Introduction

This paper discusses some of the efforts which are being made to achieve two of the major goals of education i.e. equity and cultural diversity, especially within the context of economically less developed and culturally 'plural', multi-racial or multi-cultural societies.

The first part of the paper will focus on the issue of equity. It will examine conflicts which often result from the pursuit of greater equity through the rapid expansion of the educational services, and those which are likely to arise from efforts geared towards maintaining or improving the quality of the existing educational services.

The second part of the paper will concentrate on the role of education in preserving cultural diversity in multi-racial/multi-cultural societies and the conflicts which the pursuit of this goal is likely to generate with efforts which are simultaneously directed at achieving a greater degree of social cohesion or national integration in these societies. These two issues are quite closely linked since the pursuit of equity itself often has, as one of its goals national unity, which is sometimes seen as the other side of the coin to cultural diversity.

The final part of the paper will examine, although briefly, ways in which schools might contribute towards the achievement of these two goals. It will also indicate the importance of the contribution which other social institutions must make if the efforts by the schools in this direction are to be successful.

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Equity

Over the past three decades the issue of equity has been of increasing concern to educational policy makers especially in the developing countries. For example, Lynn Davies (1986), in a review of the national planning documents of a number of these countries found that educational inequality was a key consideration of their governments. As she noted "virtually all developing countries make some reference to equality and egalitarianism in their policy statements or policy documents". This issue will probably continue to increase in importance because, while western education has traditionally been an instrument of upward social mobility for children of poorer families, it has also been helping to reproduce social and economic inequality in these societies. This is becoming even more marked as some of the developing countries begin to produce more educated individuals than their economies can readily absorb. As this happens ascriptive factors seem to be reappearing in occupational selection, even though they are now used in conjunction with educational achievement.

Different meanings of the concept of equity in education

Despite the growing concern over the issue of equity in education there are differences in perception among educational policy makers as to how education can contribute to the achievement of this goal. For some, equity is synonymous with the more equal provision of educational opportunity for all sections of the population while for others education helps to achieve equity through its contribution to the goal of a more egalitarian society. The Government of Fiji, for example, attempts to combine these two goals in its Ninth Development Plan (1986-90, p.8) which indicated that a major national objective is to promote "a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development and this is to be achieved through the further equalisation of educational opportunity by eventually making twelve years of schooling available to every child in the country.

However among educational policy makers and administrators the relationship between equity and education is now seen to refer to a range of concerns, including a more equitable distribution of educational resources throughout a country, a greater equality of educational opportunity among all groups in the society and increasingly a greater equality of learning outcomes among those who happen to be attending the nation's schools.
Sources of educational inequality

There are a number of sources of inequality in education in the developing countries including rural/urban, regional, sex, class and cultural differences and to achieve greater equity in these societies the various sources of inequality would normally have to be tackled together, especially since they are usually closely inter-linked. However from the evidence which is currently available it seems that the policies aimed at reducing these inequalities are not likely to have the same outcomes for all societies, even though countries can learn from the experiences of each other in this field.

Increasing concern for equity in education

Even before the appearance of the spate of national policy statements mentioning this need for greater equity in education, governments of economically less developed countries (LDCs) had become concerned with this issue. They have increasingly tended to see education as a basic human right and have expressed a commitment to providing some level of education for all their children of school age. This can be observed in the recommendations of the Unesco conferences in Addis Ababa, Santiago and Karachi held in the 1960’s. More recently there have been concerted efforts by an increasing number of these countries, though with different degrees of success, to universalise primary education as the essential first step in the achievement of this goal.

Such efforts were started long before these countries were aware of the findings that the rate of return on primary education was higher than that on any other level of the educational system. (see Psacharopoulos 1972) In other words concern for equity rather than just economic returns was the major consideration in the decision by most LDCs to attempt to provide some amount of primary education for all. At the post-primary level educational policies pertaining to the proportion of primary school children who are allowed to proceed to secondary schools have varied tremendously depending on the economic resources of the country and its perceived need for higher level manpower. In some cases such as Tanzania less than 2% of primary school pupils are able to proceed to secondary school while other countries such as Zimbabwe and Fiji aim at a 100% transition rate. But despite these different policies one sees that here too the desire is to provide all students with an equal opportunity to
compete for these scarce educational resources, especially those beyond the primary school stage.

