers find that working in poor facilities, with large teacher-pupil ratios, little or no material resources, and minimal pay
is not worth the effort. Many find better paying jobs; others remain unemployed which in turn adds to an already overburdened economy.

Planning vs. implementation. Educational planning in the Third World is usually centralized in order to develop a national system as rapidly as possible while also responding to national personnel needs. In theory this makes sense. On the practical side, however, many of those responsible for education in the central ministry have not been in the field for a long time or in some cases never. This leads to massive gaps in understanding between planners and those implementing the plans, especially in rural areas.

Nothing illustrates the tremendous gap between the content and process of schooling in developed and less developed nations better than the following summary:

- The wealthiest quarter of the world (30 countries with 24 percent of the population) spends 75 times more per inhabitant on education than the least developed quarter (23 countries with 24 percent of the population), a ratio three times greater than their economic disparities which are 25 to 1.
- Sixty percent of the world's population receives 6 percent of world expenditures on public schools.
- The USA, USSR, and Japan account for more higher education than the rest of the world put together (in terms of university expenditures, graduates, and professors).
- In half the world's countries, half the children never complete primary school. In 1980, there will still be 240 million children between 5 and 14 not attending school.
- Thirty-seven countries representing 30 percent of world population possess 91 percent of the total number of scientists, engineers, and technicians, while 115 countries with over two-thirds of world population possess about 9 percent of these qualified personnel.

(Sources: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook and Ruth L. Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures, 1978, as cited in Botkin and others, 1979, p. 64.)

Two Caribbean Education Development Models

Although the overall picture is discouraging, examples of innovation give hope for the future. I've visited two such innovative projects in Cuba and Jamaica. Both focus on educational development in rural areas albeit under very different sociopolitical and economic systems. These two Third World nations are former colonies of Spain and Britain respectively and have experienced all the problems of development discussed earlier. The leadership in both countries, however, believes that unless significant attention is given to development in rural areas, overall national development will be slowed.

Schools-in-the-Countryside. Cuba's escuelas en el campo, literally "schools-in-the-countryside," are based on the Marxist principle of combining work and study. In a nation continually faced with labor shortages, the work-study model embodied in these schools serves a dual function: educating the next generation while students contribute directly to the economy. With over 50 percent of Cuban laborers employed in agriculture these schools represent a model the government intends to build on for the future (Cogan, 1978).

The relationship between education and development in Cuba is clear. Indeed Castro has said, "Education and revolution are the same thing" (Cuban Ministry of Education, 1961). These secondary schools are organized around the needs of Castro's developing socialist society:

- The need to systematically combine intellectual study with physical work
- The need to develop a respect for all types of work, both mental and physical
- The need to educate within the community setting to develop an attitude of communal responsibility
- The need for universal education
- The need to channel the scientific and technological advances developed largely in the cities to the countryside where they can be applied in production
- The need to develop and promote behaviors that can be emulated by others

In trying to meet these needs, the schools, which are run on a boarding system, are in effect laboratories where solutions to educational problems facing Cuba can be tested.

The students are divided into two groups. One group attends classes in the morning while the other works in the fields; the process is reversed in the afternoon. The students I observed worked in citrus groves or on a nearby dairy farm. Their curriculum consisted of basic subjects in all Cuban secondary schools: Spanish, geography, history, math, chemistry, physics, biology, foreign languages (generally English), work education, technical training, and physical exercise.

The school I visited was also used for an experimental teacher training pro-

gram. More than 50 percent of the trained teachers left the country when Castro came to power; the pedagogical training detachments in the countryside are attempting to ease Cuba's acute teacher shortage. Under the five-year, field-based training program, a cadre of trainees is attached to a school where they receive instruction in the morning and then practice their newly learned skills with secondary students during the afternoon.

Jamaica's Rural Education Development Programme. As an outgrowth of the Jamaican Education Sector Survey completed in 1973 (Miller and Murray, 1973), the government of Jamaica embarked on the Rural Education Development Programme in 1976. The five separate projects under the Programme are now in various stages of completion (Government of Jamaica, 1977). I will focus here on the project I know best as a result of my research efforts in Jamaica: the development of teacher training programs that emphasize rural development.

Sam Sharpe Teachers' College is located in St. James Parish in a rural area near Montego Bay. The College was built under a joint venture of the Jamaican Government and the World Bank. It opened in September 1975 under the dynamic leadership of its principal, Simon A. Clarke. His four key objectives are to provide students with:

- Sound academic training
- Sound professional training
- Opportunities for the fullest possible personal development
- Means for using their academic, professional, and personal accomplishments for community development

The fourth objective is woven throughout the entire program.

