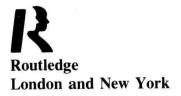
EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

EDITED BY

COLIN BROCK AND DONALD CLARKSON

Education in Central America and the Caribbean

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Chapter One

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

THE CARIBBEAN BASIN - A REALISTIC REGIONAL CONCEPT?

Colin Brock

Due to the formative influences of politics and language on the development of education systems, their evolution and related stocks of literature tend often to appear relatively discrete. In the Caribbean region this is illustrated by the several legacies of the colonial powers in respect of education, there being Hispanic, Francophone and Anglophone sets of countries and traditions which have been interrelated or disconnected at different times over the past five hundred years. Furthermore, pre-Columban educational developments were present in some form in all the indigenous Amerindian communities of the Caribbean basin, and reached very high levels in the case of the Mayan civilizations of Central America. Because of the plural nature of colonial influences in this part of the world, the 'Caribbean Basin' has not normally been perceived as a region from the outside, except of course from the perspective of the USA as regularized in one of the most recent of its backyard campaigns, the 'Caribbean Basin Initiative'. Florida, of course, forms part of the northern rim of the basin and Miami is arguably the chief central place in systematic terms, even though being peripheral in physical location.

At the height of the Spanish Empire in the New World, the majority of the basin was under Iberian control, and the

fact that their principal convoy routes for imports and exports in respect of the whole of Spanish South and Central America focused on the south and east littorals of the Caribbean Sea provided a veneer of cultural cohesion, but that was to crack under the strain of repeated incursions by other empire-building powers, especially in the West Indian islands. Indeed, even today the bulk of the Central and South American states that comprise the western and southern rims of the basin remain Hispanic in language and tradition, the only exception being Belize, as the Guyanas are physically outside - though in cultural terms undoubtedly 'Caribbean'. The islands that collectively comprise the West Indies in general remained colonies longer than the mainland states. Though the majority are now independent of their European metropoles, at least in respect of direct political control, some are still colonies of the United Kingdom, others form a joint Kingdom with The Netherlands, while Guadaloupe, Guyane and Martinique are an integral part of France. Among the larger islands of the greater Antilles, two - Cuba and Puerto Rico - have attracted the interest of the superpowers who have taken on the mantle of metropolitan policemen. In addition to Cuba and Puerto Rico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic have also experienced the tutelage of the USA in the past, while more recently the Windward Island state Grenada was the centre of Cuban and Soviet attention before being invaded by the USA in 1983 and returned to the western fold. So the active interest of external forces which led to the Caribbean political geography of the mid-twentieth century is still occurring, albeit with new agencies to the fore.

This not only testifies to the strategic sensitivity of the Caribbean region but also carries educational implications. Perhaps of all colonial legacies, that of education is the most enduring, and in the case of the island states of the West Indies even more influential in that, as Naipaul puts it, these countries and communities are 'the creations of empire'. Whereas in the mainland states of the Americas and elsewhere there was an indigenous population that survived in different degrees and contributed to the hybrid culture, in the islands, where Amerindians were exterminated or expelled, an entirely derived society was created. Throughout the Caribbean region, numerous Christian denominations vied with each other to

convert both indigenous and imported populations to their beliefs, and inevitably education had to be involved in the work of these missions if they were to achieve their objectives. Where slavery formed the basis of the economic order, that is to say in the non-Hispanic colonies, schooling was not permitted until emancipation. Consequently in the Latin Caribbean, schooling has a longer record of existence and is predominantly Catholic in tradition. Early in their colonization, the Spanish established seminaries and universities as the formative phase of what were to become highly selective and academic systems typical of their legacy throughout Latin America. They lent themselves to the servicing of the elite, conservative agencies ensuring cultural and social reproduction. However, another strand of the Catholic tradition in the Latin Caribbean has long supported the underprivileged, working with rural communities, spreading literacy and awareness. Within the region in recent times the most notable inputs of this kind have been in Nicaragua, where they inevitably conflict with the conservatism of American patronage. In Cuba, the Catholic educational tradition conflicts ideologically with the doctrine of the secular state, but in that case the state itself has rendered educational opportunity universally accessible since the revolution of 1959.

