

Knowledge Sharing on Universal Access
to Secondary Education:
Learning Support Systems



Summary [revised] of a report of a workshop

St. Kitts and Nevis

21 – 22 September 2006

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(Summary [revised] of a report of a workshop St. Kitts and Nevis 21 – 22 September 2006)

The report consists of five main segments that correspond to the major issues considered in the workshop:

- ? Mechanism for transition of students from primary to secondary education;
- ? Learning support systems to reduce disparity in student performance;
- ? Teacher development and support;
- ? Curricular and instructional adjustment; and
- ? Common principles and strategies for proposed harmonization of implementation and sustainability.

Mechanism for transition of students from primary to secondary education

Analysis of Mechanisms for Transition

An analysis of the mechanisms shows that of the eight OECS countries that submitted data to the OERU, seven countries have some variation of universal access. Only one country has retained secondary school entry based purely on merit. The specific patterns are shown in the following:

- 1 For Anguilla the Test of Standards is used to make decisions on remedial education and learning enrichment. Montserrat which has universal access similar to Anguilla uses composite measures to allocate students to streams in Form 1 of the secondary school.
- 2 Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis use zonal placement. In St. Kitts and Nevis the allocation is related directly to the area of residence; in Dominica, however, area secondary schools play a role in selecting their student cohort.
- 3 Antigua and Barbuda is the only country that has retained the process of allocating only those students who have “passed” the Common Entrance. The system offers unrestricted choice to “top passes”, places “lower order passes” into area schools,

- and denies entrance to 5-year secondary schools to those who have failed to obtain the required pass mark.
- 4 St. Vincent and the Grenadines, while offering six choices, has a mix of constraints depending upon the candidate's achievement at the Common Entrance Examination and area of residence.
 - 5 St. Lucia has instituted universal access in 2006. This country offers an unrestricted choice of seven schools. However, this choice is dependent upon space available in school of choice. School space is determined to some extent on quality of performance of the entire cohort of candidates writing the Common Entrance.
 - 6 Data from Grenada suggest a policy of phased entry until universal access is achieved fully (by 2007). The striking feature in Grenada is the purposeful decision to grant full cohort transition to thirteen-year olds in the first instance, with the 11-year and 12-year olds being phased in according to merit.

Grouping of students within the school and selection into different schools are perennial issues in secondary education. There are benefits in organizing classes for teaching when students are grouped homogeneously within school, or are allocated by merit at the selection examination. However, in homogeneous grouping there may be less cohesion, reduction in self-esteem and a high level of demoralization of some students, especially those in lower level streams.

The central issue that remains to be addressed is whether ranking of schools is to be retained in a system of universal access (see St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example), or whether universal access should be on a zonal basis (St. Kitts and Nevis and Dominica). An essential thrust in universal access should be the continued striving for excellence in a wider range of curricular options. At the same time there should be renewed emphasis on enhancing social cohesion among the divergent school population within any single school.

Age-related issues and transition

Anguilla and St. Kitts and Nevis, countries with universal access for some time, have complete access for all children at the earliest point (11-12 years). Dominica in 2006 attained almost complete transition at 11-12 years. St. Lucia, new to universal access, has about half the cohort transitioning at the first attempt (2006); while St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in its second year (2006), has attained over 75% transition at the earliest point. Antigua and Barbuda has a transition system based on strict Common Entrance success. Note that all those who qualify for entry to secondary education do so by age 13. Also, there is a tendency for transition rates to equalize as the country implements universal access over time. Of interest, too, is the fact that in every case girls outnumber boys at the younger age group at the time of transfer.

Learning support systems to reduce disparity in student performance

Analysis

There seems to a wide range of support systems for all students, particularly those who experience some form of learning or behavioural disability. The following categories of support are evident in the country reports analyzed.

- 1 Support for students with special needs: this support may take the form of special classes and/or referral systems for special treatment (Anguilla, for instance). Dominica has a coordinated network of national assessment in language Arts and mathematics, combined with an early identification system.
- 2 Student guidance and counselling system: this service is the most frequently used, although the data did not specify the adequacy or effectiveness of its operation. St. Lucia, for example, plans on expanding this type of service to form a student support process within-school, comprising the school counsellor, the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) teacher, and an adolescent development programme organized and run by the Centre for Adolescent Renewal and Education (CARE). At the other end, Antigua and Barbuda plans to establish an *Out of School Suspension Centre* to provide behavioural support to students who are suspended from regular school.
- 3 The third category comprises two parts. One subcategory includes provision of school texts through book rental schemes. In some countries the scheme covers all students, while in others the target is the student group from lower income households. In the same sub-category will be the granting of scholarships to capable students from lower income households (*Adopt-a-School-type* ventures). The private sector and Parent Teacher Associations provide tremendous financial assistance for these initiatives. The other sub-category covers the provision of meals and school uniforms to deserving cases, and transportation to and from school.

