

Dr . C. W. W.Kannangara  
Memorial Lecture-25

**A Review of Educational Reforms in the  
Post - Kannangara Era**

by

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## **A Review of Educational Reforms in the Post - Kannangara Era**

I am extremely happy to have been invited to deliver this 25<sup>th</sup> memorial lecture to commemorate and pay our tribute to a visionary leader Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara. Personally I have been a beneficiary of the free education scheme and the scholarship grants that he inaugurated and I am indebted to him for being what I am today. I sat the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination in 1947 and entered a Central College in 1948 to pursue my secondary education in the English medium. Since then, until I completed my first degree at the university I enjoyed the fruits of free education. I also wish to express my sincere thanks to the Director General, National Institute of Education and the officials of the Research Department for inviting me to deliver this lecture and providing an opportunity to express my gratitude to the father of free education.

The contribution made by Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara to the cause of education in this country, the services rendered to the vast majority of children coming from ordinary families in particular, have been acknowledged by many politicians, educationists and academics. During the period from 1931 to 1947 when he functioned as the Minister of Education in the capacity of Chairman of the Executive Committee on Education in the State Council, he initiated and implemented a number of programmes which brought about a social revolution in this country. His efforts laid the foundation for the emergence of a national system of education which has made Sri Lanka a model in social development among developing nations that gained independence after the second world war. An international organization like the World Bank has recognized the foresight of pioneers like Dr. Kannangara when it states, "The Sri Lankan policy makers who designed the basic framework of the education system, in the 1930s and 1940s were far ahead of their time in perceiving human capital as a promising investment with the potential to produce a wide range of important economic and social benefits" (World Bank-2005).

A few reviewers have commented on the overall vision he had on various aspects of education as they have concentrated on the key areas such as the introduction of free education, change of the medium of instruction to national languages and the establishment of central schools. But his work in the area of curricular reforms, diversification of secondary education, teacher development and promotion of social cohesion are equally important.

### **Quality Improvement of Education - The Handessa Scheme**

The first step towards curricular reforms was taken with the introduction of the Rural Education Programme, which came to be known as the Handessa Rural Education Scheme. The executive Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Kannagara wanted to link education to the socio-economic life of the community. As an experiment, an innovative curriculum was introduced in a rural school in Handessa close to Kandy. Children in grades 6, 7 and 8 who participated in this scheme had their learning events organized under four areas; namely life skills, health education, study of the locality and aesthetics education. Under life skills activities related to vocations in the area such as carpentry, clay work, brick making, rattan work, agriculture, animal husbandry and bee-keeping were introduced. Cultivation of vegetables in the school garden and repairs to school furniture were carried out by children. Children actively worked together with the farmers and workers in the community. Under health education, children took part in the cleaning and maintenance of water sources, construction and use of toilets and malaria control work. It may be relevant that today the World Health Organization (WHO) under its School Health Promotion Programme recommends the involvement of school children in the promotion of health activities in the community. Under study of the locality, children learned about the geography of the area, its population characteristics and economic activities of the people. Under aesthetics, study of literature, art, music and dancing were introduced.

Children engaged in these activities in the morning session and in the afternoon they learned reading, writing, speech, math and academic knowledge of the practical work they did in the morning.

As the experiment was a success it was gradually extended to other schools and by the end of the decade 253 schools were implementing the programme. The students who followed this scheme did perform better even at local examinations. But the elite English medium schools did not join the scheme and as a result there was no public support. However, subsequently Dr. Kannangara succeeded in introducing these subjects through the newly established Central Schools to the school curriculum.

### **Enactment of Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939**

One of the areas that drew the attention of Dr. Kannangara was to prepare a law on education which would facilitate the implementation of an education policy suitable for the ethos of the country. This idea was given expression in the Special Committee Report where it states "A successful system of education must arise out of and be adapted to the ethos of the nation concerned." The education law that prevailed at the time was the Education Ordinance of 1920 under which the Board of Education was the all powerful body on policy making. But the members of the Board were officials and others nominated by the governor. They represented the vested interests at the time and were determined to maintain the privileges of the denominational bodies that were in control of a large number of assisted schools. The legislation that Dr. Kannangara envisaged took seven years to see the light of day. Even in that he had to compromise some of his principles in the face of opposition from privileged classes. However it gave the authorities significant power in the control of education. Its importance is stated in the publication: Education in Ceylon, A Centenary Volume thus: "The significance of the Education Ordinance of 1939 lay in the provision it made for subsequent achievements in education. It gave the Executive Committee of Education the power it required to expand and retain control of education. Henceforth, the responsibility of the State for education became grounded on a clear legal base"(Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs - 1969). Although many sections of this ordinance appear to be outdated today it has survived for 75 years and continues to be the principal law on education in this country.

## **Report of the Special Committee on Education**

In April 1940 the Executive Committee resolved that “The task of investigating the defects of the present educational system and recommending measures for reforms necessitated by the changed conditions should be undertaken by the Executive Committee itself with the assistance of educational experts already available in the country”. Accordingly the Special Committee was constituted comprising the members of the Executive Committee and a number of leading educationists representing various interests in the country. The proposal to appoint a committee headed by a foreign expert was turned down as Dr. Kannangara knew by hindsight that such a committee would invariably give in to the pressures of the vested interests. The Committee collected data and information on the current system of education through a questionnaire and public hearings and the final report was submitted after three years in 1943.

This is the first time that a comprehensive study of the system of education in the country has been undertaken and its recommendations cover all aspects of general education. It also contains valuable ideas on education which are valid even for today. Apart from its key recommendations such as the grant of free education, the medium of instruction which have been very much highlighted on previous occasions, I would like to highlight the other aspects such as the structure of the school system and the curricular innovations which are very much relevant to my topic of educational reforms in the post - Kannangara era.

The Report of the Special Committee on Education in Ceylon (Sessional Paper XX1V- 1943) contains many ideas on education which the subsequent educational reformers have attempted to accomplish. Unfortunately Dr. Kannangara did not continue to head the educational establishment for long, after the publication of the report. Even after seven decades Sri Lanka has not been able to fully implement the “ Kannangara Chinthanaya” despite many attempts in the post independent era.

Now, let me examine some of these ideas generated by Dr. Kannangara. I am quoting certain sections from the Report of the Special Committee (S.P XX1V,1943) to indicate to what extent progressive ideas on education has been incorporated in to this report.

Under general considerations, it states that “effort should be directed towards devising a system that will enable every citizen to play his full part in the life of the nation. This means two things. Firstly, the individual must be helped to achieve the highest degree of physical, mental and moral development of which he is capable, irrespective of his wealth or social status. Secondly, the individual as a result of his education should be able to use his abilities for the good of the nation in the fullest possible measure and should be able to pass his judgement on affairs of state and exercise intelligently the franchise that the State has conferred upon him” (P.9 S.P XX1V 1943).

