

EDUCATION & NATION-BUILDING:
A CASE FOR CURRICULUM PLANNING

Earle G. Haye is a lecturer in Education at the College of The Bahamas. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto where he undertook studies in Sociology and Education.

One in-escapable fact which all ex-colonial territories must face is the need for the re-structuring of the inherited educational system. This system has been referred to in various ways. One such reference is that of its being "narrow, meagre, ill-suited and irrelevant."¹ When one considers the responsibility facing a young nation - the responsibility for its own social, political and economic development - and the fact that the educational system is usually regarded as being among the chief agents for any measure of success towards that end, it becomes clear that a system viewed so dimly cannot be tolerated.

With what does one replace such a system? The obvious answer - with a relevant system. Relevant from the viewpoint that the new system should be geared towards meeting the needs of the developing nation. Relevant also, in that the skills to be taught and the attitudes to be developed are in keeping with the aims of the developing nation. In this regard it cannot be over-emphasized that the re-structuring of the educational system must pay more than token attention to the matter of curriculum development.

Curriculum, it has been argued, is not developed in a vacuum. Educational planners and curriculum development personnel must have a clear idea of the nation's developmental goals. In the case of the Bahamian educational system, this line of argument is not new. A call for clearly defined national goals to facilitate educational development for the nation has previously been made by the Commonwealth Review Team on The Bahamas Educational System.²

In the budget speech to the House of Assembly on December 5th, 1980, the Deputy Prime Minister outlined what was referred to as a series of measures designed to bring the educational system more in line with the government's overall national

development goal.³ This statement appears to suggest that there is recognition of the need for a working relationship between national goals and educational planning. However, curriculum planners will need to know more than the fact that there exists a goal for national development. This goal must be broken down into its various components and stated in a manner which will provide guidelines for the formulation of general educational objectives. From these, curriculum developers can formulate specific objectives, provide relevant curriculum content and plan appropriate learning experiences.

Curriculum developers need to know how the developing nation, through the eyes of its leaders, sees its own possibilities for development. They need to know also, the role that the educational system is expected to play in the realization of developmental goals. Only then can they plan the kinds of programmes which bear any relationship to the kind of development which is planned.

Reference has been made elsewhere to the government's policy of equality of educational opportunity as education for investment and development.⁴ Likewise, the record shows the significant increase in government's spending on education since 1967 - a period referred to as "A Period of Educational Reconstruction".⁵ The point has also been made that money spent on education must be seen in the light of its being an investment in the future of the country and its citizens. While this significant investment in education can be lauded as a noble act, we have been advised that it is not always safe to speak of education as an investment in terms of human potential.⁶ The argument advanced in this regard is that the economic capabilities of those being educated must relate very closely to the sort of society in which they are going to live rather than just the one in which they are living at the present time. This argument serves

to underscore the need for educational planning to be approached within the framework of the overall goals of national development. The development process itself implies change; change in both economic and social life. It follows then that for change to take place in society the educational system must be modified to facilitate such change. Thus the need for curriculum planning.

In this quest for relevance and in the absence of stated goals, what do we teach? What are the skills, the attitudes and the knowledge needed for tomorrow that the schools should teach today? Skills to be taught should include much more than the familiar skills of communication, computation, reading and comprehension. Attention must be paid to the development of thinking skills. Students need to be helped to adapt themselves to changing situations. Where attitudes are concerned, the curriculum should strive towards developing in students a positive attitude towards change. They should be guided to see that change is inevitable, that it is an integral part of the development process. Emphasis on attitudes should include the development of positive attitudes towards "work," not just towards certain types of jobs. If national development is to become a reality, students must be guided to see the needs of the society and of their responsibilities as citizens to help to satisfy such needs.

In the absence of clearly defined national goals, accommodating the knowledge component of the curriculum becomes a guessing game. The danger here is that the needs of the society might easily be overlooked while developers concentrate on the nature of their subject areas. Two possible guiding principles with regards to the selection of content follows. Firstly, the knowledge component should represent the most significant, the most valid and the most up-to-date knowledge available. Secondly, basic concepts should be taught in such a way that students' minds and attitudes are prepared for further learning.

An attempt has been made here to argue for a positive approach to curriculum planning if the educational system is to be made relevant to the needs of the developing nation. As a parting shot in that direction the following points are being re-iterated.

1. Effective use of the educational system for nation building will require effective planning of the curriculum.
2. Curriculum planning cannot be effectively done in the absence of clearly defined national goals.

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