Recommendations (made by workshop participants)

- 1 Provide scholarship/funding for students to attend secondary school; and for provision of textbooks, uniforms and lunch where possible. However, support systems must not strain the capacity of the nation, and must not unnecessarily relieve or absolve parents of their responsibility. Instituting or strengthening these facilities requires the existence of an accurate data base of students and on the organized involvement of the private sector and charitable organizations.
- 2 Improve learning support systems: Guidance and Counselling units in schools, referral services to qualified learning and behavioural professionals, and learning resource centres must work in a coordinated manner to address the learning needs of students entering secondary education. The early identification and early intervention schemes used in Dominica and the Special Needs Services of Anguilla may be studied and their basic underlying principles used in addressing similar situations across the OECS. The OERU has developed a *Handbook for guidance and counselling* and has provided individual countries with some assistance in enhancing the structure of their programmes. In addition, cognizant of the importance of discipline in schools and its contribution to student learning the OERU, in collaboration with Ministries of Education, has developed a set of guidelines for a harmonized discipline policy.
- 3 Provision of Learning Centres, Resource Centres/Libraries to include remediation service where applicable: this resource addition may necessitate the inclusion of a remediation/learning support option in teacher education programmes. It is essential that every secondary school has these resources available within easy reach. The *Support team approach* being conceptualized in St. Lucia provides a starting point for thinking about possible ways of implementing such a resource.
- 4 Student assessment schemes in the OECS need to be streamlined. Montserrat, and to some extent, Anguilla and St. Kitts and Nevis have established student profile systems in the primary school. These systems provide some data that are used in deciding on placement of students in appropriate classes in the secondary system. This process should be shared to a greater extent among countries. Also, St. Lucia and Grenada particularly have instituted Minimum Standards/Minimum Competency tests at two levels in the primary, before the grade at which transition to secondary school is made.

Proper record keeping and monitoring could allow the data from these assessments to play a significant role in the transition from primary to secondary. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has completed a comprehensive testing and analysis of literacy in the primary school. These data, if made available to other countries, may be of immense value to underpin the provision of learning support. The OERU is now finalizing an assessment framework and guidelines that will be a valuable resource to primary school and lower secondary school teachers.

- 5 The apparent underachievement of boys academically at the point of transition to secondary is of concern. Although no systematic research has been done in the OECS with regard to causal factors the widespread consistency of this phenomenon requires some attention. Countries need to share strategies that seem to have worked in specific situations. For example, is there a rural-urban pattern? Is there a subject preference pattern? Do boys seem to do better academically at a slightly older age? Is there the need to strive for a greater gender balance in teacher assignment at the Grades 5 and 6? Is there merit in strengthening mentoring processes for both boys and girls in Grades 5 and 6 and in the lower secondary?

However, research done on data from Commonwealth countries, including Jamaica identify a range of factors such as reaction against feminization of the curriculum and teaching, masculinity, lack of male role models, issues of economics, social class, and ethnicity/culture. (See Jha & Kelleher 2006.)

Teacher Development and Support

Analysis

The data show that the initiatives of OECS countries fall into three main categories:

- 1 General teacher education where the focus is on continual enhancement of the skills and knowledge of teachers. Some countries include an emphasis on differentiation of instruction and remediation and classroom management. More specialized training includes identification of dyslexia and ADHD, the needs of gifted children and reading recovery.
- 2 All countries that reported on teacher development have placed great emphasis on literacy and to a lesser extent, numeracy. St. Lucia, for example, is concentrating on meeting the needs of the struggling adolescent reader and has equipped teachers to administer and use the results of the MICO Diagnostic Test.
- 3 The third category of support involves providing support for teachers through the establishment of teacher resource centres and class libraries.

