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**THE ZIMBABWE BULLETIN
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**A CURRICULUM FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM IN ZIMBABWE:
LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE**

Obert Edward MARAVANYIKA

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM ARTS EDUCATION

According to Bruner (1960:1) 'Each generation gives new form to the aspirations that shape education in its time. What may be emerging as a mark of our own generation is a widespread renewal of concern for the quality and intellectual aims of education but without abandonment of the ideal that education should serve as a means of training well balanced citizens for a democracy'.

On the eve of the 21st millennium, various sectors of the Zimbabwean society especially at policy-making levels cannot avoid thinking and planning about the future in relation to lessons of the past. The advertisement on vision 2020 that splashes on our television screens at peak viewing times is a timely reminder that we need to deliberately set development targets during the period in question. Recently Permanent Secretaries in various ministries of government spent some time in the resort town of Nyanga planning and discussing development policies for the next millennium. We in education have an equally demanding task to reflect on the achievements and constraints of the last two decades of this millennium which marked our independence as a basis for mapping out strategies for education renewal for the future.

Thus this paper attempts to discuss briefly post-independence educational issues with a bearing on the curriculum highlighting achievements and constraints and what lessons we can learn for the future. In discussing these issues one is cognisant of the broader context of policy issues that were a result of ideological shifts, first from the inherited capitalism of the colonial era towards socialism adopted at independence, and later, back to capitalism as a result of international pressure especially from the Breton Woods institutions- the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The fall of the Soviet Union bloc symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was the final nail in the coffin of any former eastern bloc oriented policies thus entrenching the ascendancy and hegemony of western capitalism especially the monetarist kind bequeathed to the West by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the eighties. The adoption of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) (interpreted in Zambia as SATAN ALI PANO - the devil has ascended) marked a final departure from socialist policies towards more market oriented policies.

The success of increased access to education at primary and secondary levels of education created its own problems related to issues of equity, quality, and relevance, issues which had a bearing on the curriculum in a number of ways. For example to what extent was the curriculum able to answer questions related to the needs of the individual learner, the local community, the wider society, the development of knowledge and technology, and, other world

wide concerns that have a bearing on international relations and generation and distribution of wealth between the south and north? What training opportunities exist in a world labour market characterized by labour segmentation?

Issues related to the needs of the learner would include the kind of knowledge that would assist the individual to answer the more existential and moral questions on the one hand, and those more utilitarian to do with earning a living after school on the other. As our communities get more and more urbanized and more young people leave villages for the urban centres and new growth points characterized by what Durkheim called organic as opposed to mechanical solidarity of village life, to what extent has the curriculum equipped the young people with social and technical skills to live decent lives in the new social set-up where there is no traditional censure and control of custom and convention as in the village? Add to this the problem that the new 'urban' centres do not always provide relevant jobs for every job seeker. The young people have to join the informal sector where in some cases they have to create their own employment without any prior preparation in the form of entrepreneurial skills development for example.

Lastly the curriculum has to be sensitive to the world-wide issues such as the environment, gender issues, social issues, etc-issues that have necessitated global meetings in the nineties for example Sustainable Development (Rio 1992); Human Rights (Vienna 1993); Population and Women Empowerment (Cairo 1994); Social Aspects of Development (Copenhagen 1995); and Gender Equality and Peace (Beijing 1995). If we in developing countries are to be part of the global village we cannot avoid these issues. Indeed Zimbabwe sent representatives to most of these international gatherings.

There have also been international conferences on education specifically, for example, the interagency initiative on Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This was followed by regional evaluation meetings of achievements and constraints of EFA six years later culminating in the Amman meeting in June 1996. Recommendations emanating from all these meetings have to a greater or lesser extent influenced our education and curriculum policies especially as the donor community which has a very strong influence on the development and direction of our education policies have been key players in these conferences.

Bilateral donors and other NGO's have played a significant role in the development of education and the curriculum in Zimbabwe since independence. Countries such as Britain, West German, Netherlands, United States, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Denmark Finland and Belgium have provided aid to education through bilateral agreements. Agencies and other non-governmental organizations such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO, USAID, CIDA, GTZ, DSE, SIDA, FINNIDA, NORAD etc have also contributed and still contribute significantly towards education and the curriculum in a variety of ways. A curriculum for the next millennium must necessarily balance the relative demands of these players on the educational scene in Zimbabwe. For whatever we might think about education it is too important to be left to the whims and predilections of a single player or stake holder as its products affect all the players (and non-active players) alike in different but significant ways.

In short, the above constitute the context of education policy formulation for the next millennium and 'give new form to the aspiration that shape the education of the future'.