Therefore, where selection occurs for education after the primary stage, it is increasingly being made on the basis of achievement rather than the economic ability of parents to pay for such education. It is true that the outcomes often fall far short of expectations and the concern is usually directed at equalising opportunities by which means the beneficiaries become increasingly unequal in terms of the rewards they eventually receive as a result of their education. But nevertheless there is no doubt that most LDCs share some common commitment to achieve greater equity in the provision of their educational services.

Conflict between equity and quality in education

However these efforts at achieving greater equity in the distribution of educational services, even by universalising primary education have been accompanied by a number of problems. Foremost among these is the conflict which has arisen over the issue of improving the quality of the education that is currently offered in schools as against further expansion of the existing educational facilities. The suggestion is sometimes made that instead of "spreading the butter thinly" by attempting to provide educational services in "every nook and cranny" of a country, especially in the context of severe resource constraints, the overall educational returns might be greater if say, the additional funds were used to improve the quality of education now offered to the 60% to 80% of the population of school age, who are currently enrolled in schools. The issue has been coming more to the forefront because it is now being recognised that, where attempts are made to extend educational services to these marginal groups, especially if they live in the more remote areas of the country, the per capita costs are often very high and the response usually poor, judging by the retention rates and the learning outcomes among these children as compared with those in other areas of the country.

But the suggestion to sacrifice the goal of equity because it seems to conflict with that of educational efficiency is short-sighted for a number of reasons. To begin with the universalisation of primary education (UPE) is the first and most crucial step towards achieving equality of educational opportunity. Secondly, it can be an important factor in helping to increase social stability and reduce discontent, especially among educationally deprived groups. Education is
increasingly being seen in the developing countries, especially by those with little or no capital resources, as the most important factor in their own economic and social improvement. Hence the denial of primary education to any section of the population for any length of time cannot be conducive to long term social and political stability, especially when this facility is already being enjoyed by a large section of the citizenry. Further social stability, to which UPE is likely to contribute is a necessary prerequisite for long term economic development.

Another fact is that, as available evidence indicates, the returns on primary education are greater than those from any other level of the educational system. This means that, even from an economic point of view, it might even be worthwhile, in a situation in which funds are limited, to transfer resources from other levels of the educational system in order to universalise primary education. So the universalisation of primary education is likely to contribute concurrently to both equity and economic productivity.

Changing existing administrative practices in education to achieve equity

Despite the importance of a policy of UPE as a step in furthering the goals of equity, one has to examine further the assumption, often implicitly made, that there is an essential conflict between efforts at increasing equity and those geared towards improving the quality of education. It is obvious that all efforts at achieving equity in education would call for additional resources, whether it be through the allocation of extra funds to education or the reallocation of resources between the different sectors of the educational system. But an important contribution might also be made by some imaginative thinking which challenges some of the current assumptions about the processes by which qualitative improvements in education can be made. For example, it is usually accepted that in developing countries, improving the quality of teachers through providing them with higher levels of formal education and training is a 'sine qua non' of any effort to effectively raise the quality of education in the schools. Beeby's entire book on The Quality of Education in Developing Countries (1966) was essentially based on this assumption.

Yet, when a choice has to be made about allocating additional educational resources, either to the training of more untrained teachers or providing instructional aids such as reading materials in situations where these are very
limited or non-existent, the decision is often not an easy one to make. In fact indications are that, in such situations the returns, in terms of learning outcomes, are likely to be greater if the money is spent in providing good quality reading materials rather than going for the obviously more expensive route of increasing the percentage of trained teachers in the schools. However, if curriculum materials are to be put in the hands of teachers who are untrained and not very highly educated they have to be substantially different from those prepared for use by teachers who are better educated and trained. In other words the use of cheaper but well prepared and appropriate inputs into the educational process, as part of the strategy to have a more equitable distribution of educational facilities in a country, might not necessarily conflict with efforts to maintain or improve the quality of education.

