

On Education

This is LALIT's education program. The LALIT Education Commission met on a dozen occasions in order to develop the analysis, demands and ideas for mobilization. We have since 2006 been mobilizing around the demands around it.

The subject of children's education is close to everyone's hearts. It's close to *Lalit's* heart, too. And while different political currents have very different ways of seeing education, any given education system is clearly both a reflection of society, and also something that, to some extent, in turn also moulds society. The education system also invariably involves some kind of fairly direct response to the demands the economy puts on it, in terms of the kind of skilled workers required. That is how an economy based on agriculture, as Mauritius was in the 1960's and 1970's, needed a majority of children to have actually *failed* the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), so that they would docilely accept the bad work conditions of the cane fields as a punishment for their failure. The economy demanded them and the education system provided them. In the same way, it provided unskilled workers for textile factories in the Export Processing Zone in the 1970's. At that very time, the Government departments and professions also needed their fairly narrow, hierarchical ranks filled as the British withdrew their civil servants in the run-up to Independence and as the *Parti Mauricien Social Democrite* (PMSD) anti-Independence campaign made the existing intelligentsia flee the country because of supposed threat of "Hindu peril". So the same CPE examination that condemned masses of young people to unskilled work also prepared a small new elite by creaming off the "best" pupils for further schooling, and for further creaming-off a few years later in the School Certificate and then the Higher School Certificate examinations.

The very dynamic debates on education going on today are certainly a direct result of the fact that the collapse of sugar and textiles is forcing the capitalist classes to invest in other sectors, including many where Information Technology is involved and that require a generally high level of education from the masses of workers. The education system has thus fallen behind the economy, and this is what is causing the particular heat of the debates.

Hegemony

Today in Mauritius we are under the hegemony of the capitalist system. This means something very precise. It means that dominant ideas have a much greater effect on us than we could ever believe something as vague as "ideas" might have. Everything we think, even everything we do, is influenced by these ideas that taken as a whole are the "ideology" ² engendered and nurtured by the dominant class. This capitalist ideology is strong for the simple reason that capitalism is in power, and "its" ideas have the double strength of being both ideas and reality. This reality produces the ideology, and the ideology, in turn, re-secures the reality by maintaining class domination and exploitation. And this is how capitalism is still perpetuating itself, not like how other previous systems perpetuated themselves. This means that the mode of production is being maintained thanks to the ideology that "justifies" it. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the system needs to resort to overt repression and institutionalized violence to maintain its rule, although the arsenals are always ready and waiting. And ideology functions in such a way that even when there is repression and violence of an every-day nature, we actually fail to see it for what it is. This "invisible repression" takes all kinds of shapes. Imagine a head of household is sacked by his boss, left without any revenue whatsoever. This is a fact of life. The factory is the boss's, the job is his, and he has just taken it back from the man. We see no violence in this act of deliberately starving the worker's children.

The education system is linked to the dominant ideology in many different ways. Let's take one example.

Today's bourgeois ideology leads everyone to believe that, in order to change the capitalist system, or even just some of its deleterious effects like inequality, poverty, domination, or anything else, all you need to do is to change people "through education". Even if you go around asking people one-by-one what's the *one* thing they would want to change so that society can be better, a vast majority (including most of the "nice" people we all know) would reply, "Change the education system!" And they would be misleading us badly, of course. There is little chance of any change in the education system being the direct cause of change in the economy. Education is a product of the economic system, and, at the end of the day, it bows to the economy's needs. What is true is that political change that manages to bring a change in the economic system could change inequality, domination, exploitation, and in turn, bring fantastic changes to the education system.