Regarding the role of education in promoting national cohesion the report states “Our fundamental need is to weld the heterogeneous elements of the population in to a nation. The existence of peoples of different racial origins, religions and languages is not peculiar to Ceylon, and history shows that it is by no means impossible to develop a national consciousness even among a population as diverse as ours. There is, indeed, a large common element in our cultures already, and under the stimulation of educational development the notion of national unity has been growing among us. In planning the future of education in Ceylon we should strive to increase the common element and foster the idea of nationhood.”

“The diversity should not be a source of weakness but a source of strength. Each community has some peculiar contribution to make to the common stock. It can effectively be made, however, only if there is equality of opportunity, and it is one of our tasks to iron out the inequalities so that every individual may contribute his utmost”.

“The nationalism that we hope to see established depends for its being on toleration and understanding. Among a people so varied as ours any other kind would produce not national unity but national disruption. And toleration

that we ask our own people to apply to each other we would also wish to see applied to other nations. This toleration is in fact a characteristic of our citizens. The communities of the island have for many years lived in peace and amity. We are anxious that the teaching in the new educational structure may be inspired by the same toleration and the same desire for peace among men of all nations”(P10 S.P XX1V, 1943).

Even before the United Nations was born, Dr. Kannangara was conscious of the role of education in promoting national unity and international understanding.

Regarding the aims of education the report identifies three broad areas; namely, mental development, culture and efficiency. Physical development is also included under mental development and in curricular reforms, pride of place is given to personal and public health. It stresses that healthy minds depend on healthy bodies. In particular it indicates the harmful effects of concentrating on examination subjects at far too early an age a theme which is very relevant in today’s context. It emphasizes the need for manual training as it leads to balanced mental growth. Besides the importance of manual training, it recognizes the importance of art and music in personality development which provides for self expression.

To sum up consider the following statement.

“The most useful citizen is he who can face a new problem and find his own solution. The spark of genius is nothing more than the spark of originality”(p.12 S.P XX1V, 1943).

Today we talk of soft skills and life skills, but Dr. Kannangara emphasized on these long before the present day prophets.

A proposal that aroused lot of controversy was the recommendation to trifurcate the school system at Grade 5 as secondary, senior and practical schools. However if one would examine the proposal carefully adequate care has been taken to provide for late developers to switch over to secondary and senior schools from practical schools. As the primary stage of schooling



was of 6 years duration, by the time a child completes primary education he was 12 or 13 years of age. The headmasters were instructed to allow change of courses if it was found that a particular child had different aptitudes that warranted a change of school. The curriculum recommended for grades 6 to 8 were more or less similar and the differentiation was on methodology. The Report states, "differentiation between the secondary school and the senior school should be based on kind of ability rather than on degree of ability"(p.45 S.P XX1V, 1943). Further there was to be an examination at grade 8 and those students who display academic ability at that stage could be transferred to a senior or secondary school. Thus there was much flexibility in the proposed scheme. Had this scheme been implemented, if necessary with a little more flexibility the "mismatch" between education and employment which later has been identified as one of the main issues in education would not have arisen.

Regarding examinations, the Committee was conscious of the pros and cons of a national examination system. Therefore, it emphasizes very much on school level examinations and fitness tests rather than achievement tests. During this time most schools were preparing students for London examinations and the syllabi were designed to suit the conditions in England. No wonder that under such conditions the students had to learn an irrelevant curriculum. The report says, "The secondary school should not permit their curricula to be dominated by examinations at all, but in so far as examinations determine the course of studies, they should be Ceylon examinations based upon local needs and conditions"(P47. S.P XX1V, 1943). It also draws attention to the heavy burden placed on students through excessive homework given to prepare students for passing examinations. The burden of homework impairs students' physique and destroys their powers of initiative. Also it cuts out a large part of students' education that comes from general reading, hobbies, play and conversation. About private coaching (tuition) it says, "We strongly deprecate the practice too frequently adopted by parents of supplementing the school homework by private coaching. In the end it destroys its object by making the student incapable of originality and initiative"( P48 S.P XX1V, 1943).

The Committee also advocated research and experimentation in training colleges and schools. To encourage this practice the Committee recommended the establishment of a Council of Educational Research. It should be provided with funds to carry out research and also establish a bureau of information on educational matters for dissemination of results of research. It should also keep in touch with the progress of educational research in other countries, collect results of researches and publish them periodically.

The report also contains very valuable and useful material on the content of education. It begins with the importance of health education which is described as fundamental to education. The other areas covered are manual training, music and art, language and literature, mathematics, nature study and natural sciences, history and geography and citizenship. It also covers other general areas such as methods of teaching and learning, home and school, the teacher, variety of curriculum, girls' education and school and community

Thus the Special Committee Report contains a treasure house of knowledge and ideas on education which are very much relevant even in today's context. Unfortunately Dr. Kannagara did not remain in power for an adequate length of time to implement these ideas and his successors were not up to the stature of that doughty fighter to forge through various obstacles. Considering the educational value of this report I recommend that this be made a compulsory text for all prospective teacher training courses in this country.

In the decade of 1950s, though there was quantitative expansion in the provision of education the only reform proposal pursued was the change in the medium of instruction to national languages. Even in this regard although Dr. Kannagara advocated the switch over to national languages he never wanted to give up English as an international language. However the way national language policy was implemented ultimately lead to the decline of English language learning which became detrimental to national development.

## **Educational Reforms in the Post Kannangara Era**

### **Schools Take Over 1960-1961**

The most important event that took place in the decade of the 1960s was the take-over of assisted denominational schools and Training Colleges by the state, under the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No. 5 of 1960. Under this Act all assisted schools were brought under the management of the Director of Education unless any proprietor of a grade 1 or grade 2 school had opted to run such a school as a non-fee levying private school. Except 48 grade 1 and 2 schools all other schools came under the management of the state. In the following year by enacting Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961 the properties of these schools were vested in government in order to facilitate the smooth functioning of the schools. The Act also prohibited the establishment of new schools for children between the ages of 5 and 14 years. Thus the foundation was laid for the development of a national system of schools in the country.

Dr. Kannangara though a member of the opposition fully supported this proposal. The Special Committee recommended the continuation of government assisted denominational schools due to the pressure of vested interests, but Dr. Kannangara personally was against it. In his rider he states:

“I feel that I would be lacking in my duty if I do not place on record my disagreement with the opinions and conclusions stated therein on the subject of the denominational control of education. I refer to the recommendations in paragraphs 63, 64, 65 and 67 and the arguments adduced in support of the continuance of the present denominational system. These are summarized in paragraphs 345 and 347. I also disagree with paragraph 163 that managers of denominational schools should be allowed to select candidates of particular religious persuasions for teaching posts in their schools in preference to those who have been placed higher in order of merit at the examination. As early as 1911 the deficiencies of the system of denominational control were commented on by an impartial observer,

namely. Mr. J. J. R. Bridge, an Inspector of Schools of the English Board of Education. Some progress no doubt has been made under the denominational system, but a one-sided advance cannot make up for the rivalry and bitterness of feeling among different religious communities which the system has engendered. A most deplorable and disturbing feature of the educational system in vogue since the British connection has been inequality of opportunity which has been aggravated by the denominational system. Religious communities with comparatively less resources and without organizational strength and solidarity have long suffered under a sense of frustration and injustice.....I am of opinion that any system of public education for the future must be entirely free and under public control” (P138, 139 S.P XX1V, 1943).

