

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE BAHAMAS

Dr. Keva Bethel

Introduction

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas gained its independence from Great Britain in 1973. It is a territory that consists of a chain of islands, cays, rocks, and reefs stretching some 600 miles from the southeast coast of Florida in the north to northern Hispanola in the south. Of the hundreds of islands and cays, more than thirty are inhabited (Sealey, 1), and on nineteen of these the Bahamas Government maintains public schools.

Census statistics reveal that in the year 1990 the total population numbered 254,685, of which 171,542, or 67.4%, lived on New Providence, the island on which the capital, Nassau, is located. Grand Bahama, where the nation's second city, Freeport, is found accounted for 41,035 inhabitants (16.1% of the population). The remainder of the population was distributed among the other islands in the chain (Department of Statistics, 1-3).

This uneven distribution of the population, while more dramatically marked in recent times due to substantial immigration from rural islands to the urban centers, has always been a pertinent feature of the Bahamian landscape. Combined with the distance of islands from one another, and the remoteness, small size, and scattered nature of the settlements within each island, historically it has been difficult and costly to render and sustain an even delivery of educational and other social services.

As early as 1931, a Board of Education Report detailed the enormity of the challenge:

Of the many educational problems that confront the Board the most formidable is that of the Out Islands. It has remained unsolved for close upon a century, and it would be rash in the highest degree to predict the length of its continuance. No other colony in the British Empire would appear to be faced with proportionate difficulties (Board of Education 1948, 29)

These factors have also impacted upon the equality of access to the full range of formal education that Bahamians throughout the country have historically been able to enjoy, as well as upon the consistency of the quality of education provided in all parts of the country.

These difficulties notwithstanding, education in The Bahamas has progressed dramatically in the fifty years since World War II, and the significant social, economic, and political developments that have occurred over that same period have had a major influence upon that progress. These serve, therefore, as an essential backdrop to the educational reforms that have been realized in the past five decades.

Post-war Perspectives (1945-1957)

Social Context

In the period immediately following the Second World War, the Bahama Islands occupied a relatively insignificant place among the colonies of Great Britain. They possessed no mineral resources, produced no major agricultural exports of note, and relied mainly upon winter season tourism as a source of government revenue. The Islands had, however, come into some prominence during the war because their strategic geographic position had made them an ideal location for American and British military bases. Further, the former King of England, Edward VIII, known after his abdication as the Duke of Windsor, had been posted there as Royal Governor during that period.

In the 1940s white residents made up only 10% of the approximately 69,000 inhabitants, but they controlled both the government and the major part of the wealth of the country. The society was strictly segregated along racial lines, and access to major hotels, restaurants, theaters, some private schools, and even some churches was denied to people of color. There were relatively few black professionals or business persons of major substance and in the absence of a framework of established political parties, black political leaders were obliged to wage their struggle for social change on an individual basis.

The highest forms of employment to which the majority of Bahamians were likely to be able to aspire during that period were posts in the Civil Service (generally at clerical and lower technical or administrative levels), teaching, nursing, or the church. Moreover, only a proportionately modest number actually achieved those positions.

Expectations for the public education system, therefore, were limited being largely defined by those realities. Even among the ruling elite, whose wealth was derived mainly from trade, there was not generally a marked interest in the pursuit of education beyond secondary school. The University of Cambridge School Certificate was the highest form of qualification available locally, and represented in the main the acme of achievement to which those few privileged Bahamians who were able to receive a high school education could aspire (even in private schools). Those persons wishing to proceed beyond that level were obliged to travel abroad. Public spending on education and other social services was controlled directly by the legislature which raised revenue and authorized expenditure. Despite the strengthening of the economy that occurred due to the expansion of tourism, the large part of resultant financial benefits were accrued to the mercantile elite, and although widespread employment, particularly in lower-level, tourism-related jobs, was possible for the population as a whole—especially in New Providence—actual investment by the Government in social development remained modest.

Status of Education

i. Primary and Early Childhood Education

Statutory authority for the oversight of public primary education was vested in a five-member Board of Education, appointed by the Governor-in-Council and consisting mainly of serving members of the House of Assembly. The Board maintained schools throughout the islands and provided free primary instruction for children aged 6-14 years. Through a system of grants-in-aid, it also provided financial assistance to communities that established schools

of their own where no government institutions existed. These were usually to be found in the Out Islands, as islands other than New Providence were termed at the time.

Most of the major religious denominations also maintained primary schools in New Providence and in the Out Islands. These were mainly financed through funds or special grants made available from their affiliates in the United Kingdom or the United States. They also charged modest fees.

Education for children between the ages of six and fourteen years was compulsory and under the clauses of the Education Act, the Board was required to satisfy itself that any child of school age not in attendance at a Board school was receiving efficient instruction (Board of Education 1948). The Board was, therefore, responsible for the certification of private schools and for ensuring that parents fulfilled their obligation to send their children to school. The compulsory clauses of the Act also required that parents who did not ensure their children's attendance at school were to be brought before a magistrate for suitable action that usually took the form of a fine.

In 1947 the total enrollment in Board-supported schools (including monitors who received part-time instruction) was 12,473 students. The average attendance rate was recorded as being 91%. By the end of the period (1957) some 23,000 students were enrolled with the average rate of attendance being recorded at 87% Board of Education (1958, 5-6).

Truant Officers, in cooperation with Welfare Nurses, monitored school attendance in New Providence, where truancy occurred mainly when cruise ships were visiting the island. In the Family Islands, absenteeism usually resulted from travel to New Providence, the need for older children to assist in the harvesting of crops, and the incidence of colds that prevented children living at some distance from their schools from attending on "days of inclement weather" (Board of Education 1948, 14).

Public schools in the capital were divided into preparatory (infant) schools that catered to students aged 6-8 years, junior schools for children age 9-11 years, and senior schools attended by children age 12-14 (Board of Education Report 1947, 14). Student movement from one grade level to the next did not depend upon age, however, but upon mastery of subject material and it was not unusual at any level to find children aged three or four years above the average age of the grade.

In the outlying areas of New Providence and in the Out Islands, where the numbers in individual settlements were often quite small, the all-age school model prevailed. Generally, it was acknowledged that the quality of education provided in the Board of Education schools was not of a very high standard and, in many cases, that available in grant-in-aid schools was even poorer. Schools were often overcrowded and located in inadequate physical facilities. Prior to 1947, moreover, students in Board schools received only twenty-two hours of instruction per week as contrasted with the thirty hours per week prevalent in the United Kingdom. In that year teachers voluntarily agreed to raise the hours of attendance to twenty-seven and a half (Board of Education 1948, 3). Teaching materials were limited and in short supply. The majority of teachers had received little or no training and possessed only modest academic backgrounds (Board of Education 1956). The

monitorial or student teacher system was widespread and, particularly in urban schools, class sizes were generally large. The minutes of the January 1956 Board of Education meeting, for example, revealed teacher/student ratios of 1:40 in some Nassau Preparatory schools and 1:50 in Junior and Senior schools (Board of Education 1956). Various means were employed to try to raise the standard of schools: the introduction of training schemes for teachers both locally and abroad; the recruitment of qualified staff from the United Kingdom and, later, from the West Indies; the provision of additional school positions via building programs. These initiatives were, however, seriously limited by the levels of funding available.

The school curriculum was confined to the “basic” subjects of English Language, Arithmetic, History, Geography and Scripture. “Practical” subjects offered were Domestic Science, Handicraft, Hygiene and Nature. Little time was devoted to cultural, vocational, or recreational subjects, although a number of schools cultivated gardens. Some efforts were made during the early 1950s to support the curriculum by means of school broadcasts, by strengthening school-based and circulating libraries through school fundraising efforts, and through assistance from the British Council.

The qualification that marked the successful completion of compulsory schooling was, for most students, a locally designed School Graduating Certificate, issued by the Board of Education. Success rates in this examination were not encouraging as a rule. In 1950, for example, only 245 (approximately 38%) of the 658 candidates were awarded certificates (Board of Education 1950, 45). By 1958, despite the efforts made to improve the quality of instruction provided in Board schools, the percentage of successful candidates for the School Graduating Certificate had risen only to 53% (Board of Education 1958, 7).

The more able Senior School students were permitted to take the University of Cambridge Junior Certificate examination and later the Bahamas Junior Certificate examination, which in 1954 replaced the Cambridge examination.

Results in these examinations were even less impressive. By 1958, only 31% of the 212 candidates entering the Bahamas Junior Certificate examination were successful (Board of Education 1958, 7).

The responsibility for monitoring the quality of education delivered in the schools resided with the Inspectors of Schools. The scattered nature of the islands made regular inspection of Out Island schools very difficult, however, and in order to alleviate that situation to some degree, several of the trained teachers who had been recruited from the United Kingdom to be Head teachers in the Out Islands were used as supervisors of schools in their islands. Further, during this period, a number of new schools were built in settlements throughout the Out Islands to allow children to attend school closer to their homes and to enable the Board to more adequately fulfill its responsibility of ensuring that primary education was made available to all children of eligible age.

Nurseries or preschools for children below the age of six were not maintained by the Board of Education and approaches made to the Board to take responsibility for this level of education were consistently rejected (Board of Education 1945 and 1957). Therefore,

nursery or preschools, as were available, were operated by churches or private individuals. Of the individually run private preschools most existed in the homes of their proprietors, often in less than desirable physical surroundings (Board of Education 1948, 85). The quality of education provided varied widely and depended entirely upon the competence of the persons responsible for the schools, most of whom had little or no formal training in the area. The importance of the early years of schooling was recognized, however, and the Board did take measures to have some of its teachers specially trained in infant methods for posting in preparatory schools in New Providence. Efforts to introduce similar provisions in Out Island schools were entirely dependent upon the availability of suitable accommodations for separate infant classes and of teachers who would volunteer for the work (Board of Education 1948, 30).

ii. Secondary Education

At this time, secondary schools did not fall under the control of the Board of Education and virtually all schools offering secondary education were located in New Providence. Most secondary schools were privately run, and the one government-supported secondary school, the Government High School, was managed by a school committee which reported directly to the Governor-in-Council. This school had been established in 1925 with the intent to provide a higher level of educational opportunity for prospective teachers and other potential candidates for employment in the Civil Service. Most of the students served were drawn from the black population, although less affluent white students, particularly from Out Islands, also gained access to secondary education through this school.

Entry to the Government High School was based upon performance in a competitive entrance examination and enrollment remained quite small (just over 100) throughout the early years of this period (Board of Education 1951, 48). Even by the end of 1957, students enrolled at the Government High School numbered only 268 (Board of Education 1958, 8).

Like most other government and private schools of all levels in the country, the Government High School was co-educational. It was not a free school during this period, though the fees charged were modest (ten pounds per year). Eight government scholarships (four for children in New Providence and four for students from the Out Islands) were awarded annually and in addition, the Board of Education offered special assistance to students identified as potential teachers.

