

History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago

Authors: Sharon Seegoolam-Partap

Samantha Emalie Samai

Winston Lochan

Keisha Basarath

HOW HAS EDUCATION CHANGED IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FROM 1834 TO PRESENT?

History of schooling in Trinidad and Tobago and changes over the years

The abolition of slavery in 1834 afforded the opportunity for ex-slaves to attend schools to be educated. The Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and the Mico charity were the providers of education. Dr. Eric William stated that at the end of 1880 there were a total of 96 schools operating in Trinidad –3 secondary, 2 normal model schools, 52 government primary school and 39 assisted primary schools. There were 332 students in the secondary schools- 80 at the Queen's Royal Collegiate (QRC), 142 at the College of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) and 110 at St. Joseph's Convent. By 1949 Governor Lord Harris established the secular or non-religious government schools called the ward schools where emphasis was placed in reading, writing and arithmetic. The established schools at that time, especially the denominational schools, catered for the educational needs of the off springs of the planters. Those planters, who could have afforded it, sent their children back to the metro poles to be educated.

This image depicts African slaves on a sugar plantation



http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/industrialisation_article_01.shtml

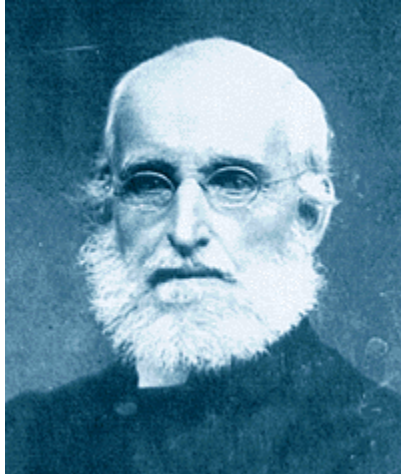
The coming of the East Indians added another dimension to the whole question of education. The Canadian Presbyterian Mission founded by Rev. John Morton in 1868, apart from its obvious religious function, served as a means of educating the East Indians. Thus the Indians were largely educated in institutions separate from the rest of the population.

This image depicts some of the earliest indentured labourers who came to Trinidad and Tobago.



http://library.kiwix.org:4201/A/Trinidad_and_Tobago.html

This image depicts Rev. John Morton of the Presbyterian Church



<http://www.naparima.org/ncmiss9.htm>

The main examination in those days for entering the secondary school system was the College Exhibition. This was the forerunner to the Common Entrance Examination. The College Exhibition was started in 1872 and awarded annually placement to a handful of 'brilliant boys' to Queen's Royal College and St. Mary's College. Further, it was inevitable that examinations would play a most important role in the selection system since demand of secondary education was consistently greater than the supply. Also mention was the greatest anxiety to parents the College Exhibition caused. Considerable social and economic returns were also brought to those who succeeded and it became a powerful channel of upward social mobility for a few black and coloured youths.

The award of exhibitions, independent of the government, was a trend followed by new secondary schools, private or public, in the early twentieth century. Eventually non-government exhibitions to secondary schools out-numbered the College Exhibitions, thus opening up a new era in educational opportunities for blacks and coloured children, and also for white children.

The College Exhibition system grew from an uncertain indulgence to an expected privilege by the start of the twentieth century and finally a political right in the 1930's. Throughout the 1930's

there was an expansion of elementary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. By 1939 there was a dual system, that of both government schools and denominational schools.

There was a conflict between the churches and government as it related to control over the running and managing of schools at that time. This conflict led to the expansion and growth of the education system. The church and the government were anxious that through education new generations should be socialized into accepting the new social structure and values of society.

The gradual growth of government interest in and control over schools was realized by the 1950s at the primary level. Dr. Eric Williams, like Governor Charles Warner, governor between 1839 and 1869, saw denominational schools as obstacles to integration of the racial divide that existed in Trinidad society. The opposition of the Roman Catholic Church remained intact. It led movements to restrict the expansion of government control of education. In addition the rise of the Canadian Presbyterian Christian churches as well as the entrenchment of Hinduism and Islam helped maintain the strong grasp which denominational schools had on education.

<http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/tt/19122003.html>

The broader historical context of schooling in relation to changes in education in Trinidad and Tobago

The emergence of Dr. Eric William and the People's National Movement saw the introduction of the Common Entrance Examination in the early 1960s. This examination replaced the College Exhibition. It was intended that it would be the sole instrument of qualification for secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. It was not intended to be a pass or fail examination and the number of awards depended on the number of secondary school places available at the time.

This is a picture of Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams



http://www.natt.gov.tt/about_us.aspx?id=68

According to the Transformation Magazine of March 2000, as the competition for places in the secondary schools increased, inadvertently spurred on by parents, an education system was created where the examination superseded the syllabus. In some schools children were taught with the sole purpose of passing the examination. As a result of this, necessary basic skills were neglected.