Another point that Dr. Kannanagara advances is that if a religious background is essential for

moral development, what about those children attending denominational schools who belong to other religious persuasions. If denominational schools are confined only to those of the denomination to which the manager belongs it would segregate future citizens on creed, thus endangering national harmony. He advocates that religious education can be imparted in a state school and “state education is *per se* is not godless or soulless”. The denominational system also discriminates against citizens in employment. He was against the power of managers over dismissal and disciplinary control of teachers. It is alleged that a teacher is discontinued for change of religion or for marriage with a person of a faith different from that of the management. He was also against the continuation of teacher training colleges based on denominational basis as such trainees never get a chance to mix with members of other religions. They will never imbibe the spirit of tolerance and sympathy for the other man’s point of view, which are so essential qualities in a teacher.

The schools take-over thus eliminated some of the inequalities and injustices that prevailed in the denominational system of schools and prepared the ground for the introduction of a unified national system of education.

## **National Education Commission 1961**

The government in 1961 appointed a National Education Commission under the chairmanship of Prof. J. E. Jayasuriya to examine and review the entire educational system and make recommendations for the establishment of a unified national system of education for Ceylon. The Commission issued an interim report in October 1961 and the final report in 1962 as SESSIONAL PAPER XV11-1962. The recommendations cover all aspects of general education and some of the key areas are:

- Compulsory School Age – from 6 to 14 years of age
- Medium of Instruction – The medium of instruction for citizens be Sinhala or Tamil
- English be introduced as an optional subject from Grade 5
- School system – A common elementary school for children in grades 1- 8 called junior school and 4 types of senior schools for G.C.E (O.L) and G.C.E (A.L). The types are Agriculture, Engineering and technology, Science and Arts, Commerce & Humanities
- Zoning of schools – Children in a zone to attend the closest basic school in the area and then join a senior school depending on aptitude.
- Content of Education – a common curriculum for the basic school and a differentiated curriculum for the senior schools.
- Work experience attached to a place of work.
- Teaching profession, recruitment and training
- Student welfare, health facilities, midday meal
- Examinations- Grade 5 scholarships be given at grade 8
- School Psychological Service.
- Educational Administration
- School Community relations.

The government incorporated most of these recommendations in a Whitepaper entitled Proposals for a National System of Education - 1964 and called for the views of the public. However at the elections held in that year the ruling party lost and the opposition came to power. That was the end of the Whitepaper proposals.

### **Proposals for Reforms in General and Technical Education- 1966**

The new government taking into consideration the proposals of the National Education Commission Report, and the Technical Education Commission Report of 1963 prepared a fresh Whitepaper. It recommended that there should be a common basic school up to Grade 8 and at that stage a selection test be held and on its results children be sent to local practical schools, Junior technical schools and senior schools. Only those students who qualify to enter a senior school would have the opportunity to enter a university and pursue higher education.

There was opposition from certain quarters that this would curtail opportunities for higher education as only those who qualify at the grade 8 examination would proceed further and the government was compelled to withdraw the Whitepaper. Accordingly an amendment was made in 1967 to have the elementary school examination at Grade 7 and students to join the senior school or a technical college or an Institute of Fine Arts.

In the midst of these stormy developments, a desirable activity that took shape was the work carried out in the area of curriculum development. A team of officers who examined the curriculum in the light of international trends gradually introduced innovations to the curriculum and trained teachers first in science and mathematics and later extended to other subject areas. It developed to be an agency of the Ministry of Education as the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) which contributed to the improvement in the quality of education in a substantial manner.

The structure of the education administrative establishment also underwent certain changes in order to cope with the expanding load of work. Until 1960 the Department of Education was responsible for the management

of all schools with the assistance of field officers. In 1961 Regional Education Offices were established under Assistant Directors of Education in the provinces and sub-offices in the districts under education officers. In 1966, the Central Department of Education was amalgamated with the Ministry of Education and the Secretary to the Ministry became the Director General of Education. The Regional Education Offices were upgraded to the level of Departments and Assistant Directors of Education were promoted as Directors of Education and vested with the powers of a head of a department. The sub-offices under Chief Education Officers continued and inspectors of schools were re-designated as Circuit Education Officers while the number of such divisions was increased.

### **Educational Reforms -1972**

With the change of government in 1970 the process of formulating a new set of reform proposals was initiated. A key issue at this time was the problem of unemployment among youth for which shortcomings of the education system were identified as the main reason. The five year development plan of the government made special mention of this issue. A team of experts from the ILO headed by Prof. Dudley Seers were studying this problem. The general impression was that there was a mismatch between education and employment.

It was at this juncture that the youth uprising of 1971 took place which hastened the authorities to take action to reform the education system. The uprising took place in April it was suppressed within two months and soon after, the educational authorities formulated new plans for reforms. Implementation was to be carried out from January 1972. Although proposals were designed hurriedly without a Whitepaper and public discussion, there were many positive features in this package.

The main components of the 1972 reforms were:

- 1** ***Structural changes in the school system*** - The new structure consisted of five years of primary, four years of junior secondary, and two years of senior secondary. The age of admission to grade one was increased

from five years to six years. So the age of the child at the end of the primary stage remained the same i.e. 11 years. At the end of the junior secondary stage the students sat for the National Certificate of General Education (NCGE). Those who passed the NCGE would proceed to the senior secondary course and at the end of two years were to sit the Higher National Certificate of Education (HNCE). Selection to universities will be done on the results of the HNCE, but they will be provided with an orientation prior to entering the universities.

- 2 **Curriculum reforms** - The curricula at different stages were revised in keeping with the age level of students

The content of the primary curriculum comprised religion, medium language (Sinhala or Tamil), second language (from grade 3 onwards) mathematics, physical and aesthetic activities, creative activities and environmental activities. But in teaching methodology teachers were expected to follow an integrated approach through activity based learning.

At the junior secondary stage there was a common curriculum consisting of religion, medium language, second language, mathematics, science, social studies, aesthetics, health & physical education, pre-vocational studies 1 and pre-vocational studies I and II. The changes were that instead of physics, chemistry and biology at G.C.E (O.L) integrated-science was introduced for N.C.G.E, social studies replaced history, geography and civics, and pre vocational subjects were introduced in place of technical subjects. The novelty in pre-vocational studies was that learning was related to the occupations in the locality and students learned about the background knowledge of the vocation. In addition the students also learned about the resources of the country and an elementary practice in geometrical and mechanical drawing.