In the non-Hispanic West Indian Islands and Belize, denominationalism has created a kaleidoscopic quilt, the composition of which contributes strongly to the idiosyncracy of both island society and the schooling that helps to regulate it. Insularity, smallness of scale and remoteness of location combine in different degrees, island by island, to further promote locale-specific educational situations, the problems associated with them being less amenable to resolution through theories and methods developed from the experience of larger industrialized nations. Nonetheless, received conventional wisdom whereby salvation - economic as well as spiritual - derives from education seems undiminished.

Even in the larger states of the region, the economies remain dependent on the old or new metropolitan markets. From the fruit company plantations of Central America to the sugar plantations of Cuba to the yacht havens of the Virgin Islands and the oil industry of Trinidad, metropolitan capital is in control and, except in the most sophisticated states such as

Mexico and Venezuela, the relatively concentrated nature of these economies poses problems for relating a general education to the occupational structure. In general, the smaller the country, the greater the discrepancy; even affluent tax havens like the Cayman Islands rely on externally generated wealth.

the era of European colonialism, groups of metropolitan-related Caribbean and Central American states, while being dependent, did belong to networks of culturally related political systems and their attendant educational philosophies and provisions. This was paternalistic and formative, greatly affecting attitudes and assumptions about schooling that have been resistant to change. So while in Cuba and Puerto Rico the relatively recent influence of the respective superpower ideologies and systems is strong, a continuum of Spanish-derived individuality is still a significant part of the culture of education. As Donald Clarkson shows in his historical narrative of American influence on Puerto Rican education, despite the firm association with the USA and freedom of movement between the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the mainland states of the Union, adherence to certain cultural traits, and especially the Spanish language, in education is enduring.

Both islands are significant influences at the regional level, and Mark Richmond takes up this theme in relation to Cuba in particular. New networks are developing, interconnecting and overlapping with the remnants of the old. Jamaica and the British Virgin Islands represent the core and the periphery of the former 'British West Indies'. Now, as Errol Miller illustrates, the question of marginality is a key concern in the former, while the latter finds itself in a symbiotic relationship with a powerful and proximate neighbour that even extends to being within the \$US zone. Nonetheless, David Smawfield is able to highlight the educational idiosyncracies that derive not only from extreme smallness of scale, but also from a degree of colonial cultural inertia as far as compulsory schooling is concerned.

The politics of Central America, so internationally visible in recent decades, inevitably make their mark on educational policy and provision. In such a context, adult educational policy represents the front line of the advancement of awareness. Without this thrust and the extension of adult literacy, any

significant amelioration of chronic legacies of curricular irrelevance, wastage and underachievement at school level is almost impossible to achieve. Yet the political implications of adult educational advance are problematic for existing systems of social regulation in many of the national units in the area. In his contribution to this volume, Gonzalo Retamal is able to catalogue the resulting tension in a wide-ranging review of the mixed fortunes of this sector in Central America,

What can be achieved when educational access and opportunity are encouraged is well illustrated by Pilar Aguilar in the celebrated and distinctive case of Costa Rica. In Venezuela, too, recent educational reform - as described by Lilia Borrero and Eyra Jimenez - has been attempting to utilize some of the 'fortunes of oil' to support a human resource development that will meet the diversified needs of a post-petroleum economy. Indeed, in places where educational reform has become endemic, such as Mexico, innovations tend not to be thoroughly carried through. Pressurizing the reformist momentum established more than half a century ago by the Mexican Revolution, there are now the educational demands of unprecedented urbanization. Mexico City is arguably the world's largest, and the educational problems and policies attached to such relentless expansion are examined here by Guadalupe Gonzalez-Paredes and David Turner.