Another factor that has to be considered in efforts to achieve a more equitable distribution of education among the various regions of a country is the impact of the administrative structures which might be devised to help achieve this goal. For example, in attempts to find additional resources for education outside those traditionally available from the government, some countries have attempted to encourage community participation in the financing of education which has led to increasing pressures for decentralising the control of education. But the outcome, in terms of achieving greater equity in the distribution of educational opportunity, can be negative because while increased community financing of education might assist with the further expansion of local educational services it is also likely to exacerbate regional inequalities. Hence the result can be a less equitable distribution of educational opportunity in the country particularly between the different ethnic groups where regional and ethnic inequalities happen to coincide. This, for example, seems to have been happening in countries such as Papua New Guinea. (see Bray 1984) Therefore to implement a policy of decentralisation and at the same time not run the risk of exacerbating educational inequalities between regional and ethnic groups, which can be detrimental for national integration, the decentralisation has to be accompanied by such compensatory policies as equalisation payments, or special allowances for qualified teachers to work in the more disadvantaged areas of the country.

Administrators also need to consider the possibility that the poorer utilisation of educational facilities by some groups might be due to a variety of underlying factors - cultural, economic and educational - which existing administrative practices and organisational structures in education might have failed to take fully into consideration. It cannot be assumed that this results simply from the lack of appreciation of the value of education by these groups. True, efforts are
often made to overcome some of the problems, including the establishment of schools in fairly sparsely populated communities, the provision of transportation and boarding facilities along with free tuition and scholarships for children whose parents are unable to pay for their education. The Government of Fiji has, for example, reported that it has been making "special efforts... to uplift the standards of Fijian and rural education" by the use of some of these measures. (Fiji's Ninth Development Plan 1986-90, p. 136).

While the popular responses to such steps have been fairly heartening, if any substantially greater degree of success is to be achieved in bringing these marginal or under-represented groups more within the ambit of the existing educational system and its provisions, a few innovative approaches might have to be used. For example, one of the factors contributing to the low academic performance of some students is not only their poor home backgrounds, both from an economic and an educational point of view, but also the irrelevance of the curriculum materials used in their instructional programmes. This even happens when the materials are produced locally because they are usually developed for and based on the experiences and environments of the children living in the more accessible or populated areas of the country, especially the cities. Because of this they are often quite unsuitable for use in what are sometimes the vastly different environments of the more remote rural areas.

Also the level of poverty of some of these marginal groups make them more unable and often reluctant to bear the opportunity cost of sending their children to school, especially at times of the day or year when it is most convenient to the teachers and the administrators but not necessarily the local population. And quite often the existing administrative arrangements in education fail to take this factor into consideration.

While this is a common situation in the LDCs it is not unknown in the economically more developed countries (MDCs) where efforts are also being made to provide educational services which would be more effectively used by groups previously under-represented in schools. I recall the experiences narrated to me by two teachers - a husband and wife team - who went out to work among the native population in the North West Territories in Canada. The parents of the children were at first quite reluctant to send their children to school but eventually did so, as a "favour" to the new teachers, who seemed to them to be very friendly individuals. But when trapping season came the parents moved away to the trapping grounds, taking their children with them and leaving the teachers with their empty schools. Not to be outdone the teachers packed up the motorised mobile home which they had, followed the
families and attempted to conduct classes during the day for the young children and in the late afternoon and evening for the older ones, after their trapping duties for the day were completed.

But they received a stern note from the Superintendent of Education informing them that they must return to their school forthwith since the regulations did not permit them to conduct classes away from the premises officially provided by the Government for that purpose. It was not simply a case of Superintendent lacking an understanding or not being sympathetic to the educational needs of the native population. It was more an example of how inflexible organisations like Government Departments of Education can be in handling situations which do not exactly fit into the traditional administrative patterns. For administrators, the safest line of action is usually to try and revert to the 'normal' situation in which the existing regulations would clearly apply. Even if there were no children in the school building, as happened in this particular case, the official regulations were not being infringed.

This kind of reaction is also quite common in developing countries, whether one is dealing with nomadic peoples like the Masai in East Africa or even with a more settled population who, when the planting or the reaping seasons come along, are unable to send their children to school with any degree of regularity. Our school systems are usually not structured to cope with such situations. In fact administrators have always tended to take existing organisational structures and sometimes even the current administrative arrangements as 'given' and expect the local population to reorganise their ways of living to fit in with them. In contexts like these administrators need to be prepared to modify the ways according to which our organisations are expected to work, by starting with a different approach, i.e. taking the people's way of living as 'given' and then structure the organisations around this fact so as to make it possible for the children to make use of the facilities at times and in places which are most convenient to them.