Recommendations (workshop participants)

- 1 Teacher education is a continuing process. The effort of individual countries is commendable. There is the need for countries to seek opportunities to share their success in appropriate interventions. Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, have done some work in preparing teachers specifically for large-scale access to universal secondary education. St. Lucia has concentrated on literacy as has St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The data from these interventions should be made available to all countries. The more specialized work on dealing with reading problems (dyslexia and reading recovery) is critical to initiating interventions in literacy development and ought to be captured, documented and shared. OERU will continue to spearhead the coordination of these activities.
- 2 Teacher induction as an orientation process for new teachers in secondary education is an important component of teacher education. Grenada's policy of redeployment of primary school teachers to secondary schools should be accompanied by appropriate induction practices. OERU has a set of induction modules prepared by the UWI that may be used by any country that wishes to do so. Also, the *Principals'*

Desk Manual will be a valuable asset in this regard. The harmonized Teachers' code of Ethics will be useful in cases where beginning teachers are being inducted to secondary schools in the expansion of universal access.

- 3 The factors that facilitate the establishment and continued operation of teacher resource centre should be analyzed and made available to all countries. The value of the OERU advisory and documentation centre and its resources for universal secondary education is available to all countries and should be used to greater effect.
- 4 Teachers of Grade 6 and Form 1 should share interaction on student achievement and transition. This process will complement the records of students who move from primary to secondary. Moreover, this interaction may have at least two components: one is administrative, ensuring that academic records transmitted from primary to secondary are interpreted accurately; a second component will be the provision of opportunity for professional discourse on academic progress and problems of students who will enter secondary school. This format for collaboration is best done in localized areas/districts and may be one of the main functions of district education/curriculum officers.
- 5 There is a concern that Form 1 students on entry to secondary education may be overwhelmed by the number of different subject areas they face. More critical, though, is the frequent change of teachers during a single day. Two recommendations are relevant here: first, to what degree can subjects be grouped into cognate areas; second, and related to the first, could a single teacher be responsible for teaching the cognate area. This practice will reduce the number of changes of teachers during a day, and also should serve to promote integration across the curriculum.

Curricular and instructional adjustment as a component of universal access

Analysis

- 1 Most countries have instituted or are in the process of setting up curricular reform mechanisms. Dominica has a national curriculum framework while Anguilla has set up working groups. Antigua and Barbuda, as well as Montserrat and St. Lucia are concentrating on developing a lower secondary curriculum.
- 2 The focus of curriculum renewal is on literacy and numeracy in the main, but some countries have decided on a core curriculum, making allowance for aesthetics and health, social and personality development.
- 3 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an emphasis in Montserrat and St. Lucia, with St. Lucia being organized for granting Level 1 of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) in the secondary school as part of the CARICOM Qualifications Framework for technical and vocational education.
- 4 Dominica and Grenada are experimenting with fewer subjects in the lower secondary, by either concentrating more on mathematics and language arts or by integrating subjects. Grenada is working toward the establishment of a teacher development programme in reading achievement. Development of skills in assessment of reading and monitoring of student progress will be the objective of this intervention. St. Lucia is experimenting with team teaching in literacy and numeracy in the Form 1.
- 5 Dominica has instituted a common text book policy which is enforced; also, that country is experimenting with a time tabling software to ease the burden of scheduling classes at the secondary level.

Recommendations

- 1 Much of the curricular reform being undertaken is built on the OECS harmonized learning outcomes. OERU will continue to provide assistance in this development. The student assessment framework is being edited and will be available for use shortly.
- 2 A Common core curriculum for lower secondary has been suggested by curriculum specialists. This core provides some guidance for lower secondary schooling. Some

- consideration should be given to the inclusion of the creative and performing arts and ICT in the lower secondary overall curriculum. A basic principle underlying universal access is the diversification of the secondary school curriculum, providing opportunity for students to design a variety of programmes of study best suited to their interest and aptitudes. OERU is available to provide suggestions and assistance in this regard wherever necessary.
- 3 TVET is currently being reconfigured for secondary schools. A more focused policy that links national efforts with ongoing work in the OAS Secondary School Management and Technical Education initiative and the implementation of the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) model for labour competency certification is being finalized. OERU is prepared to organize for limited technical assistance in this area for curriculum and teacher development, especially for the lower secondary.
 - 4 OERU is willing to help countries in teacher and curriculum development initiatives to bring greater coherence to the lower secondary. One immediate activity could be a sharing session of the modalities that have been implemented, noting their strength and their challenges, and resource requirements.
 - 5 Together with the implementation of the core curriculum, attention should be paid to timetabling, allocating reasonable amounts of time to critical areas, such as mathematics and literacy/language arts. The issue of block time tabling for core subjects is still being debated; countries should consider the merits and/or disadvantages of this scheduling procedure. Dominica is experimenting with time tabling software. OERU will be willing to facilitate the sharing of this experience among countries, although the Unit cannot commit to the purchasing of the programme.
 - 6 All students must have access to textbooks and other learning material. The various forms of textbook provision programmes should be examined and rationale underlying practices shared across countries. The OERU is at present considering the feasibility of bulk procurement of basic texts. There is need for rationalization of the number of titles used in any particular subject area across the OECS. Common book requirements will facilitate a joint book procurement facility.

