

THE ROLE OF TVET AND THE CARIBBEAN
ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL TRAINING AGENCIES
(CANTA) AND ALLIED BODIES WITHIN THE
CARIBBEAN SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY (CSME)

INTRODUCTION

Since the May 1990 launch of the CARICOM REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING the member states of the community have gradually been seized with the reality that the WORKFORCES of the region and by extension, the economies of the region are at a competitive disadvantage in relation to other workforces with whom the region trades and competes.

The establishment in each country of a national coordinating and standard setting authority for training and workforce development, as called for in the STRATEGY was equally gradual. Today the region boasts National Training Authorities in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. The OECS is soon to be formally joined by Guyana and Belize.

Working within the framework of the social partnership of workers, employers and government, the Caribbean TVET community subscribes to the philosophy and practice of COMPETENCY-based education and training. This is founded on prevailing, locally validated, international occupational STANDARDS which, describe the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes persons must acquire and demonstrate to be certified at any level with a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in any occupation. What this

means is that any person certified with an NVQ in an occupation in the region, is equally competent with his or her counterparts certified with their NVQs in that occupation anywhere else in the region.

This standardized network arrangement between the National Training Authorities in the region provides for the CSME a mechanism, which effectively facilitates and enables the free and orderly movement of certified workers within the region as soon as the political obstacles are removed. Local Training Authorities on behalf of their countries may simply reciprocate recognition and acceptance of other countries NVQ certification or, another approach, patterned from how countries issue international driver's licences to locals who already are competent locally licensed drivers, would see the local Training Authorities issuing a Caribbean Qualification (CVQ) based on the local NVQ.

The Caribbean TVET community has also developed significant expertise and demonstrated capacity to accredit training institutions and programmes, assess and certify persons including assessment of prior learning and acquired competencies. The articulation of competent, certificate holders between training institutions and programmes in the region is easily facilitated based on shared common standards. The smooth matriculation to various levels of employment and work, based on the levels of certification earned, truly empowers and recognizes the workforce and contributes to the development of human capital, individual and regional competitiveness. The Training Authorities provide countries and the region with the flexibility to respond on a national scale to facilitate the training or retraining as new occupations emerge or old occupations and skill sets become obsolete. We are able to maintain the currency, relevance and competitiveness of the CSME workforce.

THE CHANGED ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The paradigm within which the economies of the Caribbean traded and related to other economies both within the region and the wider world has been based on the understanding that none could provide itself with all the consumption requirements of even the simplest standard of living (lessons learned from the “self reliance import substitution model”). They, therefore, engaged in economic activities for which they were “best suited” or had a COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE in terms of natural abilities or resource endowments, cheap low skill labour for primary production and so traded. This paradigm has exhausted itself in the Caribbean.

The new paradigm appropriate for this era of globalized open competition is the micro-economic business model way of thinking - COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, in terms of human capital formation through education and training that nurtures and promotes individual and societal creativity, innovation, learning, entrepreneurship and a quality workforce to create and exploit select global market niches in peculiarly differentiated products and services which emanate from our culture and imagination.

The Caribbean TVET community in its efforts to prepare and certify our workforces for the growing variety of careers and job opportunities emerging from the rapidly evolving Caribbean services economy (which now employs the bulk of the workforce and provides the largest sector contribution to GDP with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana) confronts the stark inappropriateness of the prevailing elitist plantation inspired philosophy and practice of education in relation to the socio-economic aspirations of the CSME.

The TVET community is greatly challenged attempting to train and certify to international standards, the typical semi-literate, semi-numerate product of our education system so to perform as, for example, a multilingual eco-tourism tour guide or a call centre customer service representative or a Webmaster. Education makes one trainable and training makes one employable. It takes a quality trainable workforce to attract the decent job creating investments the CSME seeks to help nurture a socio-economic environment where entrepreneurial opportunities are seen and innovatively seized by our appropriately educated citizen/workers.