This examination, for all intent and purposes, was a multiple-choice examination. The multiple choice tests were in English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. The exception was the 'Creative Writing' aspect of the examination. Students were then placed into secondary schools on the basis of their order of merit and their parents' choice of school. A large percentage of the candidates selected the older denominational schools and a few selected government schools as their school of first choice. This was so since the older denominational schools such as Queen Royal College and St. Mary's College were still considered prestigious schools.

These images depict the two colleges mentioned above, located in Port of Spain, Trinidad.



St. Mary's College



Q.R.C. College

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=colleges+in+trinidad&FORM=BIFD>

The Common Entrance Examination system had its drawbacks. The Express highlighted some of them. It stated that anxiety, depression, pains, fever, delirious behaviour and severe panic attacks were some of the effects the Common Entrance Examination had on students. The Trinidad Guardian under the heading, 'How School System Destroy Children' alluded to the fact that in Trinidad and Tobago we were systematically destroying our children. It stated that the problem began with the process of taking choices in the Common Entrance Examination. It added that before the child wrote the examination he/she with the assistance of parents or guardians had to select by priority the school that they wished to attend. This was the beginning of the psychological catastrophe.

The child was considered a dunce if he passed for a junior secondary school or a school which was not considered a prestige school, according to the Trinidad Guardian. It added that the child told himself that if he were bright he would not have been placed in a junior secondary school.

Furthermore, when the child's confidence was destroyed, at such a tender age, it was almost impossible for that child to develop into the brilliant scholar that he was capable of being.

Leesa De Silva in her letter to the Editor in the Express of November 29th, 1999 stated that she was a Trinidadian living in Kansas City, Missouri. She expressed that she could not imagine subjecting her 12-year old daughter to a test that would determine if she was as intelligent as the rest of her age group and then to have the result posted in the nation's newspapers. She added that it was the epitome of mental abuse and an example of self-fulfilling prophecy. " If the country says that I was a failure then it must be true and so I would behave accordingly." The Express linked the crime rate with Common Entrance Examination. It stated that the Common Entrance Examination was a tragedy which was responsible for a lot of crime in the country. It further stated that ten thousand (10 000) children were thrown on the dump heap because places could not be found for them in secondary school after the examination. Additionally, these children were placed on the garbage heap with no hope. Finally the newspaper added that the late developer was not catered for.

It was because of the failure of the Common Entrance Examination system that a Task Force chaired by Mr. Clive Pantin, and included Dr. Anna Mahase, Dr. Janet Stanely-Marcano, Mr. Anthony Garcia and others, was set up to look at the removal of the Common Entrance Examination. The Task Force in its findings found that anxiety and stress remained a feature of the Common Entrance Examination and those immediately concerned with it. It also highlighted the sense of unworthiness and disappointment which became a feature of not only those who failed to gain a place, but also of those who were successful but failed to gain admission to the school of their choice. It further stated that due to the importance of the examination and due to a lack of acceptable alternatives to public secondary education the examination began to exert an inordinate influence on the primary school, the curriculum and teaching practices. Teachers were often very restricted to that subject which would be tested at the examination. It was found that students, even those who performed well in the examination, entered secondary school without the necessary basic preparation for secondary school work.

It found that nearly fifty percent (50%) of the students who wrote the Common Entrance Examination appeared to be semi literate and innumerate.

The Task Force recommended, among other things, that there was need to develop a Secondary Entrance Examination which would test the students' level of competence in the key areas of English, Mathematics and Written Composition. It stated that this needed be done in a manner which would indicate readiness of the secondary education programme. Further to this, it stated that Science and Social Studies should be omitted because of the unfair influence they had on the final result in the Common Entrance Examination placement of students and because they were unsatisfactorily tested. It also recommended that a Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) should become an integral part of the School System. The Continuous Assessment Programme was to be used to determine the student's readiness for promotion.

<http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/tt/19122003.html>

Changes in our social, cultural, and intellectual culture with regards to education in Trinidad and Tobago(Continuity and Change)

The Education Policy Paper (1993 – 2003) stated that it was necessary that promotion within the primary school be guided by norms of attainment as recommended in the 1985-90 Education Plan, accompanied by a system of periodic assessment to ascertain the extent to which the standards set were achieved. It stated that that measure would ensure that meaningful learning took place within the primary school. Further it recommends that continuous diagnostic testing and remediation should be built into the primary school system. Those tests together with the administration of standardized tests at significant stages in the primary school, (Standard 1 and III –1994 –1996 respectively), the Common entrance examination itself could increasingly be converted into a national attainment test It further stated that placement at the secondary level could then be on the basis of both continuous assessment and a national examination.

In 1999 the Government took further steps to bring an end to the Common Entrance Examination by the year 2000 and to provide Universal Secondary Education (USE) by 2001.

The government stated that by improving the quality of education at the primary level children would be adequately prepared for entry into secondary school. The aim was to ensure that every child from the primary school capable of such an undertaking regardless of race, creed, social status or geographical location be given free secondary education. Improving the quality of primary school education, in particular, and raising the level of literacy and numeracy skills among primary school students would enable them to be better prepared to make use of the opportunities provided at the secondary level. In April of 1999 the Cabinet appointed a seven-member Universal Secondary Education Supervisory Education Committee. The Committee headed by Mr. Clive Pantin had the task of implementation of the 1998 Report of the Task Force on the Removal of the Common Entrance examination and to bring about Universal Secondary Education by 2001.