The hidden functions of education

So, it's the economy that, in the final analysis defines the education system. And then the education system, in turn, has a number of functions within the dominant economic and political structure. It re-enforces all sorts of ground-rules for the economic system. These functions of the education system are often well nigh invisible. Parents in the working classes, for example, get a handy place to park their kids for the day, while one or both go out to work in the fields, factories and offices for the owners of enterprises. Children are kept closed up so they don't go around getting up to mischief, thus freeing their parents to work for an entrepreneur. And while the children are closed up like this, they are learning other things. They are learning first and foremost to stay put. They are acquiring the habit of sitting in one place for six hours a day, and what with the private lessons racket, eight or nine hours a day. They are being trained for the eight or nine hours they will need to do sitting at a machine or a desk at work later in their lives. They will by then think it's normal. They are also learning how to listen. They are being taught obedience to the teacher, which can neatly be transferred to obedience to the boss later. Children are learning that above their teacher, there is someone else higher, a Deputy Head Teacher, and above this person, there is one higher still, a Head Teacher, and above this person, there is another one still higher, an Inspector, and above him or her, a Chief Inspector, and so on. The child is learning to accept as natural or god-given the hierarchies they will have to cower to and fit into in later life. Children learn regimentation, too. So that when they grow up, they can fit into the army of workers in factories, without too much complaint.

At the same time, and this is something people do notice, the education system transmits ideas that actually set out to justify the dominant economic system. Sometimes these ideas are embedded in stories, assumptions to stories, and sometimes they are opinions disguised as facts.

The sad reality behind the "equal opportunities" slogan

One of the most firmly believed in elements in present-day capitalist ideology is: "Everyone has a chance to climb the social ladder." This is the *equal opportunities* ideology. People often imply that this can be done "through education".

Let's take a closer look at this innocent-looking phrase, "Everyone has a chance to climb the social ladder." The first thing we notice is that it masks another layer of meaning. Just under this sentence, another sentence is hiding, embedded, and it reads: "It is natural that certain people are higher, and others lower". Or, if not natural, it is justifiable, or if not, at least it is inevitable. Whichever way, the assumption is there. And we never get a chance to get to the really important question, morally and politically speaking, which is "Should there be some people at the bottom and others on the top?"

The most unjust and absurd inequality is, thus, *assumed*. Debate thus remains stunted and intentionally crippled. Debate is only at the level of whether everyone does or does not have an equal opportunity (to become unequal). The corollary gets us even more stuck. People's demand then gets limited to the very narrow, and probably erroneous one of: "All children should be given equal opportunities" (assumed: to become unequal). This demand with all its appearance of something kind and reasonable is actually masking the diabolical logic of inequality. It not only masks individual inequality, which is bad enough, but also *class* inequality. This demand keeps class society in place, by promising either actual mobility, or at the very least, a mirage of mobility. To understand this, just take a moment to imagine how if every child did well at school, all would rise, and there would not be a class society forever and ever after.

Perhaps the enormity of the argumentation is best exposed by transferring it backwards 200 years in time. Someone says: "Here, all slaves get the same portions of rations!" The effect of this statement is to run the risk, if its assumptions are not questioned, of leading to the demand: "All slaves *must* get the same portion of rations!" While the statements hide the very fact of slavery, implying that it is a good thing, natural or at best, inevitable. This is clearly a morally untenable position.

In the same way, the capitalist ideology that "each child has equal opportunities" clearly represents a shift from the clear position that society should be more equal, to the abject position of acceptance of inequality. This shift is hidden by offering the real (or imagined, it often makes little difference) opportunity for each person to be given his or her appropriate rung on the ladder of inequality. Those who do well at school will get (or will imagine getting) a good job, a high pay, those who do less well a bad job and low pay. Then a lot of argument goes into whether the choosing of individuals for the jobs was "fair" or not. Of course, the logic also goes that if you do really badly it's presumably the moral justification for being starved to death in unemployment without the right to any income at all.

A similar shift, or drift, has been clear in the women's movement recently. The struggle for emancipation and liberation of all women, and the opposition to patriarchy and its hierarchies, has, in some quarters, been replaced by a quest for "gender equity". The aim is for women to rise within the untouched, existing

hierarchies, where instead of precipitating emancipation or liberation, they run the risk of further entrenching the very patriarchal pyramids that keep women under oppression.

The State

A whole arsenal of institutions spends day and night keeping inequality unchallenged. They do this unconsciously most of the time. There is the family (as an institution), the education system, Government, different religious hierarchies, the press, and advertisements. The totality of these institutions, in the precise meaning of the word, makes up what we call “the State”.

We mention this because it is important to realize that however much the education system is changed (even if we could make it well nigh perfect, which we cannot because of the hegemony of bourgeois ideology), it is not changes in the education system that are primarily what’s necessary in order to change society, or to change the State.