The curriculum of the Government High School, which covered the four years of secondary schooling offered, was largely academic being determined by the requirements of the Cambridge Junior and Senior School Certificate examinations. Physical facilities and material resources were limited, but the school was staffed by a trained, well qualified, competent staff, and the quality of education provided was perceived to be high.

All other schools offering secondary level education were independent, fee-paying schools, run by or affiliated with various religious denominations. Under a special "Act to encourage and assist Secondary Education in the Colony," the Governor-in-Council was authorized to pay a grant to approved schools based on specific criteria of enrollment, numbers of qualified teachers, and examination successes in overseas examinations (Board of Education

1950, 29). As in the case of the Government High School, their curricula were generally determined by the syllabi set for the Cambridge School examinations. The private schools were staffed, for the main part, by qualified teachers and tended to offer a more diversified range of extracurricular opportunities than their government counterpart.

Overall, within the general framework of educational provision of the period, the quality of secondary education available was of a reasonable standard and offered a sound foundation from which those who had the opportunity to do so might proceed to further studies abroad. Access to secondary education was, however, severely limited because of its cost, the few school positions available, and, in some instances, by admissions policies that excluded certain students on racial grounds. Out Island students were further disadvantaged as there were few boarding facilities available and their attendance at secondary schools depended on their ability to find suitable accommodation with relatives or friends in Nassau. In 1947, therefore, only 804 students were enrolled in secondary education. By contrast, some 16,287 students were receiving education at the primary level (Board of Education 1948, 18-19). By 1957, the number of secondary school students had only increased to 1,447, while more than 23,000 were engaged in Primary Education (Board of Education 1958, 20- 21). The vast majority of Bahamian students, therefore, could not look forward to receiving education at the secondary level.

iii. Tertiary Education

Throughout the early post-war period, there was relatively little that was available in the colony in the way of tertiary education. Persons wishing to pursue studies at levels beyond high school traveled to the United Kingdom, Canada, or the United States for this purpose, and by 1958 there were some 134 Bahamians studying at universities and colleges abroad (Board of Education 1958). Although the University College of the West Indies had received its Royal Charter in 1949, only very few Bahamians took advantage of opportunities for study provided there. Contact with and influence from the University College grew steadily during the 1950s, however, as teacher recruitment for Board of Education schools spread to the West Indies and scholarships for studies at the University College of the West Indies began to be made available to Bahamians.

In 1950 a college was established for the training of teachers. A training school and a facility for developing schools' broadcasts were also attached to that institution. Unfortunately, the college encountered a variety of problems and in July 1957, after just seven years of operation, was closed by order of the House of Assembly (Ministry of Education 1973, 50). Promising candidates who were able to gain entry to Teachers Colleges in Britain were sent abroad by the Bahamas Government to receive teacher training there. Summer school courses and evening classes were organized throughout the period to provide opportunities for teachers unable to gain acceptance to college programs to acquire further academic education and some professional training.

Technical and vocational training was provided mainly through a school for domestic and hotel workers and a technical school that offered day-release and evening courses for persons in the work force, as well as day time courses for senior school boys.

Nurses training was delivered through a school of nursing operated by the Bahamas General Hospital and aspiring policemen were trained for the Force in a local police college.

iv. General Comments

Expenditure on education during this period represented, on average, some 8-9% of total government expenditure with a gradual increase to a 10% level during the mid-1950s. In 1957, for example, of the total government expenditure of 4,193,544 pounds, some 412,411 pounds were spent on education (Ministry of Education 1973, 13). Of this amount, 57.7% of the education budget was committed to teachers' salaries, and another 3.7% was spent on administration—i.e., on salaries of Board of Education officials and clerks, costs of school inspection, and transfer of teachers (Board of Education 1958, 3). The remaining 38% of the budget had to cover the costs of upkeep of buildings and grounds, construction of new schoolhouses, and teachers' residences, scholarships, grants-in-aid, and the provision of supplies and equipment for schools. The efforts of the Board to improve the material support of instruction throughout the country (through provision of more adequate materials and appropriate learning resources) were therefore significantly hampered by the low levels of funding available. Attempts to persuade the House of Assembly to increase allocations to education were largely unsuccessful.

A number of significant factors occurring during this period had considerable impact upon the development of the educational system, however. One was the appointment, in 1946, of the first professionally qualified Director of Education whose mandate was to assume responsibility for the planning and oversight of education in the colony. This marked the beginning of the gradual professionalization of the system that was to continue throughout the succeeding decades. A second important factor was the gradually increasing commitment, on the part of the Board of Education, to recruiting a number of trained teachers from overseas (the United Kingdom and later the West Indies) to serve as Head teachers in Out Islands. This reflected a growing recognition of the urgent need to make improvements in the system and, most importantly, of the role of qualified teachers in achieving such improvements.

The third factor resided in the growing numbers of Bahamians (many of them serving or aspiring teachers) who were receiving higher levels of education and training both at home through the fledgling Teachers College and at colleges and universities abroad. The impact of the improved knowledge and skill of the newly qualified teachers began to be felt very gradually in Bahamian schools. Further, the influence of this new group of Bahamian intellectuals also manifested itself in the wider society, where they began to be more forceful in their demands for social and political change and for greater educational opportunities for the masses of the Bahamian people. In addition, the Bahamas Union of Teachers, founded in 1945, continued to press for improved conditions of service, for the professionalization of teachers, and the improvement of the system as a whole.

The establishment, in 1953, of the first Bahamian political party, the Progressive Liberal Party, was to have far-reaching effects upon the future of Bahamian society in general and upon the development of Bahamian education in particular. This party was formed to represent the interests of the masses of the population and in particular those of the

majority black population that until then had been effectively marginalized in the Bahamian society. The party provided an organized focal point for the energies and aspirations of the young Bahamian professionals whose social consciousness had been raised by their exposure to new knowledge and ideas abroad. In addition to bringing home the benefits of their enhanced skills and abilities, they also brought to the society new notions of decolonization aroused by the constitutional changes occurring in the British Caribbean and elsewhere (Saunders, 86).

During this period also, large numbers of ordinary Bahamian men (and some women) traveled to the United States to work on farms as a result of a contract made between the United States and Bahamian governments. The experiences of racial discrimination that many of them were obliged to undergo (especially in the segregated southern states) forcibly emphasized the indignities of their own segregated society, and they too joined the movement for change (Saunders, 86).

These returning workers, whose efforts in previous decades had been fragmented and inadequately organized, also strengthened the struggling labor movement in The Bahamas. Supported by the new political party, the unions became more militant in their demands for more equitable working conditions and rewards for their workers. Like the members of the Progressive Liberal Party, they were strong in their press for improvements in the educational system, recognizing that education was crucial to the social advancement of the Bahamian people. The union leadership particularly urged that the Bahamas should become affiliated with the University College of the West Indies. In the early years of its existence, however, that institution was viewed by the ruling elite as a dangerous source of radical thinking, and they were reluctant for The Bahamas to become involved with it. Nevertheless, a visit to Jamaica in the mid-fifties by the Chairman of the Board of Education resulted in an increased realization of the potential benefits of such an alliance. In addition, the deficiencies of Bahamian education were particularly recognized, and it was patently clear that enormous improvements in the standards achieved in Board schools would be needed if Bahamian students were to qualify for entry to the University College of the West Indies. The ambitious intentions of the Board were not met by concomitant investment on the part of the House of Assembly, however, and little progress was actually achieved in this regard at that time.

Two other occurrences during this period had significant impact upon the development of education in The Bahamas. One was the integration of all races into the oldest and, at that time, largest private secondary school. This provided increased access to secondary schooling by middle-class children of color.

The second came in 1956 when the House of Assembly accepted a resolution abolishing discrimination in public places. It should be noted, nevertheless, that despite this official attempt to end racial segregation, a number of subtle discriminatory practices persisted (Saunders, 85), and the importance of education as a means of equipping Bahamians to combat the inequities of their society became more and more forcibly recognized.

Pre-independence Perspectives (1958-1973)

Social Context

During the fifteen years prior to Independence, Bahamian society underwent profound social and political changes that, in turn, had a major impact upon the development of education in the country.

By 1958, political struggles had taken on a more clearly defined bipartisan form, for the organized political activism of the PLP had led the white majority group in the House of Assembly to form themselves into the United Bahamian Party (Hughes, 66). A general strike in Nassau in 1958 drew the attention of the international press and led the Imperial Government to take a more active interest in affairs in The Bahamas. This resulted in an unprecedented visit to the colony by the Secretary of State for the Colonies himself, who called upon the House of Assembly to pass appropriate labor legislation and measures of electoral reform (Hughes, 66). The first stage of the latter was enacted in 1959, when a bill extended voting rights to all adult males. By the general election of 1962, women too had been granted the right to vote. Constitutional reforms in 1964 brought self-government to The Bahamas and introduced Ministerial government, abolishing the old system of public Boards (Hughes, 96). The sustained efforts of the PLP were crowned with success in the general election of January 1967, when, with the collaboration of one independent and one Labor candidate, the party achieved the necessary majority of seats and formed the new government. This was the first time that a government representative of the majority of citizens of the country had assumed power, and it heralded the advent of a new era of social development for the country.

A major plank in the platform of the new government was the extension of educational opportunities throughout The Bahamas and the strengthening of the quality of the system. Investment in education, therefore, became a priority for this was seen as essential to bolster the growing spirit of nationalism and to ensure that Bahamians should be equipped to take charge of critical aspects of their own affairs. This quest for national sovereignty was to culminate in the attainment of independence in 1973.

*Educational Developments**i. Statutory Reform*

The report of a study of Bahamian education commissioned by the Colonial Office in 1958 (later known as the Houghton Report) highlighted the many deficiencies of the system and pointed directions that should be followed to achieve needed improvements. The 1960-1961 Interim Report of the Board of Education articulated the Board's recognition of the inadequacies of the existing educational provision to meet the needs of the people of The Bahamas "either in range or quality" (Board of Education 1961, 28), and outlined plans to remedy those deficiencies. A number of significant reforms ensued. A new Education Act came into effect in 1962 and this greatly extended the powers of the Board creating for the first time a unitary system of education to cover the compulsory period of formal schooling that was now to last nine years instead of eight, beginning at age five and ending at fourteen. Under the provisions of the new Act, the Board was empowered to take responsibility for secondary and further education, as well as libraries and other affiliated

educational services. The Act also mandated the establishment of a Central Advisory Committee whose members were to be drawn mainly from the independent school systems and whose function was to advise the Board on educational matters.

ii. Establishment of the Ministry of Education

The advent of ministerial government in 1964 brought with it change and expansion in the central organizational arrangements of the education system.