Some lessons from the 1980's and early 1990's

The early years of independence were characterized by a natural national concern for self-identity after almost ninety years of colonial and settler rule. Thus transformation became a buzz word in all aspects of the new Zimbabwe life including political, social, economic, cultural and educational aspects.

As stated above, socialism was initially adopted as the new ideology that would guide development and the Zimbabwean society was to be more and more massified in a command economy characterized by state intervention largely through inherited parastatals. The economic and social fortunes of Zimbabwe under that political dispensation which ended with a return to a market economy in the early 1990's are now history but some of the results are still with us, for example, the introduction of mass education at primary and secondary levels which subsequently created its own problems in the areas of equity, quality and relevance. The following figures provide a picture of the magnitude of the expansion. Where as in 1979 there were 2321 primary schools with an enrolment of 1 235 994 by 1996 the number of primary schools had risen to 4659 with an enrolment of 2 499 381 pupils. In the secondary sector, there were 177 schools in 1979 with an enrolment of 74 321 but by 1996 the number of schools had risen to 1528 and the enrolment to 760576. These figures show more the level of neglect of African education by successive pre-independence regimes rather than the ambitious objectives of the new socialist African government. Any nationalist post-independence government whether socialist or not was likely to respond to the people's demand for education in a similar manner. Education, together with other issues such as the land and basic human rights were among the issues that people had fought for during the war of liberation.

But in spite of the massive expansion over the last seventeen years or so, the net enrolment in primary schools stands at 86% which is a further indication that the country has not yet achieved one hundred percent participation rate at primary level. Thousands of children are not in school in rural areas especially in commercial farming areas, resettlement areas, and remote communal areas. In the urban areas, street kids, children of some religious sects involved in family business, and children of destitute people form part of the out of school groups. Besides, there is a high level of drop outs between grades in primary schools and between forms in secondary schools. Some observers claim that only 5% of the original cohort that enters grade one pass O'levels with 5 subjects or more including English eleven years later.

In the secondary sector, there are considerable disparities in participation between the sexes with 54,39% male and 45,61% female which is an indication of the internal inefficiency of the system. Secondary education has also been bedeviled by an unacceptably high failure rate at O'Level with only about 21% of candidates getting 5 O'levels and better. Both parents and

pupils have had to consider opportunity costs in terms of whether it benefits the child more to remain in school than to leave school and look for employment both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Some pupils in the southern provinces of the country bordering South Africa have jumped the border to look for manual jobs in South Africa, whilst some near Lake Kariba in the North West of the country left school to join fishing rigs on the lake. Indeed it is significant to note that of the possible 300,000 O'level school leavers anticipated for each year in the eighties, only about 140 000 pupils actually write O'Level, the rest having dropped out along the way.

This raises several issues including the relevance of the curriculum which has remained largely academic and a pale imitation of the liberal tradition; the quality and morale of teachers; adequacy of the flow of resources to schools such as adequate classrooms, teachers houses, qualified and experienced administrators, and classroom level resources such as desks, books, stationery chalk, dusters etc. Studies have shown an unequal distribution of resources to schools across different types of schools in the following descending order-high fee independent schools, urban former group A government schools, mission schools, urban former group B government schools, rural council schools and farm schools.

Inherent in the problem of quality is the whole issue of inequity across the various economic groups. One of the main reasons for attempting to make education available to all was to reduce social and economic inequality. Indeed in the early years of independence the main concern was growth with equity across different sectors of the economy. However, the experiences of the eighties and early nineties show that the quality of education children received at whatever level depended largely on the parents' or guardians's level of income and in some cases their ability to negotiate their children into high quality schools. For example, although Whites constitute an insignificant minority of the population, they still wield enormous economic power out of proportion to their numbers and sadly, the majority of their children are in the privileged high fee paying schools thus perpetuating the racial inequality in education of the pre-independence era.

A major contributing factor to inequality and inequity in the provision of education in different communities of the society is the well-intentioned government policy of cost sharing and partnership between government itself and local communities and households in the provision of education. Richer communities can provide better and more resources to education than poorer communities. This in turn enables richer communities to attract better qualified and more experienced teachers than poorer communities. The result is an inherent unintended differentiation in inputs, processes and products in education across the different economic groups with the richer getting better rewards than the poorer and hence entrenching rather than reducing social inequality. Donor assistance targeted at the poor communities though useful and significant, has not been able to bridge the gap.