And yet, we in *Lalit*, even knowing this, are at the forefront of the struggle for a better education system.

Education has other important kinds of potential. For a start, it imparts to children the magic capacity to be able to read and write. (Or it should do so, and it certainly can do so). This way children are introduced to ideas. Children learn de-contextualized, abstract ideas, that can so easily be seen when they are “out there” in writing, and not inextricably linked to the speaker and listener, in the way naturally spoken language is. And this kind of abstract thinking is essential to our human capacity to develop a vision of a new kind of society. It is essential for us to be able to understand, and contribute to the building of a political program and political strategy, in a conscious way. Reading and writing helps enormously in this process.

It’s important to keep in mind, though, that it is only in the course of major revolutionary changes that the idea of equality (whether in the economy or in education) turns into a major winnable demand. In fact, the biggest literacy and mass education campaign in any one country in all history was the campaign in the immediate wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution³, when the masses were still in a state of mobilization. This is actually one of the little-known successes of that revolution. And the other big literacy campaigns have also been during mass uprisings, as in China⁴, Nicaragua, Guinea-Bissau⁵ Mozambique⁶ and even nearer us, in Seychelles.

In Mauritius we all know that it was the mass student rebellion of May 1975⁶ that put free education on the agenda at the same time as seeking a more egalitarian society in general.

Today in *Lalit*, we act on the assumption that it is important for people to be prepared for this kind of program that represents a big leap forward. We know that history rarely presents the opportunity for massive changes in the education system, but we know that these opportunities often come out of crises. We have to prepare to the highest degree possible before the events are upon us.

Capitalist economy demands a more literate workforce

Meanwhile, the education system is not producing enough workers who can read and write sufficiently well to cope with industry’s demand. The social ladder no longer holds out much hope that we might rise a few rungs. It is offering more rungs at the bottom, and the middle classes, as everyone can clearly see, have been panicking in case their kids slide down.

This is because the present crisis is a systemic one. It is affecting the whole of society, including the middle classes. While those at the bottom of the social ladder stagnate there, or get even poorer, falling into unemployment or the most unstable of jobs, dependent on social security hand-outs, turning to live from theft and robbery, not to mention from peddling drugs, and in general being pushed to the very margins of society.

And meanwhile, there are loads of people, and often those with the best of intentions, who believe firmly that many of the social problems of today (crime, robbery, hold-ups, violence, rape and every other imaginable problem) are caused by people having the wrong sort of “mentality”. So they say everyone should run around “changing other peoples’ mentality”. And this, they believe, is often done “through education”. They are convinced that if only they could change peoples’ mentality, make them become “good” people, then all at once all the ills of society would evaporate into thin air. Everyone, they imply, would even become equal.

Once we can see exactly what they are saying, we can perhaps understand the campaign run mainly with money from business that is also bent on “educating” the poor and “inculcating” good values into them willy-nilly. They intend thus to “change the mentality” of the poor in a most paternalistic manner. This is fortunately is a doomed venture. Because in reality, the causes are elsewhere and not in peoples’ “mentality”. The proportion of people who are active in the criminal world in order to survive is, for example, directly linked to the percentage in unemployment, very dodgy work, and living without a proper home. In other words, social problems are linked very closely, even if not in a strictly linear fashion, to the

economy. And so even if everyone in one fell swoop got very well educated, this would not have any direct bearing on the central economic problems that Mauritius is facing today.

But in *Lalit* we believe that, even before any profound revolutionary movement rises again, there are, however, some changes in the education system that could help children, when they grow up, participate better in the quest for a better society. For example, learning at school in the mother tongue is an obvious advantage, in its liberation of people from the yoke of colonization. As we have mentioned, the very fact of being literate gives children (and adults) the chance to free their minds from the chains of the here and now. And if the content of school subjects was broadened, this too could help children become more mature adults, stable enough to contemplate committing themselves to long-term plans for change. And of course, if children acquire nimble thinking, more logical approaches, and develop creativity, they will grow up into the kind of adults who can question the inequalities and injustices of the system that's here today, and thus put into question the very class system that upholds the economy, the patriarchy that keeps women oppressed and the communalism and racism that pervades society.