Clarke's model is one of self-sufficiency. During his tenure at Green Island Junior Secondary School, he instituted the model and the school was able to produce most of its own food. He strongly believes that rural development can be approached through educating children with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop their own community and not be dependent upon others.

When Clarke became principal of the new Sam Sharpe Teachers' College in 1975, he was committed to implementing the model there as well. He was convinced that by training teachers in self-sufficiency and by gaining their commitment to it, the effect would be
widespread when they implemented the model at their first teaching posts.

Clarke began instituting the model the first day students arrived:

We can well remember that first day, when bewildered looking students made their way up the hill through the mud and grime of unpaved roads and piles of freshly mixed cement and concrete blocks. The buildings were not ready and the contractors thought we were out of our minds to even think of starting on the day—but we did. The water and electricity were not fully connected and the only furniture we had then were beds, classroom desks and chairs and basic kitchen equipment. The pioneer students immediately had to fall to a number of chores. They had to fetch water from a tank some distance away, and to begin the cleaning-up operations. When this was done, since there was hardly any topsoil anywhere, earth had to be brought and spread, and grass planted. The original landscaping was done by this group of students. After a week of orientation, their courses began. Early Childhood and Primary education were our two areas of emphasis (Clarke, 1978, p. 5).

The college is now self-sufficient in poultry, eggs, and milk. Vegetable gardens are planted as well, with the hope of setting up a food market on campus in the near future. Using chicken manure to produce methane gas to offset high energy costs is also being contemplated.

The college is closely linked with the community of Granville in which it is located. Clarke sees community development and enrichment of peoples' lives as a primary role of education. Consequently, students in training are required to participate regularly in at least one approved community activity.

Could these programs become models for educational development in other parts of the Third World? The Cuban revolutionary model is clearly directed toward social engineering for a new society and a different role for the individual within society. The Jamaican model is more evolutionary, but the long-term educational and economic benefits can still be realized. The point is that both are models that work for their given developing societies.

**Implications for U.S. Educators**

U.S. educators need to be more aware generally about the Third World and the massive problems these nations face. We tend to "discover" these countries only when we find ourselves embroiled in conflict with them—Iran is a prime example—or when they are in our national interest—Nicaragua and El Salvador are recent examples. The fact is that our futures together on this planet are very interrelated.

Curriculum specialists and supervisors can play an important role by making teachers aware of inservice opportunities and curriculum materials about the Third World. An excellent curriculum package entitled *Toward a Better World* (Baldwin and Ross-Larson, 1981) focuses on the developing world with specific case studies on Mexico, India, and Kenya.

Second, and closely related, we need to achieve a more holistic approach to teacher training. Especially disturbing in this area is the finding of a recent study (Barrows and others, 1980) that assessed college students' knowledge about global relationships. College seniors achieved a mean score of 50.5 correct out of 101 items. History majors scored highest (59.3) while education majors, our future teachers, scored lowest (39.8). As educators we should all be concerned about this poor performance and take immediate steps to rectify the situation. Teacher trainers, curriculum specialists, and teachers should work cooperatively to develop teacher training programs with a global perspective (Cogan, 1980).

Third, many of the problems faced by developing nations in both urban and rural areas are similar to those faced in this country; for example, poor reading skills, overcrowded classrooms, high student absenteeism, irrelevant curriculum, and low possibility of employment for large segments of the student population. Projects like Cuba's assault on illiteracy and Jamaica's adult learning project (JAMAL) might be adapted in large urban centers in this country.

Fourth, as we move toward the end of this century, the less developed countries have called for a New International Economic Order which would exchange petroleum for technology. The 21st century will become the information age in which microprocessors, computers, and technological advancements unknown at this time will drastically alter education. For the first time both developed and less developed peoples will have the resources available to realize their full potential. This will present a unique opportunity for educators from all over this planet to work together in the development of a truly "universal" education.

Finally, the growing interdependence of life systems on this planet cannot be ignored. Nearly all societies are committed to education as a key tool in their development. To date this commitment has been largely verbal. We are now at a point where we must put our words into action. We clearly have the technological capability to do this. The question is whether or not we have the will. All of us would benefit through concerted efforts to learn about and from each other. Curriculum directors and supervisors could easily lead the way.

**References**


Cogan, John J. "Cuba's Schools in the Countryside: A Model For the Developing World?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 60, 1 (September 1978): 30–32.