In fact when the need arises, what administrators or policy makers tend to do, is to recommend the use of the state control mechanism to produce from the population the kind of behaviours which they expect, or consider 'normal'. For example, they are more likely to see the answer to the problem or irregular attendance as the introduction of a compulsory education ordinance which allows them to specify the hours and the times of the year when schools would to be open and then expect the population to adapt their life-styles in order to conform to these regulations.
The point here is that if equity in education is to be made a more attainable goal then administrators and policy makers have to be prepared to be more flexible in the kind of practices and organisational structures which they develop in order to provide education, especially for these marginalised groups. In doing this they would need to take more fully into consideration the life styles and constraints which such groups might be facing in their efforts to send their children to school. Indeed there are administrators who are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of such flexibility in their efforts to achieve equity, not only in the provision but also in the utilisation of educational services. But these are far too few in number.

Equity of outcomes

However, as was indicated above, the issue of equity in education is not only concerned with the provision and utilisation of educational services but also with learning outcomes. And here we return to the suggestion that curriculum materials developed for the instruction of pupils must be relevant to their own experiences and environment. This obviously brings up the vexed question of what counts as "official" or "school" knowledge as against "public" or "community" knowledge and their respective claims for a place in the curriculum of schools. But the important point is that the special needs of the various groups in the society have to be taken into account if we are also hoping to achieve more equitable academic outcomes in terms of students' performance.

Greater consideration of the factors which affect the learning outcomes among children, even at the primary school level is important for a number of reasons. In most LDCs, a secondary education is a crucial factor in determining a students' future life chances, but admission to secondary schools is still very selective. And the key that often unlocks the admission door to these secondary schools lies in the academic performance of the students at the primary school stage.

Therefore special attention needs to be directed at efforts aimed at overcoming the hurdles which adversely affect the academic performance of primary school students, if the policy of using education as a means to equalize "life chances" of different groups in the society is to materialize. This is partly why an increasing number of developing countries like Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica and others, some with the assistance of the Van Leer Foundation, have extended their concern, to the provision of facilities for early childhood education in the hope
that such a step would help to equalize the chances which students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have, in passing the secondary schools selection examination. Whether or not this is the most appropriate strategy to achieve such a goal is another matter. But one of the concerns of educational administrators interested in the role which education can play in achieving greater equity must also be able to ensure, not only a more equitable distribution of post-primary educational facilities, but also with equalizing the opportunities among all groups in the society of gaining access to such facilities.

Limitations of educational policies in achieving greater equity of outcomes

Nevertheless, despite the various efforts by policy makers and administrators to secure a more equitable distribution of educational resources, there are many factors, some much more difficult to overcome than others, which affect the achievement of this goal. For example, all the selection strategies for secondary and tertiary education which have been tried and which are based on students' achievement at some competitive examination have resulted in certain groups maintaining an advantage over others, in terms of their securing entry into such institutions. And this has proved to an almost universal phenomenon, one which is very difficult to overcome.

For example, in Jamaica (see Woolcott - 1957) the Government decided to break the traditional dominance which certain groups had in terms of their children's access to secondary schools because of the parents' ability to pay the cost of this education. It attempted to do this by increasing substantially the number of Government awards to these schools and made them available on the basis of the students' performance at a competitive selection examination which all students seeking entry into secondary schools had to take. To implement the scheme Professor P.E. Vernon, then one of the most eminent psychometricians in the United Kingdom was recruited to advise on selection procedures which it was hoped would be as unbiased and non-discriminatory as possible.

Despite the precautions that were taken the outcome was that children from the upper socio-economic groups, who in Jamaica were mainly from among the "coloureds" and others with a "fair" skin complexion were still heavily over-represented among those selected for secondary education in comparison with
those from the black population. The Government considered that this was still not an equitable outcome and later decided to make further changes in its policies to ensure that there was a greater representation in the secondary schools, of children from black families, who were economically the more disadvantaged group in the society. Since most of the children with a fairer complexion and hence from the higher income groups were entering for the secondary schools selection examination from the private schools or from the "prep" divisions of some of the secondary schools, which generally had higher academic standards than the Government primary schools, the decision was made to allocate 70% of all secondary school places to students attending the latter schools.