The Secondary Entrance Assessment, a system of education which prepared the child for entry into a secondary school and included mechanisms to determine when the child was ready and where he or she would be placed, was the major aims of that new system of education. The Continuous Assessment Programme and the Secondary Entrance Examination were considered as important parts of the new system. According the Universal Secondary Education Project Implementation Unit December 28th 1999, the implementation of the Secondary Entrance Assessment would provide a link between separate elements of the Universal Secondary Education in Trinidad and Tobago. These separate elements were Continuous Assessment Programme and the Secondary Entrance Examination. According to a brochure entitled Parents as Partners issued by the Ministry of Education , the education system was being transformed at every level to ensure that the children were well equipped with the skills they would need to succeed as adults living in a new age. It stated that the students' ability to adapt and to continue learning were essential. It further stated that the Secondary Entrance Examination would assist students' readiness for secondary schools by testing their skills in Language, Mathematics and Problem-solving. It alluded to the fact that there would be no multiple-choice questions, a feature of the Common Entrance Examination.

Additionally, it stated that placement in the secondary schools would be based on marks scored on the Secondary Entrance Examination, the available of places in their school of choice, availability of secondary places in their education division and taking into account the **20 percent (20%) provision granted to denominational school under the Concordat**. Children were now afforded a better opportunity to attend a secondary school of their respective faiths. It also noted the Continuous Assessment Programme purposed earlier would not form part of the placement process.

The Guardian of August 23rd 2000 quoted Senator Professor John Spence on the removal of the Common Entrance Examination. He stated that the Common Entrance has not been abolished only its format has been changed. He questioned the idea of placing some children who would normally have failed the Common Entrance in Model Schools. He also was not pleased with the choice of reading books for those children. These books included the Ugly Duckling, Chicken Licken and Goldilocks and the Three Bears. He felt that the model school was symbolic of the absolute failure of the primary school system. The then Minister of Education, was reported to have said in the Trinidad Guardian September 9th 2000, that many children were wasted and as a result there was no need to delay the implementation of the Secondary Entrance Examination for another year. She believed that under this new system not a single child or mind would be lost. She alluded to the fact that under the old system approximately 10 000 failed and were denied the opportunity of a secondary education. Further, these children as a result had no means later in life to support themselves financially.

The President of the Trinidad and Tobago United Teachers' Association (T&TUTA) has been very critical of, as he called it the 'mad rush' to implement a system which though excellent in theory needed to be implemented gradually. He further stated that the new system sacrificed quality of education for political purposes. Other concerned voiced by people in education included the expected overcrowding in secondary school, the lack of facilities, teachers shortages and unsuitable curricula to cater of the need of these children. Senator Kenneth Ramchand stated in the Express of April 6th 2000 that the new Secondary Entrance Examination was worse than the first. He said that any examination would stress out an 11-year old and his parents. Additionally he felt that the primary school was not for cramming of subjects but for allowing

children to do things, discover things and to be themselves.

The Universal Secondary Education Supervisory Implementation Committee Project Unit at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre noted some of defects of the new system of education. These included lack of adequate staff support since there was an apparent need for more in-depth planning. Inadequate parental support, since the majority of today's parents were themselves academically and financially challenged, meant they could not effectively meet the needs of their children. Additionally, because the emphasis was now on the slower child there was the possibility that the especially brilliant pupil would not realize his/her full potential. Further to this, parents would treat Social Studies and Science as unimportant subject areas on the timetable and this in turn would be reflected in the child's approach to this schoolwork.

Since the philosophy of education, according to Education Policy White Paper (1993 – 2003), lies in the full development of the potential of every child, secondary education for all has its place in today's technology advanced world. The task however is to ensure that the special needs of all children and properly catered for. Included in this, of course, is catering for the needs of the differently able. According to the white paper and I quote, " 80% of children who have special education needs identified by referral, and assessed by the Child Guidance Clinic are receiving inappropriate education and their Special Education needs are not being met in the existing education system."

The present Secondary Entrance Assessment Examination has a significant part to play in the transition of students from the primary school system into the secondary school system. The main tenants of this examination still hold. These include assessing the primary school child's state of readiness in Mathematics, Language and Composition for the secondary school system. The child who has attained the required standard is more likely to benefit from the secondary system.

The introduction of Secondary Education for all has both its merits and demerits. On the one hand, the child knows that having sat the Secondary entrance Assessment Examination, he/she would be afforded a secondary education. The stress, level of frustration and tension which were associated with the former secondary entrance examinations are now eased for both the child and his parents. The child, as well as the parents, is now in a more relaxed mood since whether or not he does well in the examination his secondary education is assured.

