Promoting the Attractiveness of TVET in the Context of Secondary Education Reform

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1 Main issues in the Caribbean context

Any discussion of TVET and its role in the wider education system must be situated in the broader context of the global trends and the national circumstances in which this debate occurs. The promotion of TVET in the context of secondary education reform in the contemporary Caribbean requires that international, regional and national contextualization.

From an educational perspective, the gravest challenges facing the Caribbean today include unprecedentedly high levels of youth unemployment; the impact of drugs, crime and violence in society; and the inadequacy of the education system in realizing the imperatives of learning for the 21st Century. Youth under the age of 30 make up 60% of the region’s population and the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development reveals that 85% of the 15-29 age cohort would migrate out of the region if they had the opportunity to do so.

Youth unemployment in the Caribbean represents 40-60% (except Barbados) of the unemployed, even though youth comprise 20-30% of the labour force and is disproportionally higher for females than males (Kazi: 2004). The global economic turbulence has since deepened the problem of unemployment in the region and among youth in particular.

Compounding the challenge are the weaknesses of the education systems which require fundamental restructuring in order to break free of their post-colonial inheritance and embrace the possibilities of the 21st Century with passion and vision. Poor performance in terminal examinations, weak foundational competencies (especially in language, mathematics and science), and growing inequity in the system all contribute to dangerous levels of social stratification.

Associated with the unbearable levels of youth unemployment is widening culture of despair – even among more qualified school leavers – over the absence of opportunity. Drugs, crime and violence find fertile minds. A World Bank 2003 study of Caribbean Youth Development revealed the following instructive statistics:

- Youth crime and violence in St. Lucia generates more than US$3 million in lost benefits to society and US$7.7 million in lost benefits to private individuals annually.
- A 1 percent decrease in youth crime would increase tourist receipts by 4 percent in Jamaica and by 2.3 percent in the Bahamas
- If female youth unemployment were reduced to the level of adult unemployment, GDP would be higher by a range of 0.4 percent in Antigua and Barbuda and 2.9 percent in Jamaica.

Family, schools, poverty and gender are the critical interconnected factors impacting youth at risk in the Caribbean and this is the context in which we must situate education reform. Given
the significant demographic of Caribbean society that secondary school students represent and the systemic constraints faced by youth, an integrated multi-sectoral response (which includes a very different educational paradigm) is necessary.

2 The location of TVET in the domain of secondary education

In the education systems of many developing countries including the Caribbean, TVET has historically been positioned as "second chance" or "second rate" education. In many countries young persons who are seen as “academic underachievers” are shunted into TVET programs and institutions thus reinforcing negative perceptions and a low valuation of TVET. Notwithstanding the effort of advocates over the years, the dominant discourse at the policy level has maintained a utilitarian perspective that embraces TVET as a skills alternative targeted at low achievers. The level and choice of TVET programs are predicated on the existing needs of the labour market in the national economy; not enough far-sighting is undertaken to determine future opportunities for which future workers must be prepared and there are insufficient opportunities for vertical movement beyond the "skills" training.

In replacing the colonial paradigm, the Caribbean Examinations Council sought to establish an equitable balance between the traditional academic subjects and the technical and vocational subjects by giving them equal weighting. In some schools across the region (in particular the comprehensive schools established through Canadian assistance), the content of secondary education involves a more integrated mix of academic and technical subjects. Students are offered options better suited to their career aspirations but without dichotomizing the strands.

3 Factors affecting the acceptance of TVET

There are many factors affecting the acceptance of TVET in many developing countries and most of these are legacy issues from their post-colonial inheritance. There is a persistent dichotomy between the head and the hand and the most prevalent perception of TVET is that it is the most appropriate educational provision for those who are unable to “use their head” effectively. The inherent elitism of the received models of education has reinforced this perception and the tendency towards instrumentalist philosophies of education has meant that the humanizing role of education is often marginalized. This is not a new phenomenon – as far back as 1902, the great African American thinker and activist, W.E.B Dubois warned:

“The ideals of education, whether men (sic) are taught to teach or to plow, to weave or to write must not be allowed to sink into sordid utilitarianism. Education must keep broad ideals before it and never forget that it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars.”
A related factor is the impact of outdated modes of production in the economies of many developing countries affecting/distorting the demand for TVET. In low wage, low skill economies, TVET is therefore seen as largely manual; less cognitively demanding and geared to the availability of these jobs. A recent study undertaken by the World Bank in the Caribbean noted that “As the global economy rapidly changes and new technologies are introduced, more highly skilled workers are required. In the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), firms struggle to fill skilled positions for lack of qualified candidates, while the number of unemployed low skilled workers is growing.”