At the Collegiate level the curriculum consisted of three parts:

- core subjects
- optional subjects
- project work



The core subjects were:

- First Language (Sinhala/Tamil)
- Second Language
- Elementary Statistics and Basic Principles of Management
- Our Cultural Heritage and Socio-Economic Environment of Sri Lanka and
- Basic Principles of Social Science

The optional subjects were organized under four subject streams. These were:

- Science stream
- Commerce and business studies
- Social sciences
- Languages, humanities and aesthetics

The students were required to learn two subjects from the selected stream.

### **3 *Reforms in Educational Administration***

Up to 1971 the hierarchy of educational administrators comprising School Inspectors (Circuit Education Officers), District Inspectors (Education Advisors) and Assistant Directors, Deputy Directors and Directors formed one category while the principals of schools and teacher educators constituted other categories. In order to give all these categories of officers an opportunity to gain experience in all areas of educational administration, a combined service designated as Sri Lanka Education Service (SLES) was established. Later it came to be designated as Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS).

The 1972 reform was an attempt to make the curriculum more relevant and develop skills of students suitable to the world of work. The changes were in keeping with sound principles of education. Primary education reforms in particular, were in keeping with progressive ideas on education. Teachers were given the flexibility to expand the curriculum to meet the needs of the environment. The common curriculum at the junior secondary level provided a broad general education necessary for every citizen. The senior secondary curriculum had a general component as well as specialization in subjects that a student would wish to pursue in higher education. It catered to the needs of the vast majority of students who failed to enter higher education. A foundation year was proposed for those who would proceed to university education to fill any gaps.

However, there were several criticisms about these reforms. The reduction of the school span from 12 to 11 years and the raising of the age of admission to grade 1 to six years were construed as attempts to prune educational expenditure. It was also conjectured that the reduction of the school span would lead to non-recognition of Sri Lankan certificates by foreign universities. The introduction of pre-vocational studies was interpreted as an attempt to go back to feudalism. The introduction of reforms in a hurry without adequate public consultation and availability of financial resources were other drawbacks.

In 1977 some of these became issues discussed at election platforms.

### **Changes introduced in 1977**

The opposition came to power at the elections and what was discussed on election platforms was implemented without any serious study. The age of admission to grade one was reduced to five years and the G.C.E (O.L) Examination was restored with certain changes in subjects. Integrated Science and Social Studies continued in the same manner, pre- vocational studies were given up and technical subjects were re-introduced. School span was increased to 13 years 6+3+ 2+2. One of the most damaging acts was the undermining of the role of the Curriculum Development Centre which had initiated

programmes in curriculum renewal and development of teachers. Some of the key staff of this institution was removed and new faces brought in.

During this period, as a result of a policy decision taken by the government, assistance to non-fee levying schools was restored and legal provision was given by Act No. 65 of 1981.

However with the change of the minister in 1980, things turned for the better. The report of the Educational Reforms Committee which functioned under the chairmanship of Mr. Bogoda Premarathne was released and two other committees, the Committee on Technical Education under Dr. Gnanalingam and Committee on National Apprenticeship Training under Mr. H. D. Sugathapala submitted their reports.

#### **The Whitepaper on Education- 1981**

Based on the recommendations of the above three committees the “Education Proposals for Reform” as a Whitepaper on education reforms was published. The main recommendations with regard to general education were:

1. The span of general education to consist of 5 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 2 years of collegiate level.
2. In order to minimize disparities in schooling facilities and to achieve greater efficiency through rationalization schools were organized into clusters of schools. A cluster is a group of schools in a cohesive geographical area and would be developed and managed as one whole, to serve the educational needs of the entire area using the resources available to the best advantage.
3. Teaching Service- Recruits to the teaching service will be given pre-service training before posting to schools and a District Teacher Service will be established.
4. Curricular Changes:

**Primary curriculum** - It was intended to assist the child to adjust the transition from home to school and express his personality through such natural gifts as miming, acting, singing, dancing, drawing, observing the nature. The child will also be assisted to acquire skills in reading, writing and arithmetic in a meaningful way. It will also be related to other aspects of the curriculum and environmental activities.

**Junior Secondary Stage** - The common curriculum at this stage consisted of 9 subjects: First Language, Religion, Mathematics, English, Science, Social Studies, Aesthetic Studies, Life Skills and Health and Physical Education. Life skills replaced the Technical subject. In assessment the concept of continuous assessment was introduced and a report is to be given at the end of Grade 8 incorporating the results of the summative test and continuous assessment

**Senior Secondary Stage** - The objective of general education continued to receive emphasis at this stage too, but as the examination to be held at the end of this stage is a terminal examination the Technical subjects would facilitate the transition to world of work. At the end of the course the students will sit the G.C.E (O.L) Examination, a national certification examination. First Language, Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies will be tested at national level and other subjects will be tested at district or cluster level.

**Collegiate Level** - This is a stage of specialization leading to university and tertiary levels. The curriculum comprises a core and specialized subjects. The core would be, Cultural Heritage and Socio-economic environment of Sri Lanka, First Language, English, Work experience through Community oriented Projects. The Special subjects are organized into two streams -Science and Arts. Students may select three subjects either from one or both streams

When the Whitepaper was published the proposals were heavily criticized by the radical student movements. These criticisms were of course politically motivated rather than based on factual grounds. As a result the proposals could not be implemented as planned.

The proposals relating to the grade structure and organization of school clusters were implemented but later clusters had to be abolished due to objections from various quarters. Under the cluster system the principal of the core-school was entrusted with the role of the head of the cluster. He was expected to provide leadership to the principals of other schools in the cluster and share the resources. But in actual practice what happened was that he wielded his authority in a dictatorial manner and instead of sharing resources grabbed everything for his school. That antagonized the principals of other schools. The large popular schools in urban centres were left out of the clusters and were allowed to develop as Unitary Schools (later designated as National Schools). They were supposed to be independent financially and it led to an allegation that free education was being compromised. The scheme of continuous assessment was resisted by teacher unions alleging that it increased the work load of the teachers.

Two positive achievements that resulted from these proposals were the establishment of the National Institute of Education (NIE) by an Act of Parliament in 1985 and the setting up of National Colleges of Education (NCoE) for pre-service teacher education.