On the other hand, mediocrity is created. The child is no longer spurred on to be highly competitive. The discipline which was needed under the previous system is not seen as necessary. The effort made by the parents to ensure that the child knows his work and if need be take extra lessons after school is now lax.

Further, a strain is now placed on the secondary system to cater for the more than 10 000 students who would have previously failed to gain a place in a secondary school. To this is added the inadequately trained staff to deal with these children who have obviously not attained the secondary standard of education. Some, not even mastering the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. This results in frustration for both teacher and pupil. This leads to truant behaviour on the part of the pupils. This is followed by early remittal by the student from the secondary system. Even if the child remains in the system until he sits the Caribbean Examination Council Examination (CXC), his attaining a full certificate is hardly likely.

The Secondary Entrance Assessment Examination, even with the implementation of secondary education for all, has its relevance and should not be abolished. The question should be asked whether it is better to send 10 000 students into a life of hopelessness or afford these students a place in a secondary school where they still stand a chance of succeeding. For the system to work effectively, however, there needs to be modification. This should include ensuring that the child has attained the required level for entry into the secondary system before he moves on. This can only be attained with the necessary support system in place. The Ministry of Education needs to implement a continuous assessment programme such as was intended under the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP).

This assessment has to be done at all levels from infants to standard five. Attention should be paid here to the theory of Multiple Intelligences since 'paper and pencil' measures are not always 'intelligence fair'. <http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/tt/19122003.html>

Global issues and trends that has affected education in Trinidad and Tobago(Cause and Consequence).

There is a worldwide call for inclusive education which Trinidad and Tobago must now seek to implement.

The Ministry of Education needs to deploy sufficient specialists to work along with teachers throughout the primary school system to diagnose and remedy all dysfunctional students in the system. Eye disorders, including dyslexia, hearing impairment, abused children, poorly nourished children, those with low self-esteem and other areas which negates against the proper functioning of children in the system should be addressed.

Additionally, there should be strict adherence in the primary schools system that all promotion through the system be based on merit. Proper record keeping and documentation at all levels throughout the system for quick and easy reference are also necessary. This documentation must highlight the child's strengths and weaknesses including corrective measures attempted in correction of the latter.

Accompanying the above should be the aim at the primary level to seek the holistic development of every child. Every child has the ability to learn, and they vary in natural abilities. As such, the school system should provide programmes which are adapted to varying abilities and which provide the opportunity for the child to develop differing personal and social useful talents.

The child of the twenty-first century and beyond needs to be fully appreciative of and capable of making full use of the technology at his disposal. He needs to possess critical thinking skills in problem solving along with ready access to the volume of information via the internet and other media to make positive changes in his life. To the end, the education system needs to facilitate this by providing opportunities for the child to bring to fruition these goals. Further to this, the primary system of education must be so structured that the full potential of every child is

realized. This means of course that the teachers in the system must make use of the concept of multiple intelligences, constructivists approach to learning, the importance of cooperative learning and other learning strategies. They need to constantly upgrade themselves to ensure that they are always aware of educational developments and new and innovative techniques. The 'chalk and talk' method of the last era has no place in the classroom of the 21st century.

Children need to discover, to experiment, to do research and to use their ability to think and reason. If these issues are addressed from the time the child enters the primary school he would be in a better position to take advantage of his secondary level of education.

<http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/tt/19122003.html>

Another aspect that has impacted change within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago is the Concordat of 1960(Continuity and Change).

What is the Concordat?

The **Concordat of 1801** was an agreement between [Napoleon](#) and [Pope Pius VII](#), signed on 15 July 1801. It solidified the Roman Catholic Church as the majority church of France and brought back most of its civil status.^[1]

During the [French Revolution](#), the [National Assembly](#) had taken Church properties and issued the [Civil Constitution of the Clergy](#), which made the Church a department of the State, removing it from the authority of the [Pope](#). This caused hostility among the [Vendeans](#) towards the change in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the French government. Subsequent laws abolished the traditional [Gregorian calendar](#) and Christian holidays.^[2]

While the Concordat restored some ties to the [papacy](#), it was largely in favor of the state; the balance of church-state relations had tilted firmly in Napoleon's favour. Now, he could win favor with the Catholics within France while also controlling Rome in a political sense. Napoleon once told his brother Lucien in April 1801, "Skillful conquerors have not got entangled with priests.

They can both contain them and use them." ^[3] As a part of the Concordat, he presented another set of laws called the [Organic Articles](#).

Image depicting the signing of the Concordat in 1801



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concordat_of_1801

Introduction of the Concordat into our Education System

The Education Concordat (1960) was "approved by cabinet" (not, it seems, the House of Representatives), it was published quietly on Christmas Day, and the Government is not revealing the other signatory (reportedly , "Fr. Pedro Valdez"). Since then this concordat has been extended to other religions.



This ecumenical building is from western Trinidad. Due to its history, Trinidad, (**Spanish for "Trinity"**), has a Catholic population of almost, 30%, followed by Hindus, Protestants (mostly of the exhuberant varieties) and Muslims. To try to compete with Pentacostalism, orthodoxy has been relaxed in favour of a "[Catholic Charismatic Renewal](#)".