There were two outcomes of this decision which ran counter to the intentions of the Government to achieve a greater degree of equity in the allocation of secondary school places. First a substantial number of parents from the higher socio-economic groups began to send their children, at least for a year or so before the selection examination, to the Government primary schools so that they would be among those competing for the 70% of the secondary school places. This shift not only re-established these children's chances of entering the secondary schools but also meant that those who had remained in the private schools still had 30% of these awards of which they competed. The outcome was that, while the chances of the black children getting into secondary schools did increase somewhat, it still fell short of what the Government intended when it imposed the 70:30 ratio for secondary school admission. Through the strategies which they used the higher socio-economic groups were able to maintain much of their traditionally higher representation in the secondary schools, as compared with the lower class black population.

But while the number of black children from the lower socio-economic groups who won secondary school places increased a new problem arose. The academic performance of these children, judged by their success at the G.C.E. examinations was lower than for those who were previously selected on an open competitive basis only. So it meant that for the same expenditure the "efficiency" of the secondary schools, measured in terms of the number of GCE "O" and "A" level passes which their students were able to secure, had fallen. This occurred despite the fact that there was no evidence of any relaxation by the teachers of their efforts to assist these pupils. In fact many of the teachers even worked harder in an effort to maintain the level of passes which their school had achieved in previous years at these external examinations.
In the USA Lewis Killian (1981) also reported a similar situation, pointing out that "at the City College of New York, long a symbol of academic excellence, a furious controversy erupted when some faculty members charged that the 'open admissions policy' imposed by the city government had led to a drastic lowering of the quality of education for all students, including the Black and Puerto Ricans who were supposed to be beneficiaries".

This is a problem which multi-cultural societies often have to face in their quite understandable efforts to equalize educational opportunities among the educationally more disadvantaged ethnic groups, especially at the post primary levels. Malaysia for example, operates a quota system in favour of the rural indigenous population who are said to be particularly under-represented in the post-secondary educational institutions. But laudable as this objective is, it can result, as was seen in the case of the secondary schools in Jamaica and the City College of New York, in lower levels of academic attainment among the students selected for further education, on the basis of quotas or other non-academic criteria.

In addition this method of allocating places in educational institutions challenges the meritocratic principle which educational systems tend to emphasize and could, unless other corrective measures are taken, have adverse effects on the goal of national integration and national unity in a "plural" society. In summary therefore, the efforts to achieve greater equity in the distribution of post-primary educational opportunities among various ethnic groups or regions in a country can result in a decline in the academic standards, as measured by the important index of examination results used in most of these societies, among the students attending their educational institutions.

In addition to efforts aimed at equalising academic outcomes, education policy makers need to give more attention to the ways in which education can increase employment outcomes which as Paul Willis (1986) reminded us can be "the final inequality". Many LDCs have been expanding student outputs from their educational systems, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels, at a rate much faster than the increase in job opportunities for which these graduates have traditionally aspired, resulting in growing numbers of educated unemployed. This can have adverse effects on the rate of economic growth, on social stability, and on the relationships between major ethnic groups in a 'plural' society. It is therefore becoming more of an issue to which educational policy makers have to turn if they are hoping to increase the contribution which education can make towards equity and at the same time social stability and harmony between the various groups in the society.
There have been a number of efforts at coping with this problem but these have either been ineffective or marginal in their impact, partly because the solution is often seen in local rather than in national and even international terms. However, if the role of education in increasing equity is to be enhanced there would be a need to examine more critically the deeper causes of this problem and to come up with broader policy alternatives which are likely to be more effective than the present narrow solutions that have so far been and still are being attempted.

Cultural Diversity

The second goal of education to which this paper now directs attention is the contribution which education can make towards maintaining cultural diversity and the implication this has for ensuring a certain degree of social cohesion among the various groups that might make up the nation state, particularly in multi-cultural or multi-racial societies.

Every society needs its members to have a minimum core of shared or common values and beliefs along with the facility of communicating with each other. If groups who are living side by side within a nation state have no such common institutions, which transcend sectional interests, to bind them or bring them together and create some degree of national unity, then ethnic and regional polarisations are more likely to develop and these can be potentially divisive. This has too often been the case in many culturally "plural" societies where different ethnic groups have remained sharply segmented, with the result that sectional hostilities have frequently broken out, threatening the long term social and economic development of the society. In other words a certain degree of inter-group cohesion and unity are needed in any society to ensure its long term stability and reduce the possibility of conflict among its various cultural sub-groups.