With the establishment of a Ministry of Education and the separation of the administrative and professional aspects of duties, earlier initiatives to provide more structured supervision and support of the work of the schools were greatly strengthened by the appointment of District and Subject Inspectors, the focus of whose work shifted from reporting on schools to providing assistance and guidance to them. The teaching force was steadily improved by the participation of more teachers who had received training at home and abroad.

Curricular offerings expanded steadily to include more cultural, technical/vocational, and recreational subjects. The establishment of various arts festivals provided opportunities for the accomplishments in cultural endeavors to be presented to the wider public.

The Bahamas became a contributing member of the University of the West Indies in 1964 and the Department of Education of that institution became actively involved in overseeing the preparation of teachers in The Bahamas.

iii. Post-1967 Developments

The attainment of majority rule by The Bahamas marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented expansion of school provision. Each year, the PLP government awarded to education the lion's share (19.1% by 1970) of the national budget. It undertook a massive program of construction throughout the country, building new schools and extending existing ones, with the aim of providing access to improved levels of education for all Bahamian children. Available Bahamian educational personnel were supplemented by qualified teachers recruited from abroad, while substantial investments were made in the further development of large numbers of Bahamian teachers.

A central curriculum division was established at the Ministry of Education Headquarters in 1967, with specialist officers being put in charge of ongoing curriculum development and of overseeing the work of the schools in all subject areas. Guidance and Counseling services were instituted at the Ministry level and were subsequently extended to the schools themselves (Ministry of Education and Culture 1970-71, 21).

The first Public Records Officer was appointed in 1970 and undertook initial efforts in surveying public records and archives. The Public Records Act of 1971 formally established a Public Records Office that, though it fell under the general direction of the Chief Justice, was for administrative purposes under the control of the Minister of Education (Ministry of Education and Culture 1970-71, 181).

The establishment of a central repository of important historical records provided a previously absent focal point for educational and social research and annual public exhibitions enabled ordinary Bahamians to become more fully acquainted with aspects of their own history—most of which had previously been conspicuously absent from the school curriculum. The heightened consciousness of and pride in the Bahamian experience strengthened the growing tide of nationalism engendered by the move towards independence.

iv. White Paper on Education

In 1972, the Ministry of Education published “Focus on the Future”, its White Paper on Education, in which were outlined the plans for the development of education in an independent Bahamas. This document characterized the inherited Colonial system as “narrow, meager, ill-suited and irrelevant” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1972, 1-2). It proposed a revitalized approach to the delivery of educational services that would more appropriately address the challenge of preparing Bahamians to take full advantage of the wider range of employment opportunities available to them and to assume greater responsibility for the conduct of the nation’s affairs. The new government had adopted a deliberate policy of “Bahamianisation,” i.e. the replacement, wherever possible, of expatriate workers by appropriately qualified Bahamian nationals. For its effective implementation, this policy demanded larger numbers of more adequately educated, highly qualified Bahamians. The aims of educational development in the period leading up to Independence were, therefore, to fashion a system to enable the people throughout The Bahamas to gain wider access to progressively higher levels of quality education. This process was intended to enable Bahamians to gain greater personal fulfillment from the educational experience and to contribute meaningfully to the task of nation-building.

The Schools

i. Preschool/Early Childhood Education

Despite the Ministry of Education’s recognition of the importance of preschool education, problems of staffing, accommodation, and material resources continued to militate against the provision of public preschooling during this period. The numbers of private institutions offering this level of education continued to increase, however, with the Ministry’s accepting responsibility for the supervision of such schools, for the provision of assistance in the upgrading of the skills of preschool operators, and for encouraging the community at large to recognize the importance of preschooling.

By the 1970-71 school year, preliminary surveys indicated that there were some forty-five private institutions in New Providence catering to children under five years of age. These included reception classes in independent primary schools, as well as church and privately operated preschools. It was estimated that by that time approximately one-third to one-half of all children three to four years of age were in attendance in such schools. This level of participation resulted from both the desire of parents to give their children better educational opportunities and from necessity arising from the greater involvement of women in the workforce.

Fees for preschool education (in church-run establishments), averaged about \$1.50 per week. In privately-run instructions they ranged from \$80-\$180 per term. In more expensive schools, members of staff tended to be better qualified and facilities and resources more appropriate for this level of education. In many of the other establishments, however, facilities available continued to be limited and staffs and proprietors sadly lacking in formal training for the work (Ministry of Education 1970-71, 195).

The overall result of this unevenness of provision and the differential access to early childhood education by the age cohort as a whole was predictable and children of more affluent families generally began the compulsory period of formal schooling with a decided advantage over their less fortunate peers.

ii. Primary Education

Prior to the New Education Act in 1962, existing legislation referred to all Board of Education schools as "Primary". As had been pointed out in the Houghton Report, however, only the Infant and Junior divisions of those schools could legitimately be characterized as "primary," and from 1960 this new interpretation was observed in practice.

Under the provisions of the 1962 Education Act, the starting age for primary schooling was lowered to five years and by 1968 continuous six-year primary schools had replaced the infant and junior divisions. Most schools in the Out Islands, however, continued to be of the all-age structure and in smaller ones the classes were of the multi-grade variety.

A new primary school curriculum developed by committees of teachers was introduced in the 1961-62 school year. This was devised to be more relevant to the needs of the children attending the schools and was extended to include General Science, Art, Music, Handicraft and Physical Education. The use of visual aids and supporting materials was more fully encouraged. Preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum was undertaken in the 1961 summer courses for teachers that took a professional rather than academic focus. Through the cooperation of the Department of Education at the University College of the West Indies, two specialists from Jamaica participated in the delivery of courses in the use of Visual Aids (Ministry of Education 1960-1961, 20). In the early years of this period, however, the effective implementation of the new curriculum was hampered by the persistent problems of overcrowding, inadequate staffing, and shortage of equipment and supplies (Ministry of Education 1961-1962, 7). Despite these circumstances, the new approaches indicated a major step forward in the evolution of the system. An ambitious building program was undertaken in New Providence and in the Out Islands throughout the period to alleviate overcrowding and to provide additional school buildings. The new schools in New Providence represented an important departure in design, in that the previously prevalent open plan structures were abandoned in favor of two-story buildings containing self-contained classrooms. Prefabricated schools were also introduced as a temporary measure to allow for more rapid construction of needed classrooms.

With the establishment of the Curriculum Division at the Ministry of Education in the late 1960s, initiatives in curriculum revision and development continued in order to suit the needs of the evolving school system, i.e. with the aim of preparing all students to proceed to

secondary education. Wherever possible, moreover, the concept of team teaching was introduced and new primary schools constructed in the late 1960s and early 1970s were planned to incorporate this methodology.

The Primary School Graduating Certificate that had been taken at Grade 6 of All-Age and Senior schools, was abolished after 1963. From 1966, the Government High School entrance examination was expanded into a competitive Common Entrance Examination taken in Grade 6 of the primary schools, or by students aged 11-13 years in Grade 7 of the secondary schools. Its purpose was to select students for admission to the Government High School and other Ministry schools, for scholarships to independent schools and to provide a basis on which the Headteachers of independent schools could admit students (Ministry of Education and Culture 1970-1971, 114).

iii. Secondary Education

This period witnessed unprecedented progress in the provision of secondary education. The Government High School moved into a new, well-equipped facility that enabled it to provide a wider range of curricular offerings and to expand its "A" Level program that was also made available to graduates of the other high schools in the country.

The former "Senior" schools of the public system were converted into junior secondary schools, preparing students for the level of the Bahamas Junior Certificate. In New Providence, many new structures were built, especially in the rapidly developing new residential areas of the island, in order to make a larger number of secondary school positions available. These new schools were provided with science laboratories and facilities for crafts. Large, multi-purpose gymnasiums were built at three of the new schools and large auditoriums were incorporated into other school structures. Three of the new schools were designated as full high schools and were staffed and equipped to enable them to offer courses leading to GCE Ordinary Level examinations for students who had successfully completed the Bahamas Junior Certificate examination (Ministry of Education and Culture 1970-1971, 63).

The first central secondary school in the Out Islands was constructed at Colonel Hill, Crooked Island in 1965. In that same year also, the government introduced a new scholarship plan intended to increase the numbers of Out Island students seeking to pursue secondary education. The plan allowed for the award of 250 government scholarships (50 per annum) for Out Island students to attend private high schools in New Providence. Selection of scholarship winners was based upon performance in the Government High School entrance examination. In 1967, the plan was extended to include New Providence students as well.

In the period 1965-1973, another six secondary schools were opened in islands throughout the archipelago, thus making considerable progress towards achieving the national goal that the new government had set of significantly extending the opportunities available for secondary education throughout the country. This goal was later formally reiterated in the pre-independence White Paper on Education.

An important feature of the development of secondary education in the Family Islands (as the Out Islands were now known) was the active involvement of local communities that helped to raise funds for the construction and equipping of such schools.

At the beginning of the 1970s, all public secondary education in New Providence was organized into a structure incorporating junior secondary schools (for children aged 11-14), whose programs culminated in the Bahamas Junior Certificate examination, followed by senior high schools whose curricula led to external examinations—i.e. University of London General Certificate of Education “O” Level, Royal Society of Arts and Pitman examinations.

In 1972, as another demonstration of the growing national pride, all the public schools in New Providence (other than the Government High School) were renamed in honor of Bahamians who had made significant contributions in the field of education (Ministry of Education and Culture 1971-1975, 45). Because of the tradition of excellence with which the name of the Government High School had come to be associated, it was decided that this name should be retained. That particular school continued to be a selective school during the period prior to 1973, admitting students on the basis of the Common Entrance Examination. Fees at the Government High School were abolished, however, from 1967 onwards.

The Common Entrance Examination was also used by certain independent secondary schools to screen students whose attendance would be supported by government scholarship provision. By offering financial support to students who would otherwise be unable to attend private school, the Bahamian Government further expanded the opportunities available to young people in the country to gain access to secondary schooling.

Independent schools that also operated primary departments provided direct transfer to the high school departments for students proceeding from those levels. Most of the independent schools followed a pattern of comprehensive secondary education, covering a continuous period of five or six years and offering a curriculum that encompassed academic, cultural, and various technical/vocational subjects that could cater to the abilities and interests of a wide range of students.

By 1967, when two single-sex Roman Catholic secondary schools merged to form a single large comprehensive high school, all independent schools, like their government-run counterparts, had become coeducational. In the late 1960s, moreover, two of those schools also developed boarding facilities for students from the Family Islands. This move further extended the opportunities available to Bahamians to pursue secondary education.