"Clause 2 states that materials or books to which the denominational authority formally objects will not be introduced or imposed in their schools. In a multi-religious democracy such as ours this is an untenable imposition in schools that receive public funding and which cater for students of all faiths." -- Senator Professor John Spence

<http://endrtimes.blogspot.com/2009/07/trinidad-and-tobago-concordat-of-1960.html>

(The Concordat of 1960)

- **As approved by Cabinet**

The Minister of Education and Culture wishes to clarify for general information some of the proposals on Education with reference to the re-organization of Education so far as those proposals affect the Denominational Boards of Management, the Governing Bodies and Principals of Assisted Secondary Schools.

1. In relation to property, the ownership and right of direct control and management of all denominational primary and secondary schools will be assured to the denominations in whatever modifications of the existing system that may subsequently be introduced in the New Education Ordinance, and all existing rights, so far as property is concerned, will be respected.
2. In denominational schools, no books or apparatus to which the denominational authority formally objects, will be introduced or imposed.
3. In denominational schools (unless the Denomination concerned otherwise gives its consent) the religion of the particular denomination which owns the school will be taught exclusively and

by teachers professing to belong to that Denomination. In Government Schools all recognized religious denominations will have access through their accredited representatives during the times specified in the time-table for the teaching of Religion to the pupils belonging to their faith. Pupils attending the schools of a denomination not of their own faith will not be compelled to take part in the religious exercises or lessons of that denomination.

4. The right of appointment, retention, promotion, transfer and dismissal of teachers in Primary Schools will rest with the Public Service Commission. A teacher shall not be appointed to a school if the denominational board objects to such an appointment on moral or religious grounds. Similarly, if a teacher be found unsatisfactory on these very grounds, moral or religious, the denominational authority shall have the right to request his removal to another school after due investigation.

For these reasons it is proposed (provided the legal and constitutional arrangements allow) "that vacancies as they occur in all schools should be advertised and applications submitted in the first instance to the respective Board of management which will examine them and forward them all, with their recommendations, to the Public Service Commission for final action."

Secondary Schools

5. The existing relationship between Government and the Governing Bodies and teachers in Assisted Secondary Schools will remain subject however, to negotiated changes inevitable with the introduction of Free Secondary Education and to a system of inspection of these schools by persons authorized to do so by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Governing Bodies of these schools will continue to be responsible for the administration of these schools and for their maintenance, repair and furnishing. Those schools will continue to qualify for Government Aid. The Principals of Assisted Secondary Schools will make available a minimum of 80 per centum of the First Form entry places to those who, by passing the test, qualify on the results of the Common Entrance Examination for free secondary education. The Principals will be represented on the panel of examiners to be set up to administer the test. The Principals will be free to allocate up to 20 per centum, the remaining places as they see fit provided normally that the pass

list of the Common Entrance Examination serves to provide the pupils. Entry above the First Form will be under the control of the Ministry of Education and Culture and will require the approval of the Minister.

6. Where the need arises for disciplinary reasons or unsatisfactory progress to remove a pupil from the school, the right to request such removal will remain with the Principal who may for the same reasons suspend a pupil pending investigation. Authority to expel a pupil is vested solely in the Cabinet. For disciplinary reasons the same principle will apply to Primary Schools.

7. All new Central Schools may be established only by Government for the simple reason that these schools are to be fed from the Primary Schools of all Denominations, as well as Government Schools, which may be in the area served by the Central School. Where, however, the need arises for converting an existing denominational school into a secondary school, the denominational character of that school will be allowed to remain.

8. The selection of teachers for training at the teachers' college is to remain solely with the Ministry of Education and Culture. Selection of teachers for training in the existing denominational training colleges may be made by the Denominational Boards, but such selection must be approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

9. It is the desire of the Government that all teachers be trained at the teachers' college under Government supervision and administration. Government will however respect the rights of the existing training colleges conducted by the denominations; but no expansion of those facilities will be allowed without the expressed permission of Government.

Signed by Hon. J.S. Donaldson
Minister of Education & Culture
on behalf of Cabinet on 22 December 1960,
and published on 25 December, 1960

Source: Title listed on the government website, but text only available from the Presbyterian Church archives <http://presbyterianchurchtt.org/faq.aspx>



Photo of Mr. John S Donaldson

Trinidad and Tobago's first Minister of Education.

Signatory of the Education Concordat in 1960.

Picture taken from the Trinidad Newsday dated 26th February, 2007.

Since the signing of the Concordat in 1960, no amendments have been made to accommodate the changing needs of denominational schools within the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. Presently the denominational boards are calling for a revisit of the Concordat of 1960.

The following are three clippings from the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian newspapers in connection with the Revisiting of the Concordat.

“Tim hints at Concordat changes”

Published: Monday, February 27, 2012

Kalifa Clyne

Education Minister Tim Gopeesingh said yesterday he may recommend changes to the education Concordat after he meets with representatives of 16 denominational school boards this week. “It seems as though the public is calling for public consultation on the existing Concordat,” Gopeesingh told the T&T Guardian.