That we have within the Caribbean basin a remarkable range of educational contexts, in an area that was once colonially homogeneous and is relatively modest in scale in global terms, is undeniable. There is also no doubt that in physical terms we are looking at a distinctive region. Whether it is realistic to view it as such in educational terms is obviously less clear, but it would seem that developing educational networks, such as the Association of Caribbean Universities, and more strongly, the role of education in the extension and maintenance of American influence, make a focus on the basin from this viewpoint a legitimate one. While a volume of essays such as this cannot pretend to take an integrated view, it is hoped that, if only by assembling studies from various cultural and political traditions and networks of the area within one set, a more comprehensive Caribbean perspective than that normally obtaining will have been encouraged in the field of international education. The region

Editorial Introduction

is rich in potential comparative studies of manageable proportions, but the educational literature relating to it is culture-specific and minimal.

These are just cases, but their juxtaposition is a first step on the way to a more regional perception of the Caribbean Basin in educational terms, and hopefully an encouragement to further studies.

Chapter Two

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES IN PUERTO RICAN EDUCATION

Donald Clarkson

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned mainly with the impact of American influence on the development, structure and style of Puerto Rican education. Needless to say, the influence of American educational practices in the Caribbean has been linked with political actions taken during the twentieth century. The principal areas effected include Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic (located on the island of Hispaniola), the United States Virgin Islands and the island of Puerto Rico. In general, American educational policy in the Caribbean was formulated by responsible American officials. In time, local officials supported and eventually assumed control of the educational programmes in their schools. This chapter will examine American influence in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico through the historical phases of military territorial government, territorial government, and civil under the Commonwealth status up to the achievement of educational autonomy in 1947.

THE BEGINNINGS

When the United States acquired Puerto Rico from Spain, under the provisions of the Treaty of Paris (1898), about one million people were added to the American population. Their culture was, and is, basically Hispanic with liberal cultural

infusions from Africa, Europe and the Americas. Five hundred years of Spanish colonialism had developed strong emotional feelings of the need for self-rule and perhaps independence. Puerto Ricans were a people who identified themselves as Borinquenos (an old Indian name for the inland dwellers), inhabiting their own piece of earth. They had developed a feeling of political pride and governmental competence, having been granted autonomous internal self-rule from Spain in 1897. Their political thought processes concerning autonomy were their own, having developed through interaction with peninsula laissez-faire authority under the Crown, thus briefly exhibiting self-rule under the Spanish Republic; then in open conflict with the tightening of control by the peninsula government after the Restoration; finally through legitimate internal self-rule under an Autonomous Constitution. They had been loyal to the mother country, not because they were satisfied, but because the Puerto Rican is usually a constitutional fighter, not a revolutionary. After scarcely a year of self-rule their world changed. Conflict between the United States and Spain over Cuba led to war. Martial law was enforced in Puerto Rico, and then as a result of the Treaty of Paris the Borinquenos found themselves a United States colonial possession.

The United States accepted responsibility for the future development of the Borinquenos. American policy was directed by the belief that the inhabitants of Puerto Rico could be remade into Americans, as had been the case with Hispanic and French inhabitants of territories acquired in the westward expansion of the United States during the nineteenth century.

The institution selected to assimilate the Puerto Rican into

The institution selected to assimilate the Puerto Rican into American life was the school. This was in keeping with the belief that the school was the institution that Americanized the immigrants already coming to the USA from southern and eastern Europe. 'Americanized' in terms of aculturation generally meant the assimilated western European culture, and in particular, the English language. The tasks of American educational policy were threefold. First, it should build itself into as widespread an institution as possible. Second, it should make the people loyal to the United States: that is, the people of Puerto Rico would give up their nationalistic feeling as Borinquenos and transfer national feeling to the American flag. Third, English should be taught to everybody.