Statistics for the period show steadily increasing numbers of student entries for both the local Bahamas Junior Certificate and for the overseas “O” and “A” Level examinations. Numbers of subject passes obtained in these examinations also increased, although the percentages of passes obtained (except at “Advanced” level) did not improve accordingly. As a result, critics argued that despite the major investments made in education, the performance of the system was still less than acceptable (at least as measured by examination successes) (Hughes, 180). Complaints were made by various elements in the

society—including the teachers union and Ministry of Education itself—that the inherited system of education that still, in many instances, prevailed was “alien and irrelevant” (Hughes, 180). Nevertheless, having larger numbers of people gain access to full secondary education enabled more Bahamians to enter areas of work that had formerly been closed to them—both in the public sector and in the rapidly developing private sector—and to proceed to tertiary level education both at home and abroad.

iv. Tertiary Education

As in the other levels of the system, during the period leading up to Independence there was significant growth and progress in tertiary education in The Bahamas. The Education Act of 1962 gave the Board, and later the Ministry of Education, responsibility for further education, i.e. for the full-time or part-time education of persons over the compulsory school age.

a. Teacher Education

The move that was to have an important impact on the development of the system as a whole was the reopening in the academic year 1961/1962 of the Bahamas Teachers College, as had been recommended in the Houghton Report. During the previous year land was identified and plans were drawn for the construction of a specially designed building and the acting Principal traveled to Jamaica to study teacher training there, with the assistance of the Department of Education at the University College of the West Indies. A senior Bahamian teacher attended a one-year University College of the West Indies course on the emergency training of teachers. The Director of Education visited the United Kingdom and recruited a Principal, Vice-Principal, and lecturer for the College. Twenty-eight students entered the College in 1961 to begin the first year of a two-year course. In 1962, in addition to the second intake of students for the two-year training course, a group of mature teachers were accepted to undergo a special one year emergency program (Ministry of Education 1960-61, 17).

These local developments were paralleled by an extension by the Board of Education of its scholarship support for overseas study via the Commonwealth plan for the training of teachers, the introduction of a plan to support the training of specialist teachers, and by the expansion of the numbers of the normal awards for overseas teacher training.

From the early 1960s, therefore, the flow of Bahamian teachers returning from studies abroad (especially in Arts and Vocational areas) began to grow steadily. These initiatives reflected the government’s recognition that only through a substantial increase in its investment in teacher training could the unacceptably low standards in Bahamian schools be improved. By the 1962-1963 academic year, some 82 teachers were recorded as being in training as opposed to a mere ten recorded for the 1958-59 year.

After the Bahamas became a contributor to the University College of the West Indies, training undertaken at the local Teachers College was offered in association with the Institute of Education, which “endorsed” the certificate awarded. Certification for the one-year emergency courses, however, was awarded by the Ministry of Education itself.

In addition, during the 1960s, the Ministry extended its commitment to assisting teachers to obtain degrees by offering scholarships to the University of the West Indies for this purpose. Students who took advantage of those new opportunities represented both in-service trained teachers and high-school graduates who were able to profit from the expanded programs of Advanced level studies offered locally. The 1966-1967 Ministry of Education Annual Report optimistically anticipated that these moves would “enable the Ministry to provide itself eventually with all the teachers it requires” (17). The plan also enabled degreed teachers to pursue post-graduate teacher training at the University of the West Indies and in the United Kingdom, in this way further contributing to the development of a professional cadre of indigenous educational leaders.

In 1966, the Teachers College admitted married women to the two-year training program for the first time, thus substantially increasing the enrollment. In the following year, students from the Out Islands further swelled the ranks.

In 1968, a second teachers college was opened to provide academic education and professional training for uncertified teachers who could not be accommodated at the Bahamas Teachers College in Nassau. It was established in San Salvador, one of the more southerly islands of the Bahamas chain. This residential college, located in a rural setting, was intended to cater primarily to the needs of Out Island teachers, allowing them to be trained in an environment similar to that in which they would return to teach. By the 1970-71 academic year, some 155 teachers were enrolled at the College. Sixty of the first intake of sixty-three students graduated in 1971. Graduates of the San Salvador College were to make significant contributions to the gradual improvement of Out Island schools. The influence of graduates from the Bahamas Teachers College was similarly felt in schools in New Providence and other parts of the country.

b. Technical and Vocational Education

Initiatives in technical and vocational education were also significantly increased over the period for it was recognized that a skilled workforce was essential to support an increasingly sophisticated economy.

The Nassau Technical Institute was established in 1961 when the classes of the former Technical School were transferred to the Government High School, and the facilities and curricula were restructured to provide evening and day-release courses in technical areas. A Principal and teaching staff were recruited from the United Kingdom in 1962 and the institution continued to grow throughout the 1960s. The Institute was amalgamated in the academic year 1970-1971 with a technical Center that had been set up in 1968 to relieve overcrowding in the higher grades of secondary schools among students sixteen years of age and older, and to provide full-time vocational training that had not previously been available. All departments of the amalgamated institution were accommodated on a single site in 1971-1972 and the College was renamed the C. R. Walker Technical College. Hotel training, however, that had formed part of the curriculum of the Technical Institute, continued to be offered at the facilities that had earlier been specially constructed for the purpose and eventually developed into a full-fledged Hotel Training College (Ministry of Education 1970-1971, 162).

c. Adult Education

Following the affiliation of The Bahamas with the University of the West Indies in 1964, an office of the Department of Extramural Studies was opened in 1965. The Department provided general interest classes, courses, and professional seminars for adults, taught by full-time staff of the University and part-time local staff. Important opportunities for the further education of the adult population were thus provided, and a center for intellectual debate established.

d. Scholarships for University Study Abroad

Over this period, increasing numbers of scholarships were provided by the Bahamas government to enable Bahamians to pursue university education abroad in a wide range of disciplines. The majority of these were offered for study at the University of the West Indies but support was also given to students proceeding to the United Kingdom, Canada, or the United States in order to undertake programs not available at the University of the West Indies.

The awards took the form of either bonded scholarships (where recipients undertook to work in the public service upon return from study), or loan scholarships (given for areas of study deemed important to The Bahamas, but in which the Government could not itself employ graduates) (Ministry of Education 1960-1961, 173).

In addition to those provided by the Government, growing numbers of private scholarships were offered and other awards were made available through Commonwealth and international agencies.

By the academic year 1971-1972, a total of 268 Bahamians were receiving scholarship assistance for overseas study as compared with 69 in 1967. The growth in numbers of students able to pursue full secondary and "Advanced" Level studies enabled more and more of such students to qualify for admission to Universities abroad and in addition to those who were successful in acquiring scholarships, many Bahamians pursued university study (mainly in North America) at their own expense. Increasingly, also, Bahamians sought post-graduate qualifications in specialist academic or applied areas of importance to national development. All of these developments resulted in the steady emergence of a growing cadre of Bahamian leaders in significant areas of both public and private sectors of the society. They also signaled the opening up of a major avenue of social mobility and the expansion of an influential black middle class.

Post-independence Perspectives (1973-1998)

Educational reform in The Bahamas in the two decades following Independence was particularly marked by the many and varied initiatives taken by the Government of The Bahamas to strengthen the school system in order to ensure that all Bahamians would have the opportunity to prepare themselves to participate effectively in the affairs of the new nation.

Education continued to consistently receive the largest share of the national budget, and major investments were made in further extending and democratizing educational provision throughout the country. The Common Entrance examination was abolished in 1974 and the system-wide structure of junior and senior high schools in New Providence and central high schools in Family Islands made it possible for virtually all public school students (other than those in very remote isolated settlements) to gain easy access to secondary schooling if they so desired. Locally provided tertiary education was greatly enhanced by the establishment, in 1974, of the Bahamas Hotel Training College and The College of The Bahamas, and of the Industrial Training Center in 1980 as well as by the initiatives of several U.S. institutions that offered degree programs in The Bahamas. Further, various measures were introduced with the intent of enhancing the quality of public education and counteracting the impact of an increasingly turbulent social environment.

Policy Influences

i. External Agencies

As the Government of The Bahamas turned more and more to external sources for assistance in funding educational development, planning in the Ministry of Education was guided by a number of teams of experts commissioned through the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Their reports recommended various courses of action for the improvement of the national education system.

One of the most significant of these was the so called “Maraj Report,” prepared in 1974 by a review team headed by Dr. James Maraj, the then Assistant Commonwealth Secretary General. The team brought together representatives from universities in the West Indies, the United Kingdom and Canada and the group’s mandate was to review progress made to date in the implementation of the provisions of the White Paper on Education, to recommend measures to complete the process, and identify a program of external assistance to supplement the manpower and financial resources available locally to support the existing and future needs of the system (Minister of Education and Culture, 1). The recommendations of the report were comprehensive and emphasized the need for careful, regular system-wide planning, effective articulation among all levels of the school system, clear definition of responsibilities within the Ministry, and a degree of decentralization of the responsibility for schools to local communities. Priority attention to preschool education and the further development of technical and vocational education were also urged. Guidelines for the structure and scope of The College of The Bahamas were given and the establishment of Teachers Centers was encouraged.

In some measure the Maraj Report provided the blueprint that guided the evolution of education throughout the remainder of the 1970s and into the 1980s.

In the early 1980s, the World Bank undertook a preliminary study as preparation for a major project designed to strengthen technical and vocational education in the country. This identified areas in need of institution building and human resource development at several levels of the system where investment in technical/vocational education was of particular

importance. The resultant project enabled a number of improvements to be effected in facilities and equipment available for such education at the secondary and tertiary levels and provided opportunities for professional development. The impetus provided, however, proved difficult to sustain in all areas and the need for renewed attention to this aspect of education continued throughout the period. Further, initiatives taken to improve the planning and statistical functions of the Ministry—important to support this and other forms of educational development—resulted in few substantive changes.

In the mid-1980s, UNESCO provided the Commonwealth of The Bahamas with a sector review that identified progress that had been made in the implementation of the recommendations and provisions of the previous reports, and the perceived impact of these. It also highlighted further initiatives required, and emphasized the need for greater coordination among external projects and avoidance of duplication of efforts.

ii. Local Influences

Studies were conducted also at the local level. Two national task forces were set up in 1981, one to examine matters pertaining to teacher education and the other to study issues related to examinations. Further, during the 1980s, the annual national education conferences were revived and during those events new policy directions were articulated by successive Ministers of Education. Planning for the implementation of those directives was also undertaken during the conferences.

A result of these many activities was that the 1980s was a decade marked by numerous and frequent changes that, in retrospect, made consolidation of individual initiatives difficult. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture grew significantly in size and complexity during this period. The Department of Education, that had direct responsibility for the schools, became increasingly centralized and deeply embedded in the overall Ministry bureaucracy. As the school system itself grew in size and scope, it became more and more difficult for this centralized administration to respond promptly to the needs of individual schools—especially those in the Family Islands—and despite the significant financial investment that continued to be made by the Government in the educational system, many intransigent problems persisted. Inadequate staffing and delays in provision of materials and supplies continued to plague schools throughout The Bahamas, but particularly those in the Family Islands.