Several initiatives were also taken to improve the management of schools. The role of the principal as the first line manager of the system was recognized and the move to empower schools commenced. Introduction of school level planning was another move. An attempt to establish Zonal Education Offices as academic support centres to schools was experimented with, but it was given up later. By the end of the decade the cluster system was given up and the Divisional directors were appointed to be in charge of Divisions

### **Devolution of Education under the Thirteenth Amendment**

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution was enacted in 1987 and Provincial Councils were established. Many of the functions vested with the MoE were devolved to the provinces. According to the Ninth Schedule List 1 Appendix 111 of this amendment the management of all provincial schools

was vested with the respective provincial councils. Out of 9732 government schools 9370 came under the provincial authorities and the centre was left with only 342 national schools. The functions left with the MoE were policy formulation, planning, national curriculum, teacher education, examinations and production and distribution of text books. Appointment of principals of 1AB and 1C schools was to be carried out by the MoE on the advice of the central Public Service Commission.

A new provincial education management structure was set up in the provinces. There is a Provincial Ministry of Education, a Provincial Department of Education, Zonal Education Offices and Divisional Education offices. Whether such an elaborate structure is necessary for the management of around 1000 schools in a province is a question. When there are many tiers in a system decision making becomes tardy and affects the efficiency of the system. According to the principles of democracy devolution of power to the periphery is a progressive move, but the manner in which the provincial councils have functioned since their inception leaves much to be desired. Two developments that can be perceived prominently as a result of devolution are the escalation of costs in administration and exacerbation of political interference in administration.

### **The National Education Commission - Reforms of 1997**

The second youth uprising in the south came about in 1988-89 and after it was suppressed the government appointed the Presidential Commission on Youth to inquire in to the causes of the revolt and make recommendations. The Commission identified education as one of the main causes for youth discontent and recommended that education policy be decided above party politics and there should be continuity in policy irrespective of changes in government. In fact it pointed out that education policies have been tampered even with change of ministers of the same party. The government in consultation with the opposition decided to appoint a National Education Commission which will prepare the National Education Policy. Accordingly the National Education Commission Act No. 19 of 1991 was enacted and a National Education Commission was established. It augured well as there was bi-partisan consensus even in the selection of

personnel to the commission. Thus instead of *ad hoc* commissions there is a permanent body to advise the government on educational matters.

In 1992 the Commission after public consultations published its First Report (Sessional paper No. V of 1992). This report formulated a set of national goals relevant to education and identified a set of competencies as an essential foundation for approaching the National Goals. These have been slightly modified in the publication, "Envisioning Education for Human Development" ( NEC 2003). These goals and competencies continue to be the guide for policy planners and curriculum designers since then. In 1995 the Commission put out a document "An Action Oriented Strategy towards a National Education Policy". This document dealt with the Following areas in general education:

- Extending Educational Opportunity
- Quality improvement in education
- The Teaching Profession
- Technical and Practical skills in Education
- Management of Education and Resource Provision.

According to the provisions of the NEC Act, this document was submitted to the President and a Presidential Task Force was appointed to consider these proposals and prepare an implementation plan. The Task Force appointed 12 sub committees to go into various aspects of the proposals and their recommendations were published in a document entitled, "General Education Reforms-1997" The President declared 1997 as the year of Education Reforms and implementation commenced from January 1998.

In order to ensure attendance of children in the compulsory span of schooling i.e. 5-14 years of age compulsory attendance regulations were enacted and school attendance committees were established at Grama Niladhari Division level and Monitoring Committees at Divisional Secretariat level. The media campaigns conducted had a considerable impact and a large number of non-school going children were admitted to formal schools or non-formal education centres.

In primary education a few changes were made to the existing practices. The five year primary span was divided in to three key stages as follows:

Key stage 1 - Grades 1 &2 the emphasis was on learning through guided play

Key stage 2 - Grades 3 &4 learning was through activities and some deskwork

Key stage 3 - Grade 5 emphasized more on deskwork with activities

The subjects of the primary curriculum were First Language, Mathematics, Religion and Environmental Activities. Activities in science, creative activities, aesthetics, health & physical activities were integrated to the subject Environmental Activities. In addition Activity Based Oral English (ABOE) was introduced for communication purposes. This curriculum was also designed to serve as an appropriate foundation for the development of competencies identified by the NEC. The programme had the advantage of getting foreign assistance through the DfID (UK) under the formulation of a Master Plan for Primary Education and Primary Mathematics Project. The primary reforms were implemented in Gampaha District on a pilot basis and extended to the whole island the following year.

At secondary level, the junior secondary stage was increased to 4 years by reducing one year from the senior secondary level. As a result the junior secondary stage extended from grade 6 to grade 9 and the G.C.E. (O.L) course reduced to two years. Instead of Life Skills, a new subject Technical and Practical Skills was introduced. Continuous Assessment was strengthened through School based assessment (SBA). At G.C.E (O.L) there were to be multiple syllabi in Science and Mathematics, but later amended to have two papers at the O.L Examination. At G.C.E (A.L) the number of subjects was reduced from 4 to 3, instead of Botany and Zoology Biology was introduced and in place of a number of Syllabi in Mathematics two subjects Combined Mathematics and Advanced Mathematics were introduced. A pass in the Common General Paper was made compulsory for admission to universities.



It was also proposed to have a technology stream at A.L mainly to be a safety net for Arts students who would enter the world of work.

The other changes proposed were the introduction of School Based Management, strengthening teacher education, performance appraisal of teachers and setting up of a Professional Council for the regulation of the teaching profession.

According to National Curriculum policy accepted in 1998 the curriculum cycle is to be of 8 years' duration. Accordingly preparations were made to revise the curriculum and elaborate arrangements were made to carry out the necessary changes. However there were changes in leadership and again the proposed changes were abandoned.

### **Education Policy Influenced by Donor Agencies**

In 2004, the NEC published a policy document, "Envisioning Education for Human Development - Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka" (NEC-2004), which contained proposals for the next stage of educational reforms. By this time the education sector was receiving a considerable extent of foreign funding and the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank were the major donors. They were interested in implementing some of the recommendations of the NEC. MoE agreed to the formulation of an Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) as proposed by the World Bank. The key areas of the ESDFP were:

1. Promoting Equitable Access to Basic and Secondary Education
2. Improving the Quality of Education
3. Enhancing the Economic Efficiency and Equity of Resource Allocation
4. Strengthening Education Governance and Service Delivery.

These themes formed the basis of the educational sector plan prepared by the MoE in 2006. Under this plan the government and the World

Bank agreed to the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) where donor funding was channeled through the government budget to finance the ESDFP. The existing method of setting up a separate project unit was given up. This provided an opportunity for the total education sector plan to be monitored jointly by the government and the donor agency based on agreed indicators. Thus it provided a better mechanism for monitoring education plans. However, the ADB did not join the SWAp and as a result programmes funded by the ADB continued to follow the project mode.

Some of the areas where a certain degree of success was achieved under this set up were the enrolment of a large number of non-school going children in formal schools or literacy centres, curricular reforms aimed at developing competencies, channeling of funds for higher order quality inputs such as science laboratories, ICT centres and school libraries, introduction of Programme for School Improvement (PSI), adoption of a rolling plan approach and better disbursement of funds. With the conclusion of this programme in 2012 the next implementation plan, too has been prepared for the period 2012 - 2016 on similar lines.