What we are proposing as changes in the education system in this Program is not the key to changing society. It will not automatically bring equality in society. Far from it. Such fundamental changes come from changing the economy, which is done through political action. However, changing the education system has its relative importance: a better education system can create some of the dynamics in society that make young people put into question the entire edifice⁷.

The importance of the education system

Through good education, children can obviously develop their intelligence and their creativity. Whether children are from a rich or a poor family from an orderly household or a rather chaotic one, the education system can contribute to developing their capacity to understand the world around them, and their capacity to participate in creating a better world to live in.

But the education system in Mauritius is not doing any of this. So, we have to change it. This *Lalit* program, taken as a whole and together with the demands listed towards the end, aims at precisely that: proposals as to how to analyze the education system, how to imagine something better, and how we can put forward demands that are simple and effective for setting in action dynamics that move us from where we are today towards a better education for all children.

There are always lots of people, at any one time, who want to change the education system. Today there are plenty. They all share some of the following ideas: the education system could be different from what it is, it could be better, it could involve rather less competition amongst the children, it could be more egalitarian, it could develop the potential of all children rather better than it does. What this means is that many people who are *not* prepared to put into question the economic or political system, are nevertheless able to hold progressive ideas on the education of children. This is certainly true over the past 6 to 7 years. It is as though the economic crisis has brought some thinking, and this has led to the middle classes being terrified of finding themselves hurled into the working class. And there is also a feeling that "inequality" when applied to little children is hideous, even if when applied to adults it is acceptable. Similarly, cut throat "competition" between 11-year-olds at school is often considered appalling by the very same people who believe that competition is natural to the rest of capitalism.

The last Education Minister, Steeve Obeegadoo, of the MSM-MMM government did manage to introduce certain changes towards regionalization of intake designed to decrease competition. Today the MMM has taken the initiative of a legal challenge against Labour Party Education Minister, Dharam Gokhool of the Social Alliance Government, as part of their opposition to creating an elite amongst 11-year-olds.

Most editorialists in a generally pro-capitalist press are against the Gokhool A+ examination on the grounds that it brings elitism.

The Catholic Church, especially since the 1999 riots after the death in police custody of Kaya, has realized that the youth of the country are rebellious, and have changed their approach in education from very elitist to "caring for mixed abilities" and a more egalitarian approach.

So, the challenge against Gokhool's plan is quite unusually generalized, and what we have to avoid is the communalization or ethnicization of the opposition.

So, it is true to say that from all quarters there are social forces challenging the present education system.

Contestation

There's always been contestation of the colonial education system that Mauritius inherited. In May 1975 students rose up and demonstrated for free education, equality in the level of education, for the use of the mother tongue, for respect of pupil's home environment, for the teaching of Mauritian history in schools, for more liberty, and for a kind of learning that didn't rely on repression and punishment, that did not foster

communalism, racism, sexism either. Quite a few *Lalit* activists were in the movement, either as students or as teachers. Our program is until today influenced by the progress in thinking made during that big movement.

Today, 31 years after the May 1975 student uprising, there is still, or there is once again, unrest on the issue of education. In fact, it never really stopped. It just became less marked from time to time. After the victories of May 1975, when free secondary education for all was introduced as from 1977, there were also defeats. The system continued in its patent inequality. It was still a carbon copy of the colonial education system. A majority of children were still being branded for unskilled jobs. So, contestation continued, and this in spite of a number of reforms, timid though they were, introduced by Ministers like Pillay and Obeegadoo.

Changes in the Economy Now

The reason for the present contestation is undoubtedly, as we mentioned earlier, the changes in the economy. And these changes have, in turn, been detonated by the changes in the world economic system. The protectionism that Mauritian bosses benefited from since Independence has been torn apart. Sugar and textiles, the two big employers of workers, are both, as a result, on the verge of collapse. At the same time, the Government and para-statal sectors are decreasing staff and workers. So, the economy is in a grave crisis. The form it is taking for most of us is a crisis of unemployment. And it is following the satanic logic of unbridled capitalism, of the neo-liberalism that rules the day, where, the World Trade Organization rules are applied, where market forces reign in all their cruelty, especially when it comes to weaker countries.