Social Influences

Escalating social problems had an increasingly adverse effect upon the performance of the school system during the period, particularly as the island nation became exposed to the dangerous effects of an aggressive international drug trade. The numerous islands of the archipelago served as ideal points for the trans-shipment of narcotics from the drug producing countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to their major markets in the United States. Many citizens of The Bahamas both in New Providence and the Family Islands, fell prey to the lure of the easy money that flowed from drug trafficking and participated actively in the trade. Inevitably, many Bahamians, old and young, succumbed to

drug addiction. Students in schools were particularly vulnerable and many became involved in using and/or selling drugs.

This new element in Bahamian society had a serious impact on student motivation to perform highly and brought discipline problems and elements of violence into the schools that seriously hampered the achievement of educational goals. Although the level of drug use had abated significantly by the late 1980s, these problems persisted in Bahamian schools.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the tourist trade and the expanding banking industry continued to dominate the Bahamian economy and many young Bahamians looked to those sectors for job opportunities. Although the Government declared itself committed to economic diversification, for the most part relatively few young Bahamians pursued the technical or vocational education and training that would equip them for employment in the agricultural, industrial or productive sectors.

Professional Issues

i. Teaching Force

At the same time, the teaching profession, that now offered extensive opportunities for employment, attracted very limited numbers of candidates for training. Two studies conducted by researchers at The College of The Bahamas in the early 1980s found that high school graduates perceived teaching as a difficult, poorly paid, low status occupation and that parents (and frequently teachers themselves) actively discouraged young people from entering the profession. These factors, coupled with the earlier decision that the Government would no longer subsidize teachers in training, the length and perceived difficulty of the teacher education programs at The College of The Bahamas, and the higher academic qualifications now demanded for entry into them, resulted in a dramatic decline in the numbers of candidates offering themselves to be trained as teachers. The Ministry of Education was, therefore, obliged to continue to rely very heavily upon recruitment from outside The Bahamas in order to meet its staffing needs. Many of these non-nationals were, moreover, posted to schools in small communities in the Family Islands where cultural adjustments often proved difficult. The turnover of staff tended therefore to be quite frequent, with deleterious effects upon the continuity of instruction to children in those areas.

The Task Force established in 1981 to study issues related to the training of Bahamian teachers recommended a return to government funding of teacher trainees as a means of encouraging and facilitating the participation of greater numbers of Bahamians (from both New Providence and the Family Islands) in teacher education programs. Opportunities for candidates to make up academic deficiencies were also made available at The College, and a deliberate, aggressive campaign of recruitment was mounted in the high schools and in the wider community. These combined initiatives gradually bore fruit and by 1995 there were some 500 teachers in training in the various programs offered by The College of The Bahamas.

ii. Curriculum

In addition to the difficulties experienced in ensuring a ready supply of appropriately trained teachers for the system, there were other persistent challenges facing the Ministry of Education during the period following Independence. The matter of qualitative improvement, for example, was a constant matter of concern. The sector report prepared by UNESCO in 1986 noted that while the performance of the educational system had been impressive in quantitative terms and in providing widespread access to educational opportunities, the quality and relevance of programs offered had not always been “in sufficient harmony with the needs of a rapidly changing society” (UNESCO, 1).

Further, in the Family Islands, problems of communication—and the costs entailed in developing the infrastructure sufficiently to alleviate those problems—continued to influence the rate of ongoing educational progress desired in those areas.

In 1982, however, a new national curriculum was designed by committees of teachers drawn from all parts of The Bahamas. The design and implementation of that curriculum marked an important step in a series of measures taken to try to consolidate and standardize educational provision throughout the country and to improve what were perceived to be falling standards of performance and behavior in the schools.

iii. Educational Policies

Other policy directives were issued by successive Ministers of Education at Annual Education Conferences and included the following:

- the abolition from high schools of U.S. style graduation ceremonies in which the participation of graduates was not always linked to their level of academic performance;
- the abolition of the practice of social promotion, i.e. the movement of students from one grade level to the next without reference to their mastery of relevant material;
- the introduction, in 1985, of a nationwide standardized system of assessment at the 3rd, 6th and 8th grade levels, with a view to measuring individual student performance against national norms;
- the abolition, in 1987, of junior and senior high schools and their replacement by single phase secondary schools encompassing grades seven through twelve, with the intention of encouraging more students to remain in school beyond the mandatory period of schooling (i.e. beyond age 14);
- the introduction of Tourism Studies into the primary school curriculum and into the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools a program of Family Life and Health Education;
- the introduction, in 1993, of a locally designed, national secondary school certificate examination, devised in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate, to replace all other secondary school examinations (local and external).

The actual implementation and impact of these policies reflected varying degrees of success. The intended abolition of social promotion, for example, was not totally able to be effected, because schools had neither the physical space nor the teaching or material resources to allow for repetition of grades and ensure mastery of necessary subject matter by every student. Numerous complaints were articulated by teachers and parents that the accommodation of students in single phase secondary schools had not had the desired effect in the prevailing social climate. Reports indicated that in a number of instances younger children were preyed upon and intimidated by students in senior grades and that significant discipline problems ensued. Vociferous complaints were made by parents, teachers, and employers about the abolition of the Bahamas Junior Certificate examination that was seen as both a useful measure of student performance halfway through their secondary program and of achievement and potential for employment purposes. The examination was restored in 1994 on the recommendation of the National Task Force that was set up in 1993 to study all major issues related to education in the country.

The establishment of this Task Force was one of a number of initiatives taken by the new Free National Movement government following its victory in the General Elections of August, 1992. The defeat of the Progressive Liberal Party at that time marked the end of its twenty-five years in power, and signaled the introduction of new aspects of public life. The Free National Movement's Manifesto 1992 contained specific targets for educational development in the country, among which were the improvement of literacy levels, the introduction of programs to ensure the acquisition of employable skills by all high school graduates, and the decentralization of the school system.

The Task Force on Education reported in January, 1994, after having both analyzed available documentary material and conducted widespread consultations with significant groups of individuals and with members of the general public throughout the islands to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the system as perceived by a wide cross-section of the people of The Bahamas. Central among its recommendations were measures to more meaningfully involve communities in the educational system that served them.

These included a proposed division of the country into a number of school districts to be supervised by district superintendents, the establishment of school committees and district boards of education, and a more flexible curriculum that, while including a common core of essential subjects, could be structured to respond to the particular imperatives of the diverse islands of The Bahamas chain.

The System

i. Early Childhood Preschool Education

During the two decades following Independence, despite repeated proclamations by Ministers of Education emphasizing the importance of this level of education, the involvement by the government in preschool education continued to be minimal. In 1975, however, a community-run Day Care Center and Kindergarten was established and was staffed by three teachers seconded from government schools. Later, a second community

initiative to develop a preschool center was successfully implemented with assistance from the government. All other institutions at this level were privately operated.

In 1980, one of a group of five teachers from Ministry schools who had previously been granted in-service awards to pursue degree courses in Early Childhood Education was appointed preschool coordinator in the Ministry of Education. This officer assumed responsibility for designing an appropriate program for preschool education, for supervising preschools in the country, and for offering training workshops for operators and teachers of preschools.

By 1982, it was recorded that eighty-nine preschools in New Providence and sixteen in the Family Islands were registered with the Ministry of Education. It was acknowledged, however, that many more unregistered schools existed. By the beginning of the 1990s, these numbers had multiplied significantly, even though the Government's own provision was limited to 235 positions and was confined to the two units in New Providence and three small units in Grand Bahama (National Task Force on Education, 25).

The National Task Force on Education discovered in 1993, moreover, that the curriculum guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education in 1985 had still not been implemented, although the numbers of institutions trading under the misnomer of "preschool" had so expanded that the Ministry of Education preschool coordinator was unable to provide a reliable estimate of their extent (National Task Force on Education, 26). The 1995 figures indicated, however, that there were one hundred and seventy-nine registered preschools and day care centers. Operators of these facilities were frequently persons of limited or no training, despite the availability of programs in Early Childhood Education at The College of The Bahamas.

Concerns persisted, therefore, that many of those establishments did not conform to desirable standards and there was still no legislation in place to ensure their compliance. By 1998, however, draft legislation had been developed and was being reviewed for future approval and implementation.

While there were a few privately run preschools in some of the more developed Family Islands, access to this level of education was not generally available in islands outside of New Providence and Grand Bahama, although there existed significant parental interest and demand for its provision throughout the archipelago (National Task Force on Education, 46, 48-49, 52). In the last few years of this period, however, deliberate measures were taken to extend the access to public preschool facilities by the inclusion of such provision in six new primary schools that were or were due to be constructed in New Providence, Grand Bahama, and several Family Islands. In addition there existed the intention to develop such centers in a number of existing primary schools in New Providence and Grand Bahama and in certain community facilities.

ii. Primary Education

a. Enrollment

In the decades following Independence, the numbers of students enrolled in primary education remained relatively stable at a level of some 33,000, representing an average of approximately 95% of the eligible age cohort. Of that enrollment, 77% was found in Government schools (UNESCO, 21).

Despite the constancy of actual numbers, the period was marked by significant population shifts in the urban areas as more and more Bahamians moved to the new residential subdivisions developed at some distance from city centers. This movement resulted in considerable overcrowding in schools on the outskirts of the city while enrollment in older schools in the city proper was drastically reduced. New primary schools continued to be constructed, therefore, to accommodate the increasing population of children in the burgeoning suburban areas, and there was an expressed policy commitment to the development of neighborhood schools that would enable children entering primary school to “do so in non-threatening environments, in reasonably small classes, in close proximity to their homes” (Ingraham, 82).

Similar phenomena were observed in the more developed Family Islands. In larger settlements primary school enrollments climbed, while in many rural areas numbers grew progressively smaller. In a number of islands, several small schools were amalgamated and students were bussed from one settlement to another to attend school.

b. Curriculum

The curricular guidelines introduced in 1982 were found by the National Task Force on Education to be the ones still in use in 1993; although certain new subject areas such as Family Life Education and Tourism Studies had been added in the interim (National Task Force on Education, 27). The UNESCO review team had identified as early as 1985 the weakness inherent in the subject-based focus of this curriculum in the absence of a broader curricular framework (UNESCO, 26). The National Task Force also found that the primary school curriculum had become overcrowded with disparate subjects, that it lacked integration and was only imperfectly implemented in parts due to limited accessibility of curriculum guides, lack of essential specialist staff, inadequate textbooks, and appropriate supporting materials, especially in Family Islands (National Task Force on Education, 30).