### **Review of Educational Reforms 1960 - 2006**

Now I would like to reflect on the objectives and the strategies adapted by authors of reforms at different stages. There are two main objectives that run across all stages of reforms equity and quality. Equity means providing equal opportunities for every child irrespective of race, religion, caste or socio-economic status. This we have achieved to a fair degree through expansion in provision of education. A network of schools spread throughout the country has been established where free education is made available. As a result the country is on the verge of achieving universal primary education; adult literacy is at 94% and secondary enrolment is over 90%. The quality of life of the people is better than most other countries having a similar per capita income. In addition to free tuition, a package of student welfare measures comprising free text books, school uniforms, free health care, mid-day meal for primary school children and bursaries for promising pupils from low income families are available. However whether free access to quality education is available for all is a question.

Quality is defined in general as fitness for use. In education what is expected is that the children who pass out of the school system should be able to lead successful lives as citizens in a democratic society. As the success of a student who passes out of a school can be gauged only after a long period of time the process is important. That is why educationists pay great attention to the curriculum. It is the curriculum, the content and methodology that shape the future of the child. Education reform is essentially a matter of curricular reforms.

What are the strategies that have been utilized by authors of reforms in this regard? One of the strategies is changes in the structure of the school system. Generally the span of general education is divided into two stages, the primary and secondary. The primary stage consists of 5 or 6 years and secondary another 6 or 7 years. The school structure is organized to suit these basic considerations.

According to the recommendations of the Special Committee, the primary stage had a 6 year span. At grade 5 it recommended trifurcation of schools as secondary, senior and practical schools. Under this scheme 5% of children will proceed to secondary schools which provide an academic education leading to universities and other higher educational institutes. 15% of students will be absorbed by senior schools which provide an education with a technical and commercial bias and proceed to polytechnics and technical colleges. 80% of students will join practical schools. This was one of the most criticized proposals of the recommendations of the Special Committee. It was contended that 11+ is too early for selection of pupils for academic education and vocational training. As a result streaming had to be given up.

The National Education Commission of 1961 recommended a common junior school up to grade 8 and streaming into four types of senior schools thereafter. This was accepted by the government with minor modifications but the change of government prevented its implementation. The Whitepaper of 1966 proposed the diversification at grade 7 and this was implemented in 1968, but was changed with the reforms in 1972. In that

year the structure has been changed to 5+4+2. It was again changed in to 5+3+3+2 in 1977. The proposals in 1981 retained this system but strengthened the technical component in the curriculum. The NEC recommended a basic school up to Grade 9 and the senior school to be from grade 10 to 13. But taking in to consideration the diversity of the system NEC also was of the view that variations may be made taking in to consideration the geographical factors and population density.

When we examine the school structures in other countries it is determined by historical factors. Britain and countries which were its colonies have a structure basically divided into primary and secondary at the age of 11+. UNESCO recommendation is to impart basic education in an elementary school up to grade 7 or 8 in order to provide the compulsory span of schooling under one roof and diversify secondary education. In a country like Sri Lanka where schools have been established in an unplanned manner by various denominational bodies and the government, the need is to rationalize the system to ensure equal access and economical use of resources. That should have been carried out in 1961 with the take - over of assisted schools. It was proposed by most of the reformers. The Special Committee proposed that there should be a number of primary schools for a secondary school. The National Education Commission of 1961 recommended the establishment of school zones. The Education Reforms Committee - 1979 proposed to establish school complexes. The Whitepaper of 1981 established school clusters based on a school mapping exercise. But it was given up later. Reforms of 1998 suggested forming of school families. At present the government is setting up 1000 secondary schools with 5000 feeder primary schools. However, this has to be carried out to cover the entire country so that every child will be assured of a quality education in a primary school and a secondary school with adequate facilities to implement the full curriculum.

A close examination of the school system shows that schools are getting polarized, the big schools becoming bigger and bigger and unmanageable while the small schools are becoming smaller and smaller and getting closed down. According to School Census of 2013 there are 1614 schools with an enrolment of less than 50 students per school and another

1516 schools with 51-100 students. If the primary sections of large secondary schools are discontinued the number of students in the small primary schools will increase and they will become viable. Then there are 4230 Type II schools in which classes are conducted from grades 1 to 11 and in these schools the secondary sections from grades 6-11, the enrolment is less. In all these cases, the quality of education is poor and the costs are very high. Therefore it is essential to have a judicious rationalization of schools so that no child is denied access and at the same time schools are viable on grounds of economy. On the other hand there are 77 schools with an enrolment of over 3000 students and they have created problems in management. Inability to pay individual attention to all students has created a feeling of alienation among students. Besides some of these schools have become centres of privilege and a duality that existed in the pre-independence era can again be perceived. In fact Hon' Minister of Education stated in Parliament that some of these schools do not admit scholars who are sent on the results of the Grade Five Examination as vacancies are filled contravening the regulations on school admission.

The other shortcoming in the school system is the inequality of distribution of schools with science facilities. There are 73 divisions without a single 1AB school which have A.L science courses. As a result at collegiate level more than 50% of students are forced to follow Arts courses. It is hoped that with the establishment of 1000 secondary schools this anomaly will be eliminated. The introduction of technology stream is another commendable move.

The other strategy adapted by reformers to improve the quality of education is the revision of the curriculum. According to the national curriculum policy the curricula need to be revised every 8 years. Under the reforms carried out every time, tinkering of the system has been carried out, changing subjects here and there and introducing new topics in the content. But what is more important is change in methodology. Learning has to be child centred and activity based. Educational philosophers have been advocating these for the last two and a half centuries. The only novel feature necessary to be introduced is the use of Information and Communication

Technology (ICT). Except in the primary stage, instruction going on in our class rooms is stereotyped and these classrooms are knowledge distributing factories. Students hardly develop the soft skills like communication, problem solving, creativity, initiative, inter - personal skills, leadership and empathy which are so essential for success in contemporary society.

One reason for the persistence of this culture of learning is the prevailing system of assessment. Although School Based Assessment (SBA) has been introduced, still what matters are the grades obtained at public examinations. The aim of every child is to pass the examinations and enter the university. As a result there is severe competition and the private tuition industry has become a parallel system to the schools. To meet this challenge a change in the examination system is necessary. SBA has to be strengthened. At public examinations, the type of questions should be changed to test application rather than recall of knowledge. Certain structural changes are also necessary. The importance attached to G.C.E (O.L) Examination need to be down sized. Today as an academic qualification G.C.E (O.L) certificate has no value. What employers ask for is G.C.E (A.L) Certificate. The NVQ certificates are more suitable for lower level occupations. So the G.C.E (O.L) can be held at school level or as suggested in the Whitepaper of 1981 jointly by the Department of Examinations and the provinces. Then the G.C.E (A.L) Examination can be an achievement examination at the end of the collegiate level. It should not be a selection examination for admission to universities. The present school span of 13 years can be reduced to 12 years and have the G.C.E (A.L) examination at the end of Grade 12. Those who pass G.C.E. (A.L) at a certain level can be required to follow a foundation course to prepare them for university education. Admission to universities can be on the results of an aptitude test.