As economies transform so too must TVET provision change and adapt to the new configuration of the economy and a different cluster of needs. The economies of the Eastern Caribbean countries have experienced a radical shift away from agricultural production and light manufacturing to services (which now account for almost four fifths of their economies) and even in the traditional manufacturing sector, new technologies, new quality requirements have changed the skill set requirements for competitive growth.

Another factor is the sharp decline globally in the jobs requiring manual and routine cognitive skills and an exponential increase in jobs requiring expert thinking and complex communication. This graph by Salmi (2010) demonstrates this:

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1 Bloom, Andreas and Hobbs, Cynthia “School and Work: Does the Eastern Caribbean Education System Adequately Prepare Youth for the Global Economy” in En Breve August 2007 No. 110.
The awareness among employers and stakeholders of the gap between these rapidly evolving needs and what is currently provided is negatively impacting the perception of TVET. Within the education system, the cost of both human and infrastructural investment in a model of TVET which bridges that gap is prohibitive for many countries. Notwithstanding this, such an investment is an inescapable requirement as it provides an opportunity for modernization of our economies. Investment in TVET must be seen as an essential component of any plan for re-engineering weak economies and shaping new economic opportunity that contributes to improved standards of living for all.

In the contemporary Caribbean, TVET has not kept pace with the rate and forms of technological change in Caribbean societies. The ICT revolution has brought extensive change in daily life and the expansion of telecommunication and mobile technology in particular has impacted even the poorest households. Responsiveness to this reality has been localized innovations in TVET programming at the level of individual institutions but what is needed is a system-wide re-adjustment. In some of the Caribbean countries such as Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, exciting models for TVET development in the form of National Training Agencies have been created.

4 What is to be done?

What needs to be done to promote the attractiveness of TVET in the context of secondary education reform is not a simple marketing effort. The re-positioning of TVET must constitute part of a more fundamental re-thinking of education in contemporary society. This must start with an unambiguous assertion of the purpose of education in today’s deeply challenging environment. Within the Caribbean we have adopted UNESCO’s five pillars of learning as well as the Statement of the Ideal Caribbean Person as the philosophical underpinning of all that we do in education. This is important because it establishes purpose and principles that revolve around notions of a balanced, competent, empowered, skilled and evolved human person. In this paradigm, the dangers of utilitarianism spoken of by WEB Dubois are avoided. The strategic response of the Caribbean Examinations Council to this challenge is represented in the following diagram:
In summary, the major initiatives which need to be undertaken in addressing the re-positioning of TVET within the general education system include:

- **Changing social perceptions of TVET in education** – policy pronouncements must unequivocally convey the message that TVET not a simplistic “practical thing" for the "not academically inclined" and that modern day TVET does in fact require significant foundational academic competencies. C21 TVET requires a strong cluster of generic skills that, above all provide the capability to adapt effectively to change and these skills must create capacity to handle change in technology, in the organization of work, and in the social impact of these new modes of communication and production.

- **Creating seamless pathways for success in the education system** – for lifelong learning to be effectively implemented, we must start from a perception of our education systems as eco-systems in which all sectors are inter-related, in which preceding stages lay the foundation for success at subsequent stages, in which the mating of ideas from diverse disciplines can provide new solutions and innovations for living and earning in the 21st Century. The old silos must give way to more fluid transitions. Education eco-systems must facilitate seamless transition within and between the world of work and community. Even the old dichotomy between work and community must be re-defined as we strive to create models of sustainable development in which work becomes endurable livelihoods supporting self, family and community. The education system must flow as many tributaries into one river of possibility; not parallel streams but a
confluence which improves the horizontal and vertical mobility of TVET learners and supports progression in learning and work.

TVET at secondary school level must create the strong foundation for career opportunities in technical areas for both students and young adults. This will require balancing the TVET implications of effective learning (the infusion of technology in all subjects), the creation of stronger partnerships with (especially green) industry and farsighting new trends pointing to future opportunities. The Caribbean Examinations Council has been given the mandate by the regional Council of Ministers to certify TVET in schools and we have established partnerships with the National Training Agencies in the region on the articulation of TVET in schools with TVET in the workplace. In some national environments like Jamaica with HEART Trust-NTA, there is a formal memorandum of agreement that specifies wide ranging collaboration between our agencies.