- 7 Universal access to secondary education also requires schools to concentrate seriously on co-curricular/extra-curricular activities (interest clubs, etc.) to tap the wider pool of talent that will become available; also, strenuous attempts at promoting cohesiveness among the more diverse student body should be attempted.

Common Principles and Strategies for Proposed Harmonization of Implementation and Sustainability

Recommendations

The recommendations in terms of harmonization and sustainability derive from the group discussions at the workshop and the submissions of individual countries on the implementation of universal access to secondary education. Underlying all of the recommendations is the need to continue to foster a spirit and practice of collaboration in education within and among countries. The recommendation for action at the national and sub-regional level may be grouped into four categories:

- ? Research and policy guidance and coordination
- ? Management and leadership
- ? Teacher development
- ? Communication

1 Research and policy

Research is critical to the improvement of education both nationally and regionally. Throughout this report there are instances of countries that have tried out a number of worthwhile ventures in the implementation of universal access to secondary education. A priority is the documentation of these efforts in systematic way, so that a conceptual framework relevant to the Region/sub-region may evolve to guide future development. Research when interpreted and used properly adds significant quality and power to the policy-development process. One role of the OERU is to mine and interpret the data that are available in order to make valid recommendations on the new thrust in secondary education. OERU has two relevant large scale research data sets– Student Attitude Survey (1999) and the Discipline Research (2006), both related to secondary schools - that are be useful resources in this regard.

Educational policy on universal access must be accompanied by powerful rationales that have economic, social and cultural relevance and implications. The relationship between secondary education and the world of work ought to be explored in greater detail. The multiple pathways concept through secondary education - providing varied opportunities for personal and career success - and the provision of a multi-faceted youth skills development programme are important policy issues that are linked directly to a policy of universal access. The multiple pathways idea will inform the development and implementation of a diversified curriculum.

2 Management and leadership

Secondary school management practices need to be shared across countries. An analysis of records that document experiences gained, problems encountered and solved and lingering challenges will be a valuable resource, especially for principals, involved in the implementation of universal access. There is also the need for secondary school principals to meet in professional settings for real problem-solving exercises on management and leadership in schools. OECS educational systems ought to build on the wealth of front line expertise that exists within the OECS. In this regard the OERU has compiled a Case Study book on school leadership practices across the OECS. There is also the generic Principals' Desk Manual intended to serve as a ready resource for principals. Heads of Departments in secondary schools ought to be encouraged to play a major role in taking responsibility for curriculum implementation and supervision of instruction. Another important role of these professionals is in the appraisal of the work of teachers in their department. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has started developmental work in this regard; this initiative ought to be replicated. The implementation of Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS) in a number of countries and the introduction to ICT may benefit from the ICT policy and strategy document as well as the knowledge management strategy developed by OERU.

3 Teacher development

Countries have been involved in a number of initiatives in preparing teachers for universal access to secondary education. These activities need to be strengthened and their successes shared. The OERU has spearheaded teacher development in the process of curriculum harmonization and assessment and in other initiatives. Documentation from countries in relation to universal access refers to additional modalities such as teacher exchanges, seminars and conferences. More fundamental, however, is the expressed need for the continuation of comprehensive secondary teachers training programme; such programmes such take into account the resource needs of individual countries and should incorporate specific units of work on maintaining discipline and providing personal and career guidance to youth.

4 Communication and collaboration

Throughout the submissions of countries there is evidence of collaborative effort between schools and the community, particularly the private sector. Collaboration is enhanced when there is a systematic mechanism for communicating information across the spectrum of interested parties. The OERU has established a system of technical advisory committees (TACs) to maintain the momentum of collaborative work in sustaining innovative work in a variety of educational areas.

Data from countries indicate that there is need for policy related to universal access should be widely known within countries and across the OECS. All stakeholders should be aware of and understand the benefits, challenges and sacrifice that will be necessary at the personal, institutional and societal levels. The OERU, through its Advisory Service, has a wide range of documentation on education, including universal access to secondary, and is ready to make this resource available.

24 October 2007

Reference

- Jha, J. & Kelleher, F. (2006). Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries. Vancouver: Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth of Learning.