He said he held five meetings with the denominational boards and the relationship among the boards, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of Education was one of the many issues raised. The control of appointments of deans and heads of departments by the TSC,

as well performance and management of schools and funding to boards were also raised. “If there is a necessity after I am advised I may take a note to Cabinet seeking changes to the Concordat,” he said.

Gopeesingh refused to further comment, saying it would be premature to do so until a formal meeting with denominational boards had taken place. The Concordat is a 14-point document which outlines the rights of denominational boards in the administration of education in their schools. The document, published in December 1960, guides the relationship between churches and the Ministry of Education in the provision of education to T&T’s children.

It was revised in 1999 and a report was handed to the then Prime Minister Basdeo Panday. However, no changes were made. In 2006 denominational boards took issue with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Ministry of Education that they felt might replace the Concordat. At that time Secretary General of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha Satnarayan Maharaj said: “If there is need for new arrangements, changes could be made to the Concordat.”

In 2007, then Education Minister Hazel Manning denied the MOU would replace the Concordat. She told Parliament the Concordat continued to be the guiding document in the relationship between the State and the Church on Education. Once again, there are calls for changes to the single-page. This follows recent problems at the ASJA Girls’ College and more predominantly the Tunapuna Hindu School, with both school boards taking action to remove staff appointed by the Ministry of Education.

In the case of the Tunapuna Hindu School, the board has refused to accept the re-appointment of Principal Sita Gajadharsingh-Nanga. In an article in yesterday’s Guardian, Maharaj said the TSC needed to seek the approval of denominational boards on appointing teachers to assisted schools. “That means we can tell the Tunapuna principal, you can’t come here and subvert our religion, we will lock you out.”

Image depicting Trinidad and Tobago’s present Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh



<http://www.news.gov.tt/index.php?news=4048>

(Ethical Dimensions)

“Presbyterian Moderator: Opportune time to review Concordat”

Published: Saturday, January 14, 2012

Yvonne Webb

Presbyterian Moderator Reverend Brenda Bullock said issues at Tunapuna Hindu School and ASJA Girl’s College may have been simmering for some time and a lack of communication among the partners caused those situations to escalate into ugly confrontations.

While she did not condone the actions taken by the two denominational school boards to remove personnel appointed by the Education Ministry, Rev Bullock said the situation presented an opportunity for a review of the Concordat. She refused, however, to support calls for the Concordat to be removed.

Speaking to the media following a thanksgiving service to mark the 100th anniversary of Naparima Girl’s High School yesterday, Rev Bullock said: “The Presbyterian Church is a strong advocate for the Concordat, because it gives our schools, our church, a say in the curriculum.” She said while they are dependant on government for certain things, “denominational school boards do get pro-active and do some things. “Unfortunately, we need to realise that the schools, while they carry the Presbyterian name or the name of other denominations, they are not solely our schools.

“We work in partnership and it may be an unequal partnership in the eyes of some, but it is a partnership and we need to work together, because at the end of the day it is for the upliftment of our students.” Rev Bullock said the financial grant schools get from the ministry is not adequate

and the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) often has to raise funds. She also said they are constrained by personnel from the ministry, explaining that at present, many of their principals are retiring and the persons acting in the positions have not covered a sufficient period to fill the vacancies. Bullock said she was not at liberty to say what areas of the Concordat should be reviewed but suggested that denominational boards to sit together with government and work out a process.

“It cannot happen overnight and when there is a sense of dissatisfaction in a school, it means somewhere along the lines, steps were not taken. It was probably overlooked.” She said communication is important “because if something is happening, it may be administrative and is not facilitated through the PTA and through the other boards, something is wrong. There is a breakdown in communication.” Asked about the approach by the boards at the two schools, Bullock described the situation as unfortunate, but said she was not privy to all of the information. She called for calm communications: “If there is a problem, people need to talk. Don’t wait for it to get to that stage.”

Image depicting Rev. Brenda Bullock Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago



http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Attending_to_the_needs_of_women-121040163.html

Tinkering with Education and the Concordat

During the recent course of events leading up to the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Mrs Sita Gajadarsingh-Nanga, represented by the

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA), to resolve the impasse between the Maha Sabha and Mrs. Gajadarsingh-Nanga in the discharge of her responsibilities as the Principal of the Tunapuna Hindu School, mention was made by Education Minister Tim Gopeesingh of an intention to review the Education Concordat of 1960.

The Concordat, another Memorandum which was signed by then Minister John S. Donaldson on behalf of Cabinet, preserves the roles of the Denominational Boards of Management, the governing bodies and Principals of Assisted Secondary Schools in our education system, with the advent of the Education Act in 1966.

In brief, the Concordat assured to the respective denominations the continuing ownership, and respect for the direct control and management of their schools in whatever modification subsequently introduced by the Act.