TVET FOR HUMAN CAPITAL FORMATION, DECENT WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

The TVET community questions the continued practicality and usefulness of segmenting learning and education into various categories, academic, skills training, TVET, formal, non-formal. We subscribe to the view that education is a life long process through which one learns how to learn, learns how to do, learns how to live and work productively with other people, and learns how to be. What comes quickly to mind is the profile of the Ideal CARICOM Citizen/Worker promulgated by the CARICOM heads in 1997 which reads as follows:

The ideal CARICOM citizen/worker:

- Is capable of seizing the economic opportunities which the global environment is presenting

- Demonstrates multiple literacies, including foreign language skills, independent and critical thinking

- Has developed the capacity to create and take advantage of opportunities to control, improve, maintain and promote physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being; and to contribute to the health and welfare of the community and country.

- Nourishes in him/her and in others, the full development of each person's potential without gender stereotyping; and embraces differences and similarities between females and males as a source of mental strength.

- Has an informed respect for our cultural heritage and that of others.

We notice the radical transformation in education worldwide at all levels where education is now being measured in terms of STANDARDS, LEARNING OUTCOMES and COMPETENCIES. Most jobs profiled either in job descriptions or in classified job advertisements, set out in great detail the specific COMPETENCIES required for the job delineating all its three components, namely, knowledge, skill and attitude or in other words, the cognitive, psycomotive and the affective domains of learning.

It is this reality, which directed TVET institutions in this region to pursue the philosophy and practice of COMPETENCY-BASED education, training and certification.

This approach ensures that every certificate issued is a guarantee of the holder's competence to perform at whatever given level of the occupation anywhere in the world. Qualification must equal competence and specific learning outcomes. In addition, basing training curricula, assessment and certification on internationally validated occupational standards, renders the qualification holder internationally competitive in his/her area of occupation.

The major obstacle the TVET community faces in its attempt to create and maintain a modern, competitive CSME workforce is the dysfunctional education system. We must hasten as a region to adopt a philosophy of education, which promotes universal access, quality, relevance and equity to at least the secondary level as well as introducing a secondary level adult education and certification scheme.

We need an education system, which is driven by curricula derived from a broad common consensus as to the profile, competencies and learning standards, the products of the secondary school system must meet. The existing exam subject, syllabus-driven system that serves only a minority of the privileged cohort in secondary schools within the region, is no longer tenable.

The TVET community advocates and is able to contribute significantly toward the creation of a more holistic learning outcomes-based secondary education curricula, which would include career guidance, entrepreneurship training, and TVET with occupational certification. The curriculum should be broadened to impact the affective domain focussing on a prescribed socialization for citizenship.

What this approach will do is to provide a context within which education takes place. The secondary school leaving transcript will provide a comprehensive profile of the graduate, not just the subjects he or she earned, therefore, enabling potential employers or educational institutions to make informed decisions about graduates.

The region cannot continue to graduate and credential persons at both the secondary and tertiary level who are unable to do anything or have any idea as to how to apply their education to create value and earn a livelihood.

The competency-based model used by the TVET systems in the region is CRITERION REFERENCED, based on standards derived from the workplace. The assessment for certification is based on performance criteria and conditions under which achievement will be assessed, all explicitly stated and made public in advance.

This approach widens access to learning and certification as it allows learners to review the competencies and learning outcomes they must demonstrate for assessment and how the assessment will be conducted so to determine if they need further training or if they could register for assessment directly. This prevents learners from doing courses, the content of which they have already mastered.

The criterion-referenced assessment approach based on subject area syllabi as practiced by CXC does not provide the context of relevance to work or society afforded by the competency method and therefore is inappropriate for TVET purposes. The CXC method, however, seems to serve the purpose of facilitating learners' matriculation to tertiary education for the fortunate minority who earn the required number and types of subjects required so to do. The question begs, what of the over 85% majority who this system fails?

CONCLUSION

Council for Human and Social Development (COSHOD) is being asked to:

1. Approve CANTA as the implementation arm of the Regional Coordinating Mechanism for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (RCMTVET)
2. Mandate CANTA and its member agencies, through the RCMTVET, to facilitate and enable throughout the CSME, the provision of COMPETENCY-BASED training, assessment and certification services at the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level and the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) level. This will establish a practical cost effective mechanism to enable the free movement of certified workers with CSME.
3. Mandate CANTA to explore other possibilities to develop and sustain the competence and competitiveness of all the working aged citizen/workers of the CSME afforded by the region's TVET community. Our benchmarks are international, our demonstrated competence world class, as we stand ready to assist in the transformation of the CSME into a region of competence, competitiveness and prosperity.

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