The rule of supply and demand, as it breaks the sugar and textile industries, thus affects the education system, because the economy no longer requires it to “strain off” unskilled workers for these two huge sectors, nor to “catch” a tiny administrative elite for the civil service and professions. So the education system is out of step with the economy. It is out of date. It is no longer viable in its present form.

Almost every enterprise wants workers who can read and write well, who are computer literate and who are at ease on electronic machinery. So it is no longer just *Lalit* and a few progressive professionals who are criticizing the system, but the very owners of capital are concerned. At the same time, parents of working class children are realizing that their children need to become highly literate to get any job at all in the future, so they mobilize. The present system is not working, even in that sense. And the upper petit-bourgeois parents are stricken lest their children not be able to compete on the new international market for jobs in the upper echelons of private and public sectors.

All these factors are leading to the setting up of new kinds of private educational institutions that grow up like mushrooms all around us. They also lead to pressure for schools and universities to produce broad-based educational success for, if not all, at least very many.

“World Class Quality Education”?

So, the economy is demanding a higher level of education today or, as Minister Gokhool is always putting it “a world class quality education”.

But will Minister Gokhool’s Plan to provide high-level education actually work?

The simple answer is never on your life.

The category of A+ that Gokhool has introduced as a panacea, will, instead, be like a virus in an already shaky education system.

At primary level, there is the existing popular classification into “good” schools, ordinary schools and ZEP schools (for the poor areas). The “good” ones are still good for nothing except rote learning. The ordinary ones are the same, only with lesser results in terms of success at rote learning, and the ZEP schools have caused a social fracture between poor areas and other areas. In addition, there are private paying primary schools now, also shooting up like mushrooms all over. And then private companies are busy sponsoring government ZEP schools. There’s also the unofficial business of private lessons, and a moneymaking trade in schoolbooks, too. A+ will have a worsening effect on all this. The “rush” to the “good” schools will get worse. Parents, teachers and pupils will get even more drawn into an even tougher rat race than the one Obeegadoo was trying to get them out of. And there is no plan as to what to do to improve the ordinary and ZEP schools.

Meanwhile, the A+ has effectively banished the national debate on the use of the mother tongue as medium, as well as putting the debate on the curriculum into the background. Everyone will be drawn back into the savage competition. And at best, into debates about it.

At the pre-primary level, there are already the hideous effects of the A+. Pre-primary teachers in some schools have offered to do the Std I and II syllabus during pre-primary school.

At the secondary level, the elitist “National Colleges” that will cater for some 1,260 pupils who get A+ at the CPE will, in no way, produce “world class quality education”. Those whose rote learning is best will arrive there. And they will be in emotional distress from all the competition, as well as unbalanced by believing at that young age in their intellectual superiority. Nothing in this will help them think independently, rationally or creatively.

For the Regional Colleges, Gokhool has no plan whatsoever, while for the Prevocational classes, he seems to be, if anything, confirming them as a “caste”, increasingly separate from mainstream secondary education. Whereas in the past, it was possible for a pupil to do well and go back into the academic stream, it will no longer be possible.

In addition, there are the private paying Ecole du Centre and Le Bocage, for example, which are colleges purpose-built for the economic elite of the country.

So, secondary education is divided and divisive.

The tertiary education sector is being offered up for “investment” by Government under the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) under the WTO. What happens is all sorts of business Universities (both teaching “business” and little else, and also making money) come and set up shop. Then they complain to the WTO that the University of Mauritius has unfair subsidies. Then the Government pretends it only just realized that it is illegal under the WTO to subsidize just the University of Mauritius, announces it cannot possibly subsidize all these new “Universities”, so therefore it no longer subsidizes the University of Mauritius.

And the CMT textile company is now financing a course at the University of Mauritius, a course cut to measure for its needs on the shop floor.

Bankruptcy of the education system

There have been all sorts of Reports ¹⁰, after all sorts of Commissions that have, one after the other, pointed to the necessity for reform of the education system. In *Lalit*, we would go further than most of these reports do, and say that the education system is actually doing harm to children. It is doing harm, not just to those who fail the CPE examination but also to the rest who pass, and even to those whose results are supposed to be brilliant. Let us look at the harm being done to children.