This included the type of books to be used therein, the teaching of the respective religions by teachers of the same religious conviction, the right to object to the appointment of teachers to these schools by the Teaching Service Commission on moral or religious grounds, and seek their removal on the said grounds. It also recognised the right of the Denominational Boards to administer, maintain, repair and furnish their schools with an allotment of 80% of their admissions to Government needs and 20% to the principals. Training and selection of teachers for denominational schools were primarily within the purview of the Ministry.

While the Education Act may have achieved one of its principal objectives, i.e., to make available free secondary education to all persons of school age, the Chamber is of the view that many of the challenges faced by parents, teachers and children today, partly flow from the Concordat's arrangement. . The loss of life, physical assault, rapes, injuries and misbehaviour of pupils, teachers, and even, parents, continue because of the curtailment of the disciplinary powers of principals and the snail's pace at which discipline is enforced by the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission.

The quality of education remains a concern for parents, who are faced with teacher absenteeism, obsolete plant and equipment, shortages of or absence of textbooks and the need for costly remedial or supplementary "private lessons". Just look at the dreadful results at CXC and CAPE of boys, in particular, when compared with girls, and about which the Minister expressed great

dismay at the beginning of the last term. No longer are our centres of education sacrosanct and deserving of respect, as some students have to be searched daily by police. Security guards are part and parcel of the daily complement of staff, and criminal elements prey on both students and teachers.

A little over a decade ago, the Ministry of Education through its Secondary Education Modernisation Programme Coordination Unit (SEMPCU) began appointing School Boards to partner with principals and be policy advisers in support of its initiative in school based management. The Boards were not to be involved in day to day management, the domain of principals, who would be responsible for management of academic work, staff, curriculum, leadership and development and maintenance of a close relationship with the Boards.

This relationship is not without its challenges, as there is overlap between the duties and powers of principals as set out in the 1966 Act and its amendment in 2000, establishing the Boards. While the 1966 Act imposes on the principal the responsibility for day-to-day management of the schools, many principals have been taking the position that it overrides the 2000 amendment, that the function of the Boards is merely to advise them and they are not obliged to accept such advice. Perhaps, this may be the source of contention between the Maha Sabha and Mrs. Gajadarsingh-Nanga at the Tunapuna Hindu School.

In the Chamber's view, this one small step by the Ministry to appoint these School Boards, is but one in the journey of a thousand miles towards the ideal where they will operate like the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of private sector companies have been doing successfully, since corporations acquire a separate existence at law from the parties which own and manage them. It is desirable for School Boards to follow exactly this model, whereby the Ministry merely administers the policy of Government on education and transfers full authority to the Boards, to manage each school with funding as may be necessary in well defined circumstances, like where it wishes to provide free education to those who qualify, otherwise all who wish to attend school must pay to do so. Using this model, each principal actually exercises the Board's power to manage on a day-to-day basis and is answerable to it. They may hire and fire from principal to cleaner. They fix the curricula in accordance with Government's policy as enunciated by the Ministry, which measures their performance.

Despite the Chamber's support of the concept of School Boards, we also recognise their handicaps. They have no direct access to funding, despite the strictest rules for transparency and accountability. Government does not simply hand over to them the allocation in the national Budget to the Ministry.

The Boards are empowered to raise their own funds and control expenditure thereof, unlike public monies, which are constrained by ponderous and counter-productive tender procedures. Over centralisation and more so, management by the Ministry, continues.

The private sector and business community have a vested interest in the quality of education available to our youth. Its success will ensure that there is an appropriately qualified pool of human resources upon which to draw, and will assist in achieving a GDP which is reflective of growth, prosperity, reduction of unemployment and poverty in the country.

It is indeed a tall order, even with the advent of these types of School Boards courtesy SEMPCU. The Chamber trusts that the appointment of more of them will not be a statistical exercise only, but will serve to provide the Ministry with objective data in the pilot project from as wide geographic locations as possible, in order to shift the management and leadership style from one which is impotent and helpless, to one which provides our students with the tools, knowledge, aptitude and discipline to reduce its inefficiencies and so meet the needs of a modern society.

The proposed review of the Concordat may be part of the solution to the problems at the Tunapuna Hindu School. In the Chamber's opinion, any move by way of such review must certainly address the issues of empowering school boards to operate in a manner of optimum efficiency. In so doing it must provide a pool of productive graduates to enter our workforce.

Points to ponder

By John Spence

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Revisiting the Concordat on

Education — Part I

I wrote four articles in the Express in 2006 on the Concordat in education which is an agreement between the Government and the religious denominations in Trinidad and Tobago. Recently the Minister of Education has referred to the significant involvement of the religious denominations in the education system, pointing out that many denominational schools are underperforming, as are also many Government schools. In view of this I shall again write on the Concordat, drawing heavily on my earlier articles.

On reading the Concordat one gets the impression that (a) it was hastily put together and (b) it is out of date – it was agreed to in 1960 under the signatures of JS Donaldson, then the Minister of Education and Culture on behalf of the Government and Fr Pedro Valdez. However, it is an important document since 71 per cent of the primary schools and 31 per cent of the secondary schools are managed by the denominations. If, as seems to be generally agreed, the education system is deficient, the denominations cannot absolve themselves from some responsibility for this.