The teacher plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education. Therefore recruitment, training and deployment of teachers are very important. The recruitment of teachers is done not on the basis of need or suitability of candidates, but on the need to provide employment for graduates who may sometimes not have another option. As a result the majority are not suited to be members of a profession like teaching. They

are deployed not on the basis of vacancies available in schools or the subject needs. Although the overall teacher pupil ratio is 1: 17 still many remote schools are without adequate teachers. There is a plethora of teacher training institutions but the quality of training dispensed leaves much to be desired. The cascade model of in-service training is being implemented but there has been no change in the attitudes of teachers. The newly introduced concept of School based Teacher Development (SBTD) need to be strengthened. The teacher morale is very low and about one third of the teachers are absent from schools daily.

It is imperative that teaching be brought up to the level of a recognized profession. For that proper training, remuneration and professionalization of the service are necessary. Any graduate with a degree cannot be a successful teacher. Prospective teacher trainees should be groomed through courses such as Bachelor of Education programmes. The present National Colleges of Education need to be raised to the level of degree awarding institutions after a proper rationalization. Other teacher training institutions can be converted in to in-service training institutes or teachers' centres. Once the present back log of untrained graduates are trained, the universities need to concentrate on producing graduates in education. Regarding remuneration, the teachers are the lowest paid category in government service. Together with enhanced remuneration monitoring need to be strengthened to ensure that they do an honest job. Professionalism can be enhanced by establishing a professional council as has been proposed.

With regard to management many reforms have been carried out in the hierarchical structure of the ministry, departments, zones, divisions etc. But schools where the transaction of imparting education takes place have changed very little. An Act to establish School Development Boards has been passed by Parliament. But it is a dead letter. Gradual changes are being introduced towards school based management, but these need to be taken in to their successful conclusion. Of course a proper background has to be prepared through awareness creation.

## **Factors that Contribute to Success of Education Reforms**

During this period every government that was in power in this country has attempted to reform the education system. They have succeeded to a great extent in providing educational facilities. A wide spread network of schools are available to cover every nook and corner of the island. Sri Lanka has one of the best teacher pupil ratios compared to any other country, developing or developed. But has the output from the system acquired the skills and attitudes necessary to lead a successful life in the emerging globalized, technological society? It is here that the quality dimension is very much relevant.

Torsten Husen, an OECD educationist with a wide experience in educational planning, management and comparative education, was the founder president of the governing board of IIEP, UNESCO, Paris and functioned in that position for 17 years. He was also the Chairman of IEA. In his publication "Education and the Global Concern" (1990), he formulated a set of rules and principles that apply to educational reform. It may be useful to go through these rules and examine to what extent Sri Lanka can learn from them.

Of course at the beginning, he emphasizes that there are no universal paradigms for conducting educational reform. Historical, cultural and economic conditions vary between and within countries and each case have to be considered as a specific case. But there is a set of general rules which could form the strategy for carrying out reforms.

The main principles that Torsten Husen enunciates are given below:

### **I Educational Reform is part and parcel of Social Reform -**

Education must be planned and implemented within the larger framework of socio-economic change. Educational reform cannot serve as a substitute for socio- economic change.



## **II Reforms cannot be implemented overnight -**

Educational institutions, especially schools are “beset by strong institutional rigidities and inertia. Educational structures and practices are shaped by long traditions and in that process of being shaped becomes extremely time honoured.” The fact that a new Education Act is promulgated by parliament does not change the system. The author relates an example from Sweden where in the 1940s two committees worked for ten years in formulating proposals and spent another ten years piloting the programmes and another ten years were allowed for implementation. So the whole exercise took 30 years and the results were fruitful. He also examines another example from the same country, an example of a badly implemented reform in the area of higher education. A commission was appointed in 1968, the report out in 1973, reform proposals finalised in 1975 and implemented in 1977. It took 10 years for the whole cycle but it was a failure. Education reforms have to be gradual.

## **III Resources are needed -**

Resources mean both financial and human. The golden age of education in developed countries during the 60s and early 80s came about at a time when expenditure on education grew rapidly – twice the growth of GNP. Investment in education is an enterprise with a remote time horizon. The contribution of the products of the education system can be evaluated only decades after the investment. Finances are required for infrastructure, equipment and materials and hiring and training of human resources but the benefits will accrue to the country much later.

## **IV Central Government and Grass roots Participation are Key-Factors -**

Generally education reforms are initiated at the central level. It also provides the resources, particularly the financial resources required. Such interventions affect only the general framework of the education system by bringing about structural changes and providing financial

resources at the disposal of the peripheral organizations. This has to be done in consultation with all the stakeholders. Once the broad policies are agreed upon it is necessary to create motivation and commitment at local level. Experience shows that much can be gained from achieving maximum participation on the part of those in the field who are involved in the implementation of reforms.

#### **V Educational Research and Development is Called for -**

Progress of educational reforms can gain a lot from research at various stages, from planning through implementation to evaluation of outcomes. A comprehensive data base at the centre is essential for monitoring as well as for the purpose of course corrections. Special studies are required for finding out whether the goals are being achieved. Financial information is necessary for budgetary planning. The information also should be made available at regional and local levels for them to take correct decisions.

In Sri Lanka when we reflect back we see that in every instance, reforms have been a matter of party politics. A broad national consensus was never there. Changes have been introduced at the whims and fancies of authorities in control. Mr. M. D. D. Peiris, a former Secretary to the Ministry relates an incident in his memoirs "In the Pursuit of Governance" (2002) how the decision to issue free uniforms was taken at a public meeting in Polonnaruwa even without knowing its financial commitments. This happened when the NEC was functioning. There have been instances where even with a change of minister under the same government policies are changed. That is why the Youth Commission recommended the establishment of a National Education Commission for formulating national education policy. Even after the establishment of the NEC, education reforms have been perceived as party policies and the opposition parties have always opposed what is proposed by the government.

Formulation of reforms and implementation in a hurry to show the results before the next election is another drawback. Reforms implemented

without adequate preparation are bound to fail. Take for example, instances of curricular changes. When Social Studies was introduced in place of history, geography and civics there were very few teachers who were competent in all three subject areas. As a result if a history teacher was entrusted to teach social studies, emphasis was on history at the expense of geography. Piecemeal training without any incentives does not motivate teachers to learn new subject areas. Another instance is the introduction of Biology in place of Botany and Zoology. The teachers were not competent to teach both subjects. Unless teacher preparation precedes implementation results are marginal. Parents are very sensitive to educational changes. Therefore, changes need to be advocated only if they are essential. Awareness creation and arriving at a consensus are necessary. Otherwise education reforms would be construed as attempts by the authorities to experiment their fanciful ideas sacrificing children as guinea pigs.