Recently a group of psychologists expressed concern about the dangers to the cognitive and emotional development of all children of introducing the A+ examination. They wrote a joint letter to the Minister of Education ¹¹. There are also University lecturers who have pointed to the shortcomings in the “cognitive development” of university level students, causing them to suffer difficulties in coming to grips with their work. In a *Le Mauricien* ¹² article, an ex-student from the elite Royal College gave witness to how any success he felt he had had in life was in spite of and not due to the education system. In a Public Forum organized by *Ledikasyon pu Travayer*, *Lalit* member, Dr. Ram Seegobin in 2002, described from his own experience how difficult it was to juggle ideas the same way his co-students at Balliol College at Oxford University, and that it took him some six years to feel he had caught up.

The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) recently published a Report on the 2005 CPE examinations that shows the bankruptcy of the education system. Levels have fallen, it says. Most children have not developed critical thinking, and could not reply logically to questions. None of the children got the maximum score for essay writing in English, while 33.5% got zero. They also noted poor performance in Mathematics and Science, which they put down in part to “poor language skills”. Many children, the report says, learn by rote and approach their work in a mechanical way.

Results of a recent British Council study in 2006, in various secondary schools including the so-called “star colleges”, show that the level of English is low. Many international companies at the Cybercity have complained of the same problem. They note that there are very poor levels of English and especially French amongst Mauritians they have been recruiting ¹⁴. Most young Mauritians, they note, even those with a University degree, can’t speak French at all well, and their written English is weak. The levels of French and English that they got in school is not enough to be useful even at the relatively low level of what is required to work at a call centre.

What this means is that the education system is not only against the interests of the pupils, but is not even up to the minimum requirements of what the capitalist system needs on the shop floor. Prof. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas ¹⁵ put it rather well when at the Port Louis Theatre, speaking at an LPT public lecture in 2002, she said: “Creativity comes before all inventions. This is true even as regards the invention of objects and commodities. Investment follows creativity, and high-level multi-lingualism increases creativity. Teaching language in an additive way (when new languages are added to the progress already made by the child in its mother-tongue) brings multi-lingualism to a high level. It is thus true that any form of education that does

not develop high-level multi-lingualism is limiting creativity. This means education that is not done through the mother tongue, is ruining the country's future. This should be of concern to everyone.”

Studies in favour of using the mother tongue

Worldwide, endless studies have shown that the mother tongue is the finest tool for use in schools. This means the medium must be the child's natural language. In a recent speech, Dr. Arnaud Carpooran¹⁶, University of Mauritius linguist, gave an excellent outline of the importance of developing one's general language proficiency in one's own tongue first and foremost.

Recently the *Association for the Development of Education in Africa* (ADEA) was commissioned by the African Union to do a huge study on the language issue in education in Africa¹⁷. The results, though not public yet have been circulated to some of our members, and they show clearly that the mother tongue must be used as medium for at the very least the first six years of school. The longer the mother tongue remains the medium, the better the results. It is also clear that the ability to master English and French is better, the longer the mother tongue is used. We will come back to this.

The longitudinal studies in the USA by David Ramirez, between 1983 and 1991 in California, Texas, Florida, New York and New Jersey, had already shown that the longer children learn through their mother tongue (mainly Spanish in the 51 schools they followed for 7 years), the better they do at science, maths and also at 2nd and 3rd languages. Similar studies in Mali, Mozambique¹⁹, Haiti²⁰, Zambia, Malawi, Guatemala, Nigeria²¹ and Papua New Guinea have all given similar results. The studies by Jim Cummins²² provide the theoretical framework for understanding all these studies. He found that children have two rather distinct language capacities, one he names Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which you can acquire in a language that is not your own, and the other, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which is badly stunted if you are taught through a language that is not your own. His study, together with those of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas²³ indicates that it takes some 7 years post-secondary education in order to attempt to catch up what has been lost.