This even minimal level of consensus is further necessary if the various groups in a society are to develop the realisation that, even though they might be trying to achieve different goals, these can in the long run, be seen as complementary, with each, in its different ways contributing to the overall development of the nation.
These cementing of integrative institutions often referred to as "basic", "key" or "national" institutions should ideally be shared on a common basis by all the citizens, be cross-cutting in their membership and relate equally to all sections of the population. For example, all individuals and groups need to have equal access to the political, legal and economic institutions which are some of the "key" institutions in any society. But the institutions must not only be accessible to all. They should also be open to every member of the society on an equal basis. If this does not happen the society would virtually be having a policy of apartheid in operation.

Further the population should have the knowledge and skills to permit members to make full use of these "national" institutions as they see fit so that they are not commandeered by one or more sections of society at the expense of others. These "key" or "basic" institutions therefore play an important role in developing a degree of cohesion, unity, and solidarity among the various ethnic groups that make up a culturally "plural" society.

In addition multi-cultural societies must, in their institutional structures, recognise the importance for their different cultural groups to retain aspects of their own cultural heritage in order to meet their specific psycho-cultural needs. Such institutions include the religion, the music, the dances and other art forms, the language and other aspects of their cultural systems. These "local" institutions as they are often referred to, also need to be encouraged because they give to the members of these particular groups a sense of "rootedness" in the overall society and a feeling that they enjoy the respect of other groups, rather than being culturally dominated by one or more of them. In other words a culturally "plural" society must provide for the vibrant development of both these types of institutions - "basic" institutions which attempt to integrate the society at the national level and "local" institutions which allow the different ethnic groups to express themselves in their own cultural medium and ways.

It is often argued that the development of these two sets of institutions can increase the divisive tendency in a society and retard the emergence of a sense of nationhood. Because of that it is sometimes suggested that "local institutions" that serve the needs of particular cultural groups should be superseded by the more inclusive type of institutions which operate on a more universalistic basis. This process is often described as one of "cultural assimilation" or more correctly as "cultural imperialism". (see Carnoy 1974). But such a policy can be a short-sighted one which in today's society is more likely to bring conflict between the different groups since the various ethnic minorities would be inclined to see such efforts as one of "cultural genocide" for them. This
"assimilationist" approach to social integration generally misinterprets the relationship that can develop between "national" and "local" institutions in a society. First, instead of being conflictual, such institutions can be complementary, each contributing in its own way to national solidarity and to the overall harmony in the society. Secondly, any attempt to suppress the cultural aspirations of any group, especially if that group is large enough to react effectively, is likely to be socially very disruptive and costly to the society as a whole, including the dominant group. Further, such a policy is not likely to be very successful, judging from the fact that after years of colonial domination, many developing countries experienced, they have, since their independence, tried to re-assert their own cultural identity. Lastly, the assumption that the cultural expressions of sub-groups should be suppressed and be replaced by the culture of the dominant group in order to achieve national integration is one which totally disregards the human rights of individuals and groups.

However, for "plural" societies to retain their vibrancy, which comes from their multi-culturalism, they need to find ways and means not only of strengthening both their "national" and their "local" institutions but also of extending bridges between those two types of institutions through the use of what is sometimes known as "broker" institutions such as schools and the educational system in general. Such "broker" institutions can help bridge the gap which exists in many plural societies between the "national" and the "local" and thereby help to maintain cultural diversity and national integration.