The presence of ever larger numbers of children for whom English was not the first language in primary school classrooms further exacerbated the problems of ensuring effective primary education. Teachers were, by and large, ill-prepared to tackle the challenges of dealing with non-English speakers, especially in the early grades and, in its report, the National Task Force strongly identified the need for teacher trainees to be given skills in teaching English as a second language (National Task Force on Education, 31).

c. Teachers

In the decades following 1973, a variety of efforts were made to improve the training of primary school teachers. Teacher education programs at the newly established College of The Bahamas were progressively strengthened and standards for entry and required performance were raised. Special arrangements were put in place from time to time to

enable those teachers who had not completed their training to do so, and a special training program was introduced for mature untrained teachers.

From 1975, serving teachers were afforded opportunities to pursue Bachelors degree programs in Elementary Education offered locally by the University of Miami and, through the Catholic Continuing Education Council, by the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University in Minnesota. School Administrators pursued University of Miami Masters degree programs in administration and supervision. Certain other teachers were offered in-service awards to pursue specialist studies abroad (mainly in the United States) in critical areas, including education of the handicapped, reading and music.

Short-term professional workshops and seminars were organized by the Ministry of Education during summer sessions. The foregoing activities and others were actively encouraged and, in some cases, organized by the Primary Principals Association.

In 1992 a full-time two-year University of the West Indies Bachelor of Education degree program in Primary Education was introduced at The College of The Bahamas, and groups of Ministry of Education teachers were awarded paid study leave to pursue this program. All of these initiatives strengthened the professional competence of Bahamian primary school teachers and assisted in the development of a corps of educational leaders at this level. Further, the later introduction by The College of The Bahamas itself of a four-year Bachelors degree program in Primary Education reflected the expressed objective of the Ministry of Education to move systematically towards a fully qualified graduate primary school teaching force.

d. Impact

Despite these varied efforts made to improve Bahamian public primary education, dissatisfaction continued to persist concerning the actual levels of achievement of students, especially in the core subjects of Language Arts and Mathematics.

In 1993, the National Task Force on Education found that the performance of public school students in both the 3rd and 6th grade GLAT (Grade Level Assessment Test) was significantly lower than that of independent school counterparts. Over the period 1986-1989, for example, the national average percentile across all subjects of children in public schools was some thirty to forty points lower than that of children attending independent schools (National Task Force on Education, 72). Further, the effectiveness of a number of earlier innovations such as the team teaching concept, still ostensibly in place during the nineties albeit in modified form, was questioned by researchers, as was the ever increasing dependence upon foreign textbooks and other learning resources in the delivery of an indigenous curriculum (Davis, 137). There was a growing concern, also, that the system was being too heavily dominated by tests and that, although generally these were intended to be diagnostic in nature, there was a tendency for teachers to concentrate on preparing students for them since the effectiveness of their own performance was often measured by the results obtained by their students (Davis, 135).

iii. Secondary Education

a. Access

In the two decades following Independence, access to secondary schooling was greatly expanded in New Providence and, significantly, in the Family Islands as well. By 1985, the 27,144 public and private secondary school enrollments in The Bahamas accounted for 85% of the age group 11-14 (i.e. the junior high school level, which represented the final phase of compulsory schooling), and for 41% of the age group 15-18 (the senior high school level) (UNESCO, 22). In 1993, there were 24,513 students (approximately 56% of the age group 11-18) enrolled in Bahamian secondary schools (Ministry of Education 1994, 16) and the pattern of enrollment continued to reflect a decline of participation in the senior grades of secondary schools. During this period, and particularly from the mid-1980s, there was expressed desire to retain larger numbers of students throughout the full range of secondary education and numerous statements and recommendations were made that the legal school leaving age should be raised to at least 16 years. Various policy decisions reflected this intention, but the necessary legislative action was not yet achieved.

b. Structure

During the decade of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, public secondary education was delivered in New Providence in two stages—i.e. via a system of junior and senior high schools. The original public grammar school, the Government High School, was converted to a senior high school in the 1970s. In other islands, central secondary schools were generally continuous and followed either primary schools (grades 1-6) or all-age schools (grade 1-8). Independent secondary schools were all continuous high schools encompassing grades seven through eleven or twelve.

In 1987, a policy decision was taken to abolish the concept of junior high schools in the public system and to deliver all secondary education in single phase schools incorporating grades seven through twelve and offering “the entire secondary school range of subjects in a single facility” (Adderley, 12).

This move was made for two main reasons: the desire to retain more students beyond the ninth grade—i.e. the end of compulsory schooling, and a concern that the movement of students from junior to senior high school caused a “major dislocation of student education at a time when this need not and ought not to be the case on purely educational grounds” (Adderley, 11). Despite this new arrangement, however, in 1992 two of the largest secondary schools in the country, one in New Providence and one in Grand Bahama, both of which occupied split campuses, were, for practical reasons, subdivided into separate junior and senior high schools, a move that appeared to hold promise of reducing the management and discipline problems previously observed in those institutions.

In 1994, on an experimental basis, a seventh grade was added to a number of primary schools in New Providence and Grand Bahama where physical space and appropriately qualified staff existed. This was done with an effort to reducing overcrowding and associated social problems in nearby secondary schools, and the ultimate intention was stated as being to test the effectiveness of a middle school model (grades 1-8), that could then be followed by a single-phase high school encompassing grades 9-12.

The evaluation of the outcomes of this experiment and the continued assessment of both the academic and social performance of the junior/senior high schools provided valuable sources of information for decisions concerning the structure of secondary education in the country, for the National Task Force on Education found that a number of administrators, teachers, and parents expressed grave reservations about the appropriateness of the large single-phase secondary school in a social climate where older students tended to prey upon younger ones and where problems of indiscipline impinged upon achievement and remained a cause for concern. In 1997 there was a deliberate return to the junior and senior high school model.

c. Curriculum

Throughout the post-Independence period, the secondary school curriculum, in its various applications (both in the public and most independent schools) reflected a commitment to exposing students to a broad range of academic, technical/vocational, and cultural subjects. This broad spectrum of curriculum offerings was in keeping with the general move towards comprehensive secondary schools that, it was hoped, would not only provide opportunities for students with differing aptitudes, but also achieve the kind of social integration desired for the new nation. Moreover, successive Ministers of Education reaffirmed the view articulated in 1975 that it was important that the educational program “make ample provisions for specific preparation for employment, as well as for further study and education” (Minister of Education, 8).

Despite this avowed philosophy, however, the effectiveness of the high school curriculum continued to be judged primarily by student achievement in external examinations, mainly British in origin, whose syllabi and emphases did not always reflect the same objectives as those held for the Bahamian schools. The intention to introduce a National Secondary School Certificate that would be a more appropriate measure of the Bahamian senior high school curriculum, stated as early as 1975, was only realized in 1993 when the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education was introduced.

The full, consistent implementation of a broadly based secondary program in schools throughout the country was hampered by a variety of factors, including a relative neglect of curriculum development at that level, as the UNESCO report identified in 1986, and the uneven availability of adequate, appropriate human, material and physical resources.

In 1993, the National Task Force found that the effectiveness of the curriculum was negatively influenced by the continued dependence upon imported materials whose cultural biases was often alien to the Bahamian reality. Moreover, the curricular offerings in schools throughout the islands did not adequately reflect the diversity of economic activity prevailing in different parts of the country. Further, insufficient attention seemed to be paid to the special needs of students at both ends of the continuum. The time actually spent in the teaching/learning process was too frequently interrupted by unrelated activities, and the unevenness of teacher competence and/or availability in critical subject areas (such as Mathematics and Science), as well as in technical/vocational and cultural subjects, also adversely affected the realization of curricular goals (National Task Force on Education, 33-40).

d. Effectiveness

As noted previously, the effectiveness of Bahamian secondary schools continued to be measured both by the public in general and by employers, by the successes achieved by students in external examinations, that is, the Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC), taken usually at the end of the junior high school phase, and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level, Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and Pitman's Examinations, taken at the end of the senior high school phase. When judged by those measures, the efficacy of the secondary schools—especially those in the public system—was frequently called into question. Student performance at the BJC level was modest, with students of independent schools achieving consistently better results than their counterparts in public schools (UNESCO, 30). This pattern was also observed in the GCE, RSA and Pitman's examinations. Further, these latter examinations were taken by only a small percentage of students, i.e., about 10-15% (UNESCO, 31). Many students, therefore, left the secondary school with few, if any, formal credentials that would enable them to proceed either to higher levels of education or to seek employment. Many prospective employers complained further that the functional levels of literacy and attitudes to work displayed by secondary school leavers were often unsatisfactory.

Concern to redress this state of affairs led to the decision taken in the late 1980s to develop, and to introduce by 1993, a secondary school examination that would measure, in a more realistic fashion, the abilities and achievements of a wider range (80-85%) of secondary school students and that, by emphasizing course and project work, would stimulate a revamping of the curricular content and instructional methodologies employed at that level.

Despite difficulties created by the inconsistent availability throughout all the islands of resources necessary to support adequately the strong project emphasis of the new examination, early impressions were that more students achieved some reasonable level of success in one or more of the over twenty subjects examined. Considerably larger numbers of students, for example, qualified for direct entry into College of The Bahamas programs than had previously been the case. Concerns remained, however, about the high levels of stress engendered by the increased demands of the new examination, and the actual standards attained.

When viewed from the broader context of economic development, too, the existing curriculum was found by the National Task Force still deficient in some important areas: the absence, for example, of certain valuable areas of study relevant to the needs of the country, and the lack of sufficient flexibility to respond to the real needs of particular Family Islands that contributed to a tendency for young people to move away from their home communities in search of employment, and to question the importance of or need for formal education (National Task Force on Education, 41).

In addition, in the decades following Independence concern continued to mount over the increasing levels of indiscipline and violence prevailing in secondary schools (particularly in public schools in New Providence and Grand Bahama). It was speculated that this was exacerbated by the continuing growth in the size of schools and the resulting levels of impersonality witnessed in teacher/student relationships.

Further, the rivalries engendered by the emergence of neighborhood gangs in the urban areas of New Providence, Grand Bahama and some Family Islands, tended to spill over into the school environment causing serious problems of discipline and control. Concerted and deliberate initiatives were therefore undertaken by educational authorities to attempt to meaningfully address in the impact of the gang culture in schools. These combined the encouragement of more positive activities with more coherent, consistent school policies on discipline and enhanced practical security measures in schools.

iv. Tertiary Education

It was perhaps in the area of tertiary education that the most dramatic advances were noted in the post-Independence period. The Bahamian government recognized clearly that if the needs of a rapidly expanding, increasingly sophisticated economy were to be more fully met by Bahamians themselves, opportunities must be provided locally to enable more citizens to prepare themselves academically, professionally and technically to play more prominent roles in both the public and private sectors of the country. The development of institutions that could offer enhanced education and training beyond the level of secondary schooling became, therefore, an important priority.

a. The College of The Bahamas

The College of The Bahamas was formally established by Act of Parliament in 1974. Four existing post-secondary institutions—the two teachers colleges, the technical college, and the sixth form of the Government High School—were brought together in a new structure, under a central administration and subject to the guidance and authority of a governing Council appointed by and answerable to the Minister of Education. It was anticipated that the integration of the previously unrelated constituent institutions would “permit a more efficient use of lecturing staff, and more comprehensive and thorough preparation of students” (Minister of Education, 19). It was also hoped that, in this way, larger numbers of students could be served, and served more effectively, in an atmosphere that would acknowledge and encourage the equal value of academic, professional and technical studies. The College was established to be a “multipurpose institution serving, as far as possible, every important need of The Bahamas” (Minister of Education, 20). It was patterned, in large measure, after the North American Community/Junior College model and, from the outset, delivered its programs through a series of modular courses offered by relevant teaching divisions. The academic year was divided into two sixteen week semesters and (initially) two six-week summer sessions. The two summer sessions were replaced in the early 1980s by a single eight-week session running from May to July.