The ADEA document has now come up with similar results after studying 25 African countries. The authors maintain that it is essential that at least 6 years be in the mother tongue if academic success in foreign languages is to be obtained. Even in optimal conditions (which we don't really have in Mauritius), they estimate that it takes 6 to 8 years of the study of, say, English or French, for a child to be equipped to learn any other subject *through the medium of* these languages. They are in favour of the use of the mother tongue in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Optimal results are obtained, they say, from the exclusive use of the mother tongue as medium for the first years and for as long as possible. As late as possible a foreign language can be introduced as medium, but even then, preferably only for a few subjects. Mother tongue medium, they believe, is beneficial throughout an educational system.

Genocide

All pedagogues now agree that in Mauritius the schools are not only harming children emotionally by suppressing the mother-tongue, but are also doing serious “mental harm” to the children, that is to say, interfering with the children's capacity to reason and understand. Article 2 of the United Nations *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*²⁴ states that if a State inflicts “serious mental harm” on a people (defined linguistically) that this, just as physical extermination of a people on the basis of language, amounts to genocide. In Mauritius it is Kreolophone and Bhojpuriphone peoples that are being made to suffer “serious mental harm” as a result of their mother tongue.

There is a second way in which the UN Convention defines linguistic genocide. If a State, through its education system for example, attempts to “empty” a whole linguistic category by forcing them to abandon their mother tongue in practice, and ends up placing them into a different linguistic group. Here the Government is emptying the peoples defined as being Kreolophone or Bhojpuriphone, and converting them, by means of the education system, into Francophone and Anglophone people. LPT had already written a letter to the previous Education Minister, Steeve Obeegadoo²⁵ on this issue, accusing the government of genocide, and now with the PT-PMXD government continuing in the same vein, LPT has written to the new Minister.

In addition, the Mauritian State is a signatory to the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 29 (a) of the Convention states that education must aim to “develop the child's personality, talents and mental and physical capacities to his or her full potential”²⁶. The Mauritian educational system certainly falls gravely short of this.

However, in the Concluding Observations (commonly called COBS) of the UN Human Rights Committee under the *Civil and Political Rights Convention*, the Mauritian State was congratulated (rather too

generously, it could be said) for taking measures to ensure a certain measure of written Kreol in schools ²⁷. But so little has been done, and even less is being done.

Reform

It is true that some Education Ministers (especially Pillay and Obeegadoo) tried to introduce certain reforms. The Governments that they were in certainly lacked any political will, and their attempts to change education in a fundamental way, failed. Steeve Obeegadoo tried to decrease competition by assuring all children a place in a secondary school until the age of 16, but the plan was so timid, on the one hand, and did not repose on a mobilization around a program, on the other, that it probably permitted the reaction that we see in the “Gokhool Plan”.

Today the education system is now coming under increasing criticism. Its weaknesses are being increasingly exposed for all to see. Its examination system, still run in the colonial way through Cambridge, has been criticized ²⁸. There are criticisms from all sides. Even the Catholic Church, that had had a whole history of elitist and “specific” education is today criticizing the excessive competition in education, taking up the education of those who have failed the CPE, and more recently beginning to defy the Government’s language policy. They have in fact introduced Kreol in classes of many of their Prevok schools. Recently Bishop Maurice Piat said: “When a child hears his mother tongue in school, he gets the wonderful feeling of welcome and of recognition of who he is.”²⁹ According to a Bureau d’Education Catholique (BEC) study, there are indications that children studying in the mother tongue are making better progress than those who do not. ³⁰.

Some Unions in the teaching sector have also taken a position in favour of better education. It is true that teachers have an important role to play in the process of changing the education system. It is of concern, however, that at present nearly all the teachers’ unions have limited their thinking and actions to very narrowly defined issues of work conditions and respect for acquired rights, which, important as they are, should not mean any neglect for their role in proposing changes in the education system as a whole. At the same time as struggling for better work conditions, it is necessary for them to discuss the content of education being offered, the medium used, the punitive methods still resorted to. When unions come forward with ideas for improving education, then we can expect to see parents supporting them in their struggle for better work conditions. The alliance becomes a natural one. In France, the education unions have a long history of fine contribution towards the thinking on the education system ³¹.

There are also editorialists ³², academics and pedagogues ³³ who agree on the necessity of developing a new vision of education for the Republic of Mauritius, one that responds to the needs of the modern age as well as being in the interests of the pupils.

And this is what *Lalit* has always stood for, too.