The Concordat of 1960 (Assurances for the Preservation and Character of Denominational Schools) is comprised of nine clauses and starts with an introductory statement that seeks to clarify the proposals on education at that time so far as they affected denominational boards of management, the governing bodies and principals of assisted secondary schools.

Clause 1 relates to property rights and states that "ownership and right of direct control and management of all denominational primary and secondary schools will be assured to the denominations".

Recently in the case of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Centres (not dealt with by the Concordat) it is proposed that the Ministry contribute 80 per cent of the "cost of construction works" and the religious body 20 per cent "inclusive of the value of the land" (the land to be provided by the religious body). I find this provision difficult to understand. If the land is worth 20 per cent and the religious body is not providing cash does this mean that the Government will provide 100 per cent of the construction cost of the building? And what if the land is worth more than 20 per cent?

Clause 2 states that: "in denominational schools, no books or apparatus to which the denominational authority formally objects will be introduced or imposed." To me this clause carries implications that have great significance for education and should have the widest discussion. For example, it could mean that the theory of evolution might not be taught in some schools, an issue which is much debated in the United States. Or if an examining body (Cambridge or the Caribbean Examination Council) were to select a book for English Literature to which there is objection are the students to be disadvantaged by the exclusion of this book? This might be justified if only students of the particular faith attended the school but this is not the case in our present system.

Clause 3 states —"In denominational schools (unless the denomination concerned otherwise gives its consent) the religion of the particular denomination which owns the schools will be taught exclusively and by teachers professing to belong to that denomination. In Government schools all recognised religious denominations will have access through their accredited representatives during the times specified in the time-table for the teaching of religion to the pupils belonging to their faith. Pupils attending the schools of a denomination not of their own faith will not be compelled to take part in the religious exercises or lessons of that denomination."

The question arises: do recognised religious denominations have access through their accredited representatives (during the times specified in the time-table for the teaching of religion) to the pupils belonging to their faith if such pupils are attending a denominational school not of their faith? I believe that in some denominational schools it is the practice to allow such access but there seems to be no obligation so to do.

Clause 4 relates to the appointment, promotion and disciplining of teachers in primary schools which will rest with the Public Service Commission (the Concordat was signed before the establishment of the Teaching Service Commission). However, the denominational board may object on moral or religious grounds to appointment of a teacher. It was proposed (provided legal and constitutional arrangements allow) that applications for teaching posts will be submitted in the first instance to the board of management (presumably the Denominational Board) which will forward them with their recommendations to the Service Commission for final action.

Clause 5 provides the core of the relationship between the Government and the denominations:

"The existing relationship between Government and the governing bodies and teachers in Assisted Secondary Schools will remain, subject however, to negotiated changes inevitable with the introduction of Free Secondary Education and to a system of inspection of these schools by persons authorized to do so by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

"The governing bodies of these schools will continue to be responsible for the administration of these schools and for their maintenance, repair and furnishing.

"These schools will continue to qualify for Government aid. The principals of Assisted Secondary Schools will make available a minimum of 80 per cent of the First Form entry places to those who by passing the test, qualify on the results of the Common Entrance Examination for free secondary education. The principals will be represented on the panel of examiners to be set up to administer the test.

The principals will be free to allocate up to 20 per cent, of the remaining places, as they see fit provided normally that the pass list of the Common Entrance Examination (now the SEA) serves to provide the pupils. Entry above the First Form will be under the conduct of the Ministry of Education and Culture and will require the approval of the Minister."

http://www.trinidadexpress.com/commentaries/Points_to_ponder-135218203.html

From our research we have concluded that the following should be considered:

- Total reform of the Education system. Example; training and professional development for teachers and educators by hosting regular workshops also incorporating global trends that have proven to be successful by other countries into our own.
- Entry level requirements for teachers should be reassessed; applicants should be a holder of a Bachelor's in Education Degree from an accredited institution. They should have a certificate of good character issued by the Ministry of National Security.
- Medical examination for qualified persons should include a psychological assessment as well as the physical.
- Review of existing policies to meet the global changes in education. Example; Inclusive Education and physical infrastructure to accommodate the differently able.
- Every child should be assessed by trained personnel to determine if there is a need for special intervention, in the case of special needs, such as dyslexia, ADHD etc.
- Every school should be equipped with full time Special Education teachers, Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers
- Provision of adequate resources and resource personnel (teaching assistants and substitute teachers).
- There should be constant revision of the curriculum to accommodate the changes in society and new global trends in education.
- There should be smooth transition from primary school to secondary school without the pressure and anxieties associated with the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). We should then consider continuous assessment for this transition.

- Denominational schools should not be guided by an outdated agreement (Concordat 1960). Times have changed and such, this particular guiding document should be revisited and changes implemented to accommodate all stakeholders in education.

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