Need for a comprehensive programme

The success of the efforts aimed at encouraging cultural diversity and maintaining harmony between various ethnic or racial groups in a society would depend very much on the formulation and concurrent implementation of a comprehensive set of national policies aimed at achieving greater equity in the society. This is because there are usually gross inequalities both in terms of economic and educational opportunities; between these different cultural groups and, therefore, if measures aimed at maintaining cultural diversity are to be successful, they cannot be separated from those needed to improve the socio-economic position of these groups which are currently disadvantaged. In other words, the goals of equity and cultural diversity are often inseparable and are most likely to be achieved if both are pursued together. Success with them is therefore inter-linked and would depend heavily on the support of the overall social, political, and economic measures which are taken by the society as a whole.
The role of the school in the maintenance of cultural diversity

However, once the total policy to achieve and maintain cultural diversity in a society has been accepted and measures towards its implementation are being taken, the education system can then play an important role to such efforts. Within this context schools can assist not only in the development and strengthening of both "national" and "local" institutions but also in helping to increase the awareness and understanding by the different groups in the society of each other's culture and value systems. This it does in its "broker" role by increasing the level of articulation between "national" and "local" institutions.

The alternative to this approach which in today's context could create many social problems, often leading to political instability, is for the dominant group to attempt to use the school to culturally homogenise the various ethnic groups which make up a "plural" society and get them to accept its cultural system as the only one which is "respectable" and therefore should be "universalised" within the society. Such attempts were often made in colonial societies.

It is because of the realisation of the possible contribution which schools can make to the achievement of the goals of cultural diversity within national unity, that education policy makers and administrators have been exploring ways and suggesting means by which education could help them to achieve the above mentioned objectives, i.e. to develop in the future citizens, irrespective of their particular ethnic or racial group membership:

- A common core of values and support for the "key" "basic" or "national" institutions which ideally would embody these values.
- The knowledge and skills which would prepare youngsters eventually to participate fully in the workings of these "key" institutions.
- Respect for and appreciation of the cultural traditions of the other groups who form part of these multi-cultural/multi-racial societies.

This type of political function of education has always been acknowledged (Milburn and Herbert 1974; Bereday 1966; Tapper 1976) and it goes without saying that schools are more likely to be effective in this task if there is
substantial congruence between the reality of how the overall societal institutions work and what is taught to the pupils about them.

Next an examination will be made of the attempts to achieve these three roles of the schools mentioned above. Schools and other educational institutions use a variety of approaches in attempting to develop among future citizens a sense of national solidarity, national unity or belongingness to a single nation state. For example students are often helped to understand the workings of these "key" or "national" institutions, to develop necessary skills, knowledge and dispositions to participate more fully in their operations and finally accept the idea that these "basic" institutions operate with essential fairness to all. There is evidence that one of the main outcomes of schooling is that it does succeed, at least to some extent, in passing on some of these universalistic values which obviously contribute towards social integration and the development of a sense of national unity among the various groups in the population. (see Dreeben 1968; Coleman 1973).

One of the more well known strategies is through the use of a core curriculum which exposes all students to these common sets of values and the "hidden" curriculum which further reinforces them. But even here the educator needs to be careful because quite often the content of the common curriculum tends to emanate solely from and represent the culture of the dominant group and treats as irrelevant the "structure of knowledge" shared by other groups in the society.

Another means is through the language policy which is often adopted in education. Despite the linguistic diversities which might exist in a multi-cultural society there is usually an attempt to educate the younger generation in a common language which would better prepare them to communicate effectively with each other. A latent function of this ability of the citizens to understand and speak to each other in a common language is also to contribute to the development of a sense of national unity, social cohesion or belongingness to a single nation state. However this policy might not always be easy to implement especially when the numerical strength of each language group is substantial, as for example in India.

In addition to inculcating in children these universalistic values, schools in multi-cultural or multi-racial societies, as was indicated before, also need to help develop an awareness and sensitivity among all students to the more particularistic elements in the society as revealed in the culture of the various ethnic groups who are also members of the nation state. This would help to ensure that "local" institutions do not continue to be seen as separatist,
mutually exclusive and potentially antagonistic or subversive to national unity but as essential elements in the social fabric of a culturally "plural" society.

There are many ways in which schools can help to increase the degree of articulation between "local" and "national" institutions which is necessary to maintain cultural diversity with a framework of national unity. For example, they might attempt to help their pupils acquire a basic understanding of the culture of various groups in the society such as their religious beliefs and practices and not only that of the numerically or politically dominant one. However the specific aspects of say the religious practices of a group will have to be taught in the "local" institutions which each cultural group might establish for this purpose such as Sunday Schools, madrassas, etc.