Another area of concern is resource provision. In the decade of the 1960s education received approximately 5 percent of the G.D.P and 15 percent of the annual budget. But after 1977 it declined to about 2 percent of the G.D.P and 8 percent of the annual budget. Today it is about 1.86 of the G.D.P. and 7 percent of the budget. Of course, it is argued that annual allocations have increased and the government revenue itself as a part of G.D.P has come down and the government investment on infrastructure is growing. Apart from inadequate allocations cash flow restrictions have affected educational expenditure. Even the limited allocations are not properly utilized. For example, recruitment of teachers over and above the requirements is an issue. Similarly maintenance of unviable schools is another area of wastage. If the government is not in a position to allocate adequate resources, a way out may be to encourage public - private partnerships. The turn- over in the private tuition industry is a pointer towards this direction.

Several reviewers have commented on another influence that militates against the efficiency and the effectiveness of the education system. That influence is described as politicization. Dr. Ananda Guruge, an academic and professional who had a long experience in educational administration, delivering the 5<sup>th</sup> C.W.W. Kannangara Memorial Lecture states "In every

instance, the major obstacle has been that education, more than any other subject, has been politically sensitive. All three debates on Whitepapers in recent times have resulted in aborting the introduction of a comprehensive education bill. What we have sacrificed as a result of playing politics in education would constitute the saddest story of our nation” (P134). NEC in its publication “Envisioning Education for Human Development” (2003) says, “Political will at the highest level is needed to correct this situation. Unless politicization is eliminated from the education system, no amount of policy reforms, structural and organizational changes can prevent a total breakdown of the system. It is proposed that leaders of all political parties should agree to eliminate political interference in the education system; make a “joint declaration in this regard and implement an action plan to achieve this goal on a priority basis in the best interest of the nation “(P243). Mr. Eric J de Silva another former Secretary to the Ministry states, “Structural and organizational deficiencies are however only part of the problem. The major contributory factor for overall inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the system lies elsewhere, is only too well known, but rarely referred to in reports of this nature, And that is the extreme politicization that has taken total command of the system”( NEC 2004 - Study Series No. 24 - Management of Education).

It is unfortunate that the bi-partisan consensus that emerged at the time of the establishment of the National Education Commission did not last long. And now we are back to square one. However there is a silver lining in the horizon. The parliamentary consultative committee on education has taken the initiative to formulate a set of educational reform proposals with the participation of all parties. Except one party members belonging to all other parties have signed this document. It is up to the professionals of this country to ensure that a national debated is held on these proposals and after arriving at a consensus, implemented as national policy for the sake of future generations of this country. That is the role that those who have benefitted from policies of Dr. Kannagara should play at this juncture.

Thank You Very Much!

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## **The Author**

Mr. R. S. Medagama graduated from the University of Peradeniya in 1960 and joined the Education Department as a teacher. He did his Post Graduate Diploma in Education at the same university in 1962-63 and on passing out was appointed a principal of a school. Subsequently he joined the Education Administrative Service as a Circuit Education Officer and rose up to be a Provincial Director of Education and the Director, National Schools at the Ministry of Education.

In 1976 he did a Diploma in Social Statistics at the Vidyodaya University and in 1978-1979 he completed a Master of Professional Studies Degree at the University of Philippines at Los Banos. In 1983-1984 he followed a Masters Programme at the University of Sheffield and obtained the degree of Master of Science in Education Management.

Mr. Medagama retired pre-maturely from government service in order to take up an appointment as the head of the Science Education Centre, Male, the Republic of Maldives. After five years of service in that capacity he returned to Sri Lanka.

He was then invited to be the Secretary to the National Education Commission in 1995 and functioned in that capacity until 1999. The Education Reforms of 1997-1998 were formulated and commenced implementation during this period and he played a key role in that task. He also served as a member Presidential Task Force on Education which was overseeing the implementation of these reforms.

In 1999 he was called to the Ministry of Education to steer the implementation of reforms as Director General of Education Reforms. He served in the Ministry in that capacity and later as Chief Advisor on Education to the Minister until 2007.

He has participated in a large number of international seminars and conferences organized by UNESCO, IBE, UNICEF, SAARC and the World Bank as a representative of the MoE, Sri Lanka

During his long career in the education sector he has served as a member of the Councils of the Open University Sri Lanka, NEREC of the University of Colombo, Institute of Bio-Chemistry, Molecular Biology and Bio-Technology of the University of Colombo and the Vocational Training Authority.

After retirement from the MoE he has been a Consultant to the World Bank and the WHO. At present he is a member of the Academic Affairs Board of the NIE and the President of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education.



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## **Mr. R. S. Medagama**

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### **Profile**

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Mr. R. S. Medagama graduated from the University of Peradeniya in 1960 and joined the Education Department as a teacher. He did his Post Graduate Diploma in Education at the same university in 1962-63 and on passing out was appointed a principal of a school. Subsequently he joined the Education Administrative Service as a Circuit Education Officer and rose up to be a Provincial Director of Education and the Director, National Schools at the Ministry of Education.

In 1976 he did a Diploma in Social Statistics at the Vidyodaya University and in 1978-1979 he completed a Master of Professional Studies Degree at the University of Philippines at Los Banos. In 1983-1984 he followed a Masters Programme at the University of Sheffield and obtained the degree of Master of Science in Education Management.

Mr. Medagama retired pre-maturely from government service in order to take up an appointment as the head of the Science Education Centre, Male, the Republic of Maldives. After five years of service in that capacity he returned to Sri Lanka.

He was then invited to be the Secretary to the National Education Commission in 1995 and functioned in that capacity until 1999. The Education Reforms of 1997 - 1998 were formulated and commenced implementation during this period and he played a key role in that task. He also served as a member Presidential Task Force on Education which was overseeing the implementation of these reforms.

In 1999 he was called to the Ministry of Education to steer the implementation of reforms as Director General of Education Reforms. He served in the Ministry in that capacity and later as Chief Advisor on Education to the Minister until 2007.

He has participated in a large number of international seminars and conferences organized by UNESCO, IBE, UNICEF, SAARC and the World Bank as a representative of the MoE, Sri Lanka

During his long career in the education sector he has served as a member of the Councils of the Open University Sri Lanka, NEREC of the University of Colombo, Institute of Bio-Chemistry, Molecular Biology and Bio-Technology of the University of Colombo and the Vocational Training Authority.

After retirement from the MoE he has been a Consultant to the World Bank and the WHO. At present he is a member of the Academic Affairs Board of the NIE and the President of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education.