- With renewed interest in TVET in the Caribbean, a big challenge is the need to articulate TVET offerings and to rationalize the sector. Qualifications Frameworks provide an effective starting point but the rationalization of TVET programs (particularly in small states and limited resource environments) is a necessary next level imperative. Assessment and certification must serve to reinforce this articulation and create a transparent architecture for validation by all stakeholders. The following graphic summarizes some of the conceptual work done by the Caribbean Examinations Council in articulating the academic and the TVET subject domains and the relative incorporation of cognitive, affective and psychomotor elements:
• **TVET in basic education must promote innovation.** Even from primary/elementary level and through project activities in language, mathematics, science and civic subjects, students can be challenged through enquiry-based learning to display design thinking, create solutions using their own inventiveness and resources from their environment. At secondary level, the emphasis would be on higher order problem solving and on innovating through application of knowledge. This would require a paradigm shift from TVET as largely “skills training” to developing competencies and an innovation mindset.

National authorities have often invested significant sums in the establishment of incubators for business and new industries. We need to champion our schools as the greatest potential incubators in our societies but we can only do so if they are transformed from their Taylorist complexion to environments of discovery, application and a stronger cross-fertilization of disciplines. The fusion of TVET and STEM for example holds great promise for the enrichment of learning.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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- Main issues in the Caribbean context
- The location of TVET in secondary education
- Factors affecting the acceptance of TVET
- What is to be done?
context is important...

Caribbean Population

85% of the 15-29 age cohort wish to migrate if given the opportunity

CARICOM Commission on Youth Development 2010
Youth unemployment in the Caribbean: **40-60%** of the unemployed

Youth comprise **20-30%** of the labour force

Youth unemployment is disproportionately **higher for females than males** (Kazi: 2004)

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**Youth crime and violence in St. Lucia**

- More than **US$3 million** in lost benefits to society
- Approx. **US$7.7 million** in lost benefits to private individuals *annually.*
1% decrease in youth crime

increase tourist receipts

+ 2.3% in the Bahamas

+ 4% in Jamaica

If female youth unemployment were reduced to the level of adult unemployment, GDP would be higher by:

0.4% in Antigua & Barbuda

and

2.9% in Jamaica
LOCATION OF TVET IN EDUCATION SYSTEM

TVET has historically been positioned as "second chance" or "second rate" education. In many countries young persons who are seen as “academic underachievers” are shunted into TVET programs and institutions thus reinforcing negative perceptions and a low valuation of TVET.
Technical and General subjects on the same level

FACTORS AFFECTING TVET
"The ideals of education, whether men (sic) are taught to teach or to plow, to weave or to write must not be allowed to sink into sordid utilitarianism. Education must keep broad ideals before it and never forget that it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars”

W.E.B. duBois 1902
In low wage, low skill economies, TVET is therefore seen as largely manual; less cognitively demanding and geared to the availability of these jobs.

**CURRENT TRENDS**

The revolution in technology today

- The effect of mass introduction of computers in home and workplace
- workplace demand for type of skills

© Salmi 2010
New technologies
New skills

Design thinking
Solutions orientation
Adaptation

Worker re-training
Preparation for new jobs

Digital kids in analog classrooms
WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Where does TVET fit best?

What is education for?

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION & STRATEGIC GOALS
CXC TVET PHILOSOPHICAL & THEORETICAL BASE

- The Ideal CARICOM Person, 1989
- UNESCO Pillars of Learning C21
- Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence
- Wagner’s Seven Survival Skills for the New Economy
- Learning theories
- European Union key skills for meeting the fundamental aspects of life

STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO TVET ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Review of all TVET Syllabi for alignment to TVET Policy
- Formulation of a Policy Implementation Plan 2011
- Formulation of a TVET Policy 2009-2010
- 2008 Research on TVET offerings in secondary schools

The seamless integration of strong minds and hands in TVET to respond effectively to the demands and performance standards of Human Capacity Development

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Changing social perceptions of TVET in education

A seamless, globally competitive education (eco)system...

Creating seamless pathways for success in the education system
articulate TVET offerings and to rationalize the sector
TVET in basic education must promote innovation
“The essence of knowledge is, having it, to apply it; not having it, to confess your ignorance.”

Confucius

THANK YOU

MESI ANPIL
MUCHAS GRACIAS
MERCI

谢谢你 xie xie
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