Another examples is again the language policies adopted in schools in multicultural societies. While for the sake of national integration, schools might be assigned the task of passing on a common language to all groups so as to make it possible for them to communicate easily with each other it should also provide the opportunity for the various cultural groups, where their numbers make it possible, to learn their own language because of its importance for their overall cultural survival. So while a single language might be an important nationally integrating force in a society, the languages of the other cultural groups should not be ignored by the school system. Such a policy of bilingualism or multilingualism obviously regards language teaching in schools as a means not only of national integration but also to help maintain cultural diversity in a society.

But unfortunately the emergence of such an educational policy often depends on the amount of political power or influence which these different groups can exert on the dominant group in the society. Further the success of this policy will usually demand the use of local materials which are meaningful to the children. For example, the successful teaching of French in Quebec would depend, not on language materials which are developed for children in metropolitan France but on those which are produced locally for children in that province. This would obviously need extra resources for the preparation of such materials which often present a problem for the administrator, especially in these days of financial stringency. Nevertheless its importance in a culturally "plural" society cannot be ignored and Fiji seems to be an outstanding example of a country that recognises the importance of encouraging the teaching of different languages in an effort to maintain its cultural diversity. The number of examinable languages in this country has been increasing over the years and
Another area to which attention needs to be given if schools are to develop as effective "broker" institutions is the training of teachers to work in communities whose cultural systems might be quite different from their own. Teacher training has been increasingly focusing on the classroom performance of pupils and the earlier efforts in teacher education programmes at developing among trainees, a recognition of the importance of the links between the school and its community have, over the years, been gradually de-emphasised. But if schools are to play this broker role effectively it means that the teachers themselves would also need to develop a better understanding of the communities from which the schools draw their pupils. This would therefore involve a shift in the focus of most teacher education programmes since teachers can only effectively work with various cultural groups in the successful education of their children if they themselves have a sound understanding and appreciation of the culture of these communities.

Finally educators need to remind themselves that schools alone cannot successfully perform the task of achieving equity and diversity and develop greater harmony between the different ethnic groups in the society and this can be done by attempting to increase individual awareness of each other's cultures and value system. Schools can only play a supporting role in this task. It is ultimately the effective openness of the political, economic and other "national" institutions of the society, on an equal basis to all its member groups, which would ultimately determine the success of any attempt to achieve equity and social stability and at the same time maintain cultural diversity in "plural" societies. For example, education has been and probably still is an important instrument of upward mobility and a major determinant of an individual's income in the developing countries also. But this relationship does not hold equally well for all groups in a "plural" society and the degree to which factors such as race, ethnicity or other non-achievement variables modify this relationship depends very much on how unequally are economic and political powers distributed in the overall society.

Therefore unless the various groups in a culturally "plural" society have access to and share in an equitable manner the political, economic and other scarce resources of the country, then the schools would not be very effective in trying to achieve the goals of equity and cultural diversity. There are, in the long run, two possible outcomes of the relationship between the various groups in a multi-cultural society. Either a situation develops in which some groups
become economically, politically and culturally dominated while the dominant group continues to assign a greater part of the national wealth and other tangible or intangible but nevertheless crucial resources such as effective political power to itself, or the dominated groups rebel against the existing system and attempt to change it radically or in some cases, even overthrow the existing social order.

On this point it would be useful to recall the continuing controversy among social scientists as to whether the major ethnic groups in a "plural" society could live and work together in harmony or whether, as M.G. Smith (1960, 65) pessimistically - though some might say realistically - asserts, "no peaceful change" or long term harmonious relationship between them can be achieved because the various "sections have nothing in common except involvement in economic and political relations which are essentially antagonistic" (see also Smith R.T. 1966).

Admittedly social cohesion and the maintenance of cultural diversity in a "plural" society is not easy to achieve. But the chances of securing a peaceful and harmonious relationship between these various groups would ultimately depend on the overall steps taken by the ruling or dominant group to achieve greater equity including, as was mentioned above, a more equitable sharing of economic and political power and other scarce resources by the various groups that make up these societies. Failure to move in this direction also would create continued dissatisfaction and disharmony among the groups who are disadvantaged as far as the allocation of these resources are concerned. And it is only when this becomes a policy which is accepted by the nation and actively pursued throughout its many institutions that the schools and other educational institutions would be able to increase the effectiveness of the contribution which they can make in helping to achieve equity and preserve cultural diversity in these societies.

References