The main credential offered by The College was (and continues to be) the Associate Degree awarded upon successful completion of a two-year program of study whose requirements combined a compulsory core of general education, specialized study in a major field and a number of optional courses of the students’ own choosing. Some career oriented programs (such as those in teacher education) requiring extensive periods of practice, were of three-years duration.

The level of education provided in the Associate Degree programs was generally similar to that offered in the first two years of a four-year Bachelors degree program in the North American context, and graduates proceeding to institutions in the United States and Canada to complete a full degree were able to obtain significant exemptions for work completed at The College. In addition to the Associate Degree programs, however, The College continued to offer GCE Advanced Level preparation—though, over the years, to a lesser and lesser degree—and programs leading to Diplomas and Certificates in specific vocational areas. Further, the scope of the College’s work grew to encompass not only the academic and career-oriented programs previously offered in the individual institutions, but also a variety of new areas and higher levels of study not formerly available.

From its inception, The College actively pursued cooperative relationships with agencies in the public and private sectors and undertook special programs of study in collaboration with them. This approach was in consonance with its mandate, identified in the White Paper on Education, “to meet the special needs of The Bahamas in education, training and national development” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1972, 10).

The College also maintained close cooperative relationships with the regional university, the University of the West Indies, under whose aegis its programs of teacher education fell, and to which significant numbers of its graduates proceeded in order to complete Bachelors degrees. From as early as 1976, moreover, UWI Bachelor of Education programs were offered at The College itself.

The proximity of The Bahamas to South Florida and the traditional ties existing between Bahamians and their neighbors in that part of the United States also inevitably led to the development of collaborative relationships with such institutions as the University of Miami and Florida International University, both of which offered, from time to time, and in collaboration with The College of The Bahamas, Bachelors degree programs in various important disciplines. These included education, business administration and technology.

Over the first two decades of its existence, the College expanded and grew in sophistication, both in levels of achievement and in operational processes. Although it continued to be essentially a teaching institution, the conduct of research assumed increasing importance. This was formally recognized with the establishment, in 1992, of a Research Unit that was intended not only to facilitate the research carried out by individual faculty members but also to undertake special projects on behalf of public and private agencies.

A further important dimension was added to the work of The College when, in 1991, the School of Nursing that formerly operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Health was integrated into The College’s structure as the Division of Nursing and Health Sciences.

On July 1, 1995, a new College of the Bahamas Act gave to the institution greater financial and operational autonomy and authorized it to award degrees, thus paving the way for its development into a four-year, degree-granting institution.

- Access

From the beginning, The College of The Bahamas consistently served much larger numbers of students than the four constituent institutions combined had done previously. Enrollments (including full-time and part-time students) always approached or exceeded the 2,000 mark and, in the later years of the period, reached and exceeded 3,000.

Several factors contributed to this.

1. In the early days of The College's existence, it followed an open-entry policy and provided a wide range and large number of upgrading courses that enabled students—especially adults who had not had the opportunity to complete a full high school education—to qualify themselves for entry into College-level work. The open-door policy proved too costly to maintain—both in terms of financial and human resources—and was replaced in 1978 by a selective process that required students to possess five GCE "O" levels (including English Language and Mathematics) or the equivalent for acceptance into Associate Degree programs. The "equivalent" option, however, enabled the institution still to offer a limited, closely structured program of preparatory work that would allow students with deficiencies to upgrade their academic standing and qualify for entry via that route. This program was very necessary since the numbers of students acquiring the requisite five "O" levels were generally very small and the "College Preparatory" program made it possible for many hundreds of Bahamians who would otherwise have been denied access to tertiary level education to acquire this.
2. The opportunity to pursue college programs on a part-time basis (through evening, day-release or summer study) enabled working persons to qualify themselves.
3. The Division of Continuing Education and Extension Services provided a variety of useful and non-formal general interest and specially designed training courses and programs, in New Providence, Grand Bahama, and throughout the Family Islands. Further, its early, modest initiatives in Distance Education proved valuable and were likely to assume major importance in the future.
4. It is anticipated that, as The College adds more and more programs at the Bachelors degree level under the provisions of the new Act, access by large numbers of Bahamians to that level of education will also be significantly increased.

- Impact

Though initially The College was regarded with a degree of skepticism within the Bahamian community, it gained steadily in credibility. This was achieved in no small measure by the performance of its graduates in the workforce and at institutions to which they proceeded to complete their degree studies. Their successes reflected positively upon the standards and quality of instruction maintained by The College. Gradually, the institution came to be regarded by an increasingly large number of Bahamian parents as the most desirable first stage in the tertiary education of their children, and by adults seeking to extend their own academic or professional preparation as a productive avenue through which their goals might be achieved. Such adults traditionally accounted for up to 50% of the total enrollment of the College. An important measure of the impact of The College was the degree to which

its graduates came to occupy prominent positions in the public and private sectors and in professions (such as accounting and banking) that had formerly been dominated by foreign nationals.

- Financing

From 1975 to June 1995, The College was totally financed from public funds. Though it charged modest tuition fees (at the rate of \$25 per credit), all revenue generated was deposited to the national Consolidated Fund, and all expenditure of the annual budget had to be approved by the Public Treasury. Support from the private sector was forthcoming mainly in the form of improvements to facilities and learning resources, and the provision of scholarships for needy students. On average, the budget of The College through the years 1975-1995 accounted for some 7-8% of the national educational budget, with tuition and other fees accounting for some \$1.5 million in revenue.

As of July 1, 1995, under the provision of the new Act, the finances of The College were to derive from a block grant from the Bahamas Government and from revenue generated through tuition and fees, contracts and other services. Under the Act, moreover, The College was empowered to set in place such mechanisms as would enable it to attract additional funding such as endowments, gifts, and grants to assist its further development. Further, expenditure was to be controlled from within the institution itself under the overall direction of the Council that would have fuller authority for the governance of The College. In January 1998, the Government of The Bahamas approved a program of tuition fee increases to be phased over a period of three years. It was anticipated that this would enable the College to generate more realistic levels of revenue from that source.

b. The Bahamas Hotel Training College

Over this period, the economy of The Bahamas continued to be fueled largely by its tourism industry. As was mentioned earlier, courses for housekeeping, food service and, later, clerical personnel within the hotel industry were initially offered at the Dundas Civic Center and later through the Hotel and Catering Department of the Nassau Technical College. By the early 1970s, however, it became clear that there was a need to focus more closely upon the training needs associated with the tourism industry. A statutory body, the Bahamas Hotel Training Council was established therefore to form policies and procedures related to hotel and tourism training. The Council reflected a tripartite membership with representatives being drawn from the government, the hotel and tourism industry, and the relevant trade unions. Each group was, moreover, to share in the cost of funding the recurrent expenditures associated with training, with the government assuming responsibility for capital expenditure (Massiah, 137).

The Bahamas Hotel Training College was established by the Council in 1973 for the purpose of providing both pre-service and in-service programs in hotel management and in the direct operation areas of the hospitality industry. The College was accredited by the Commission on Occupational Institutions of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the United States and offered programs in both Nassau and Freeport. Graduates

of its two-year diploma in Hotel Management were able to proceed directly into the third year of Bachelors degree programs in hospitality management at various U.S. institutions.

The College became well known throughout the Caribbean and beyond and over the years attracted an international body of students. Entry requirements varied according to the type and level of program, but generally included high school completion, the possession of three or more GCE "O" Level passes and satisfactory performance in the College's entrance examination. Enrollments generally averaged about 300 students, some of whom (such as the apprentice chefs) combined on the job service experience with their formal College-based training. Many hundreds more persons in the industry benefited from training offered by the College through part-time study or participation in programs offered on site.

With the decline of the tourism industry in the early 1990s, enrollment at The College suffered, as students appeared to be reluctant to prepare for entry into an industry in which cutbacks in staff had become prevalent. Further, the level of financial contributions that would be available from the industry and the unions were more difficult to predict.

Despite the gradual strengthening of the industry observed by the mid-90s, The College was still faced with the need to mount aggressive recruitment initiatives to ensure viable numbers of students. The upswing in the tourist industry in most recent years, however, has been accompanied by a revitalized interest in tourism studies. Enrollments have, consequently, shown steady growth.

- Impact

Over the years, graduates of the Hotel Training College assumed positions of prominence in hotel properties throughout The Bahamas and elsewhere and The College was viewed as an important vehicle for providing necessary training for the major industry in The Bahamas. Various recommendations were made, however, to bring The College to a closer, more integral relationship with The College of The Bahamas that, it was perceived, might result in further enhancement of programs in both institutions and greater efficiency in the use of available resources. Discussions between the two institutions continue in this regard, and have recently resulted in productive joint initiatives.

c. The Bahamas School of Nursing

Formal nurse training began in The Bahamas as early as 1902. It was only in 1928, however, that the first preliminary training school was actually established offering a four-year program that included training in midwifery (Nursing Handbook, 4).

During the 1960s, the school pursued a stronger alliance with training programs in the United Kingdom and by 1967 the Registered Nursing training offered through the School had achieved full equivalence with those programs falling under the governance of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales. Nursing students became employees of the Ministry of Health upon entry into the School and provided extensive practical service in the clinical settings. In the late 1970s, the desirability of more fully integrating the basic nurse training programs into the work of The College of The Bahamas was identified, and in 1982

discussions began in earnest concerning this move. In 1984, an Associate Degree program in Nursing was introduced at The College of The Bahamas as a route to registration that would run parallel to that available via the hospital based diploma program offered by the School of Nursing itself. The program was grounded, at that point, in the Division of Natural Sciences from which was drawn the strong science core of the program. This enhanced science foundation was seen as important to ensure that nurses would be more adequately equipped to deal effectively with increasingly sophisticated medical practices.