Curriculum reform which in earlier years of independence was inspired by the philosophy of Education with Production met with limited success largely due to factors such as lack of understanding of the philosophy by key players, shortage of trained manpower, lack of resources especially those related to vocational and technical skills, resistance from parents

and pupils, and the attraction the academic curriculum still has especially as the new leaders of the new Zimbabwe were largely products of the mission schools academic curriculum. Besides successive colonial governments had also deliberately limited access to academic education for Africans and encouraged the building of vocationally oriented schools, providing especially agriculture to keep Africans in the village. Thus the Africans wanted the education they had been denied- the lure of the forbidden fruit. In addition, Education With Production smacked of the old vocationalism the Africans had resisted. More importantly, given the rapid expansion of education at independence, it was much cheaper to train and equip academic secondary schools than vocational and technical schools which would require expensive infrastructure such as running water and electricity and also purchasing of expensive equipment. The majority of the underserved groups as far as secondary education was concerned were in the communal lands which were under-developed and lacked the relevant infrastructure. Indeed a project such as *Zim Sci* was intended to teach pupils in rural areas the basics of science without the traditional equipment that would require the above infrastructure.

A number of curriculum projects were initiated and funded by different donor agencies addressing different issues such as augmenting learning resources (*Materials Project*); increasing access to vocational and technical education (*Technical Subjects Kits Project*); improving schools infrastructure (*Teachers Houses Project*); increasing environmental awareness (*Environmental Studies Projects*); training teachers for the primary school system with the correct ideological orientation (*Zintec Project*) training lecturers and teachers for technical subjects at the University and in schools (*The Technical Subjects Projects*) etc. The above projects and many more met with various degrees of success. Three related constraints however have emerged out of most of the evaluations of these projects. These had to do with shortages of qualified or experienced manpower to plan, implement and evaluate the projects; shortage of adequate funding apart from what the donors contributed; and lastly where transport was required to monitor the projects, or to transport materials to various centres, it was always inadequate unless provided for by the donor in the project proposal.

Thus for better or for worse, the donor dimension has been a significant factor in determining the amount and quality of curriculum innovation in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately donor funds are no longer flowing into Zimbabwe as generously as they did shortly after independence. The democratization of South Africa has attracted donor attention and a lot of donor limited resources have been redirected to that country.

Possibilities for the Future

The issues discussed above provide a context within which one could meaningfully discuss possibilities for the curriculum in Zimbabwe for the next millennium. But it would be presumptuous of one to be prescriptive as the curriculum enterprise should necessarily be a negotiated process between various stakeholders and partners whose composition and interests may vary from time to time. And yet certain issues and questions about curriculum decision-making have remained invariant over time. These include the needs of the individual, the nature of knowledge, the needs of the local communities and societies, and more

recently issues with regards to globalization.

Questions that might lead to a search for a worthwhile curriculum for the next millennium might then revolve around the above issues. For example, what skills would the young need to cope with the social, moral, cultural political and economic pressures anticipated in the next millennium? How can the curriculum prepare the young to cope with the more existential problems in a world of change and problems to do with earning a decent living? What knowledge do the young people need and how can it be made accessible equitably to all communities? What sort of communities and societies do we anticipate? For example one does not have to go far to see evidence of 'urbanization' without modernization. Lastly, what is going to be the place of Zimbabwean youths in the global village characterized by (among other things) fast developing information technologies, matters about the environment, concerns about gender, democracy and human rights, population, and participation and influence in charting the course of regional and world affairs?

The above questions would then have to be realistically and honestly answered within the context of constraints and possibilities (some of them discussed above) that the experiences of the last two decades have taught us. These might call for fundamental structural changes in our decision-making processes to allow for more open participation by different interest groups. We have to be proactive and design strategies that would allow us to tap into diminishing world resources towards education. The Education For All conference (1990) on basic education and the World Bank paper on higher education (1992) are already pointing towards the education agenda of these stakeholders for the next millennium. Is that what we in Zimbabwe want? Given the economic power and general influence the proponents of these initiatives have, how can we in Zimbabwe make our voice heard without jeopardizing our other interests? The Education for All initiative advocates the concentration of resources to education to the first nine years while the World Bank advocates passing on costs of higher education to beneficiaries. The combined effects of the two initiatives for developing countries would be to 'provide' for the majority of pupils basic education for up to nine years with limited intellectual and academic skills and limit higher education to those who can pay for it. What would be the impact of this on the international labour market in the anticipated global village? Due to labour market segmentation, basic education has tended to lead to secondary labour market characterized by unstable working conditions, low wages and fewer job ladders. Limiting access to higher education to only those who can pay will mean perennial dependence in the area of technology and other areas requiring technical and administrative expertise on the North by the South creating an unequal global village and depriving large populations of the world from enjoying the fruits of modern technology - a human heritage.

We owe it to succeeding generations to help shape the future in a manner consistent with our anticipated needs that take into consideration our own culture, economic potential and political needs. We cannot be diffident or reticent as other stakeholders with their own agendas might grab the initiative from us.

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