In 1991, the decision was taken to phase out the Diploma program and to make the Associate Degree program the single route to registered nurse status. The School of Nursing itself became an integral part of The College of The Bahamas. Students in the program were no longer employed by the Ministry of Health, but were supported by that Ministry that paid their tuition fees and provided grants to assist with other expenses. In return, students were bonded to serve in the government run hospitals and clinics upon successful completion of their program.

In 1995, a Bachelors degree program in Nursing was introduced at The College to respond to the need and desire for further education expressed by existing Registered Nurses.

- Impact

Graduates of the Bahamas School of Nursing (and more recently of The College of The Bahamas) staffed all major health care facilities and community health services in New Providence, Grand Bahama and throughout the Family Islands, where they often functioned as the primary health care givers for their communities.

The standard of education and training they had received could be judged not only by the competent performance given by nurses in the clinical setting, but also by the favorable transfer arrangements that were possible for those who proceeded to complete Bachelors degrees or other advanced programs in the United States or at the University of the West Indies.

However, with the transfer of all basic nursing programs to The College of The Bahamas and the more stringent general education requirements (especially in the sciences) associated with that move, an important challenge became that of enabling students to complete their programs in a timely fashion and in sufficient numbers to meet the ongoing needs of the service.

d. The Industrial Training Center (Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute)

In 1980, an Industrial Training Center was established to provide basic job entry skills to unemployed youth and to high school graduates possessing few, if any, marketable skills. It was intended also to increase the numbers of Bahamians who possessed technical and vocational skills that were badly needed within the society. The center assumed responsibility for the craft-level, apprentice-type programs in the construction, engineering, and service trades that had formerly been offered in the Technical and Vocational Studies

division of The College of The Bahamas, but whose enrollments had fallen due to the introduction of more stringent entry requirements at that institution.

Programs of study integrated yearlong on-the-job experience with formal classes. Attendance at the Industrial Training Center was free of charge and, indeed, for the first decade or more students were paid a weekly stipend to encourage them to undertake the training provided. The Center operated programs in both Nassau and Freeport in other islands as demands required. While the work of the Center responded to a need within the community, the continuing concern was the lack of articulation between its programs and those offered by The College of The Bahamas that resulted in the students experiencing difficulty in moving to higher levels of training.

Enrollments at the Center in Nassau generally approached the 1,500 mark, with many more students being served in Grand Bahama. Challenges for the future included the extension of program levels and the continuation of dialogue with relevant sections of The College of The Bahamas so that the opportunities for students to proceed more smoothly to successively higher levels of technical education and training might be enhanced.

e. Other Institutions

During this period, a number of other publicly financed institutions provided specialized training for specific groups of persons in the Bahamian community. These included the Police College that, after thirty years of operation on the compound of Police Headquarters, moved, in 1973, to a residential facility constructed for the purpose of providing training courses for police cadets and refresher courses for serving officers (Royal Bahamas Police Force, 14).

The Public Service Training Center, opened formally in 1970, continued throughout the decades following Independence to provide courses and programs to meet the special, varied needs of the public. A number of the academically-based courses were transferred in the late 1980s to The College of The Bahamas, where a special program in Public Administration was also introduced for the training of senior officers. A specially designed management program for personnel at the highest levels in the Service was introduced at the Center in the early 1990s, offered by contracted consultants from the United States, the United Kingdom and the Caribbean.

f. University Programs

- The University of the West Indies/Center for Hotel and Tourism Management

From 1978, the second and third years of three-year Bachelor of Science degree programs in Hotel and Tourism Management were offered in The Bahamas by the University of the West Indies. Students who had completed part I of the Bachelors degree Program in Social Sciences at one of the other campuses of the University (in Jamaica, Barbados, or Trinidad), or who had completed an Associate of Arts Degree program in Business Administration at The College of The Bahamas, could complete part II of the program at the Center in Nassau. Provisions also existed for diploma graduates from the Bahamas Hotel Training College to

enter the program after completing specified supplementary courses at The College of The Bahamas.

The Center existed as a department within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Mona Campus of UWI, and was intended to provide degree-level training to meet the management needs of the Caribbean tourist industry. A major concern in The Bahamas was the low level of participation by Bahamians in the program—a situation resulting in considerable measure from the lack of direct articulation between the Diploma program at the Bahamas Hotel Training College and those offered by the Center. Graduates of BHTC (who constituted the bulk of those interested in Hotel/Tourism training) opted instead to proceed to the U.S. institutions that more readily facilitated their completion of Bachelors degrees.

There were also some concerns expressed by industry personnel that the programs offered by the Center were too academic in nature, and did not sufficiently emphasize some important, practical aspects of the industry. Ongoing efforts to address the concerns identified were undertaken, particularly during the 1990s.

- Off-Shore University Programs

Several U. S. universities became involved in the delivery of degree-level studies and/or research programs in The Bahamas. They included (notably) the University of Miami, that, up until the mid-1980s offered Bachelors and Masters degree programs in Business Administration. The Bachelors programs and various professional development workshops and seminars were carried out in conjunction with The College of The Bahamas. An M.B.A. program continued to be offered in Nassau on a biennial basis.

Florida International University collaborated with The College of The Bahamas in offering Bachelors Degree programs in Technology, as well as a variety of professional development activities for persons in the public and private sectors.

In 1974, St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict, Minnesota, through the Catholic Continuing Education Council of the Bahamas, introduced locally based programs leading to Bachelors degrees in Education, for the benefit of full-time employed teachers. A unique requirement of these programs was that students would have to spend at least one semester on campus in the United States. The scope of programs offered by these institutions expanded over the years to include a variety of other disciplines and the programs continued to thrive. Unlike most of the other programs that were delivered by U. S.-based professors who came to The Bahamas on weekends to teach, the SJU/CSB programs were from the outset taught by local residents who were approved for this purpose by the universities concerned.

In 1994 the SJU/CSB established a permanent campus in New Providence that served as the base for full-time and part-time studies. Programs were also extended to include students in the Freeport community.

Through Nova University in Florida, a number of senior officers in The Bahamas Public Service pursued degree programs in Public Administration during the 1970s and, at the request of the Bahamas Union of Teachers, a Master of Science program in Modern Educational Systems was provided for serving teachers.

Later in the period, the University established Bachelors and Masters programs in Business Administration and in Education in both New Providence and Freeport. The flexible entry requirements of the program rendered them extremely attractive to potential candidates, despite their high costs.

- Private Post-Secondary Institutions

In addition to those institutions and professional training programs already described, there were steadily growing numbers of institutions that were registered by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of providing various forms of post-secondary education or training. While most offered programs in business related subjects, more recently established institutions introduced a wider range of programs leading, in several instances, to Associate Degrees similar in structure to those offered by The College of The Bahamas. Their increased importance in the educational scene of The Bahamas reflected other growing demands for tertiary level education that could not be fully met by the existing public institutions alone.

The proliferation of institutions at this level observed towards the end of the period emphasized, however, the pressing need for the establishment of a national quality assurance mechanism that would monitor the standards of work conducted in both private and public tertiary colleges and institutes.

The Future Agenda

Plans for future educational development in The Bahamas reflect the continuing conviction on the part of the government and people that education is the principal vehicle through which orderly social and economic development, as well as the self realization of individuals, may be attained. The most significant element, therefore, of the proposed policies articulated in the draft five-year plan formulated in 1994 by the Ministry of Education is the strong focus upon making education “accessible and equitable to all social and geographical groups in The Bahamas” (Ministry of Education 1994, 2).

The policies, drawn in large measure from the recommendations contained in the Report of the National Task Force on Education, aim to effect significant, qualitative improvement in the delivery of education in a context of increasing technological sophistication, and to expand educational opportunities available to young people so that they may participate more meaningfully in the processes of national development (Ministry of Education 1994, 2). Five main areas have been specifically identified for attention: access to education (physical, geographic and socioeconomical); curriculum development; human resource development; administration and management of education; and partnership in education.

Efforts in these areas are intended to be addressed at all levels of the system.

1. **Preschool Education:** In order to achieve the desired ideal of extending access to preschool education, it is proposed that the government substantially increase its involvement in schooling at this level and that the necessary legislation be enacted to ensure that both public and private preschool maintain appropriate standards.
2. **Primary Education:** Improved access to primary education of the desired quality is intended to be realized through the provision of more appropriate school environments, the employment of itinerant teachers to alleviate shortages in key areas of the curriculum, the introduction of distance education approaches in Family Island schools where adequate staffing presents problems, and the implementation of a more effectively integrated curriculum.
3. **Secondary Education:** Universal secondary education up to grade twelve (i.e. up to age 16 or 17) is the stated goal for the future. This has been confirmed by the provisions of the amended Education Act of 1996, which have extended the upper limit of the compulsory school age to sixteen years. It is intended, further, that at the completion of secondary schooling, all students should have been exposed to skills training, as well as a sound academic foundation, in order to enable them either to proceed directly to a worthwhile career or to successfully pursue post-secondary education and training.

The achievement of the stated goals will entail the further construction of new schools, the diversification and strengthening of the curriculum, the provision of more adequate, indigenously produced teaching/learning resources, the ongoing professional development of the teaching force and the introduction of innovative arrangements to facilitate the delivery of relevant secondary education throughout the country. The decentralization of the school system will be pursued to achieve the greater empowerment of local inhabitants in the delivery of appropriate educational services to their communities. This process will provide for more site-based management of schools, the establishment of school districts throughout The Bahamas, and the appointment of school and district boards that will have more direct responsibility for the oversight of educational provision.

4. **Tertiary Education:** The increasingly significant role that tertiary institutions must play in human resource development for the country is recognized. In the future, therefore, it will be imperative that further deliberate efforts be undertaken to more effectively rationalize and articulate existing public institutions at this level, and to extend the access to tertiary education throughout the islands of The Bahamas.

The roles that private institutions ought to play in this regard must be more clearly defined and, to ensure that acceptable standards are maintained by public and private institutions alike, it is intended that a national quality assurance body be established. The long-standing relationship with the regional university will be maintained, although, in certain instances, in a modified form. This link will continue to be vital to the ongoing evolution of tertiary education in The Bahamas.

Concluding Comment

The fifty years following the Second World War have brought phenomenal progress and reform in the provision of educational opportunity in The Bahamas. Equity of access has been significantly increased (with coverage up to secondary level extended to most major inhabited islands) and the system has been greatly democratized.

The challenge of the future will be to achieve the sustained qualitative improvement of the system that will enable the people of The Bahamas to function competitively in a demanding global environment.

Dr. Keva Bethel recently retired as the President of the College of The Bahamas, in Nassau, New Providence. She was also the Chairperson of the National Task Force established by the Prime Minister in late 1992 to review the educational system of The Bahamas and make recommendations for its reform. Dr. Bethel has served the Caribbean on important Commissions of the Organization of American States, and on regional review groups on tertiary education, including the Chancellor's Commission reviewing the Governance.