And we regret hearing some parents in these times saying “I want a good school for *my* child!” when it would be so much healthier to hear the same parent say (as all parents in some epochs do say): “I want to help raise the standard of the school in our neighbourhood.” In some times of history, especially those where there are more mass movements, parents express hope for better schools for everyone in the country, and in really big movements, for everyone in the whole world.

The Progress of the Mother Tongue

For many years the *Lalit* position on education and the use of the mother tongue remained marginal. It was deliberately marginalized and often repressed. For example during the *National Seminar on Language* organized by the MMM Government in 1982 ³⁴ at the University of Mauritius, the organizers prohibited the *Lalit* representative and others who had prepared speeches in the mother tongue, from speaking in Kreol. They even resorted to turning microphones off when Rex Stephen, *Lalit* representative was addressing the assembly.

Not that repression discouraged us. On the contrary, we became more determined, and continued publishing leaflets, posters, newspapers, books, magazines, program in Kreol. We have even set up a website with a lot of text in Kreol. No one would deny that Kreol has made immense progress ³⁵. It has made progress not only for itself, but also for freedom. Today Kreol is used in all kinds of diverse places: in ads, in stand-up comedy, in literature, in films and television serials, on posters, in theatre, in the Courts of Justice, in dictionaries and on banners ³⁶. Even boat skippers now have an examination in Kreol. Policemen in the UK can pass a written exam in Kreol, in order to get overtime jobs as translator in the Courts when Mauritians whose English isn’t too good are called as witnesses. Many Ministries use written Kreol. Bosses have used it for their Codes of Ethics, and any number of other campaigns. LPT even has a Unit especially for translating all kinds of texts into Kreol, or perfecting someone’s orthography. And today thousands of people accept the importance of the mother tongue as medium.

The publication in 2005 of a standardized orthography, “Grafi Larmoni”, is part of this ongoing progress. This makes introduction of Kreol in schools much easier for people to imagine. All this progress is certainly in part due to the relentless political pressure that *Lalit* has built up, together with numerous associations and movements in favour of Kreol and Bhojpuri³⁸. This struggle will continue until the mother tongues get full recognition, in school, and in society as a whole.

Institutional divisions amongst children

Historically, the Catholic Church has had an important role within the national education system, and this has had two contradictory effects: a positive contribution in terms of developing the system, and also a potentially, and often real, source of division amongst pupils, on the basis of race, religion and class. These divisions have been accentuated by the ambient communalism in society as a whole.

Prior to the Church’s opposition to the Government Notice (GN) 114³⁹, it had been implicitly, and even explicitly, accepted that the Church’s schools were a part of the *national* education system. During the course of the battle over GN 114, the Church relied on an argument to the effect that it had a “specific” type of education that it dispensed in its schools, and this position, then contributed to a long-lasting and destructive battle between Church, State and others, against the general back-ground of a country fraught with communal, language and class tensions. When Education Minister, Armoogum Parsooramen in the MMM-MSM Government set up two Select Committees⁴⁰ (with Madun Dulloo as President of one and Jean Claude de L’Estrac as President of the other), this further communalized debate from 1993 onwards. The two Select Committees were equivalent to the State offering a kind of trade-off between two very unlike objects: “Oriental languages being counted for CPE examination results” v/s “The Catholic Church being able to keep 50% of its places for its own choice of pupils” especially relevant for its “star schools” (i.e. not off the national list). This Government decision put the communalists of two “communities” on head-on collision course, and a number of collisions took place, both in mass mobilization on a communal basis, and also in Supreme Court litigation. In the first round the Church side gained important victories, so the barter seemed unfair. Then when Suttihudeo Tengur of the Government Hindi Teachers’ Union took cases on appeal to the Privy Council in London, his side won both halves of the barter.

When S. Tengur finally won his victory and the Oriental languages could be counted for the purposes of CPE ranking (an eminently reasonable decision), then the MMM-MSM Plan that Obeegadoo came up with was one that aimed to “escape crisis by fleeing forwards” (also a good thing). He abolished ranking for CPE altogether. However, it was also rather normal that the supporters of S. Tengur should be angry, because their victory after years of struggle was suddenly a Pyrric one. So that the Gokhool Plan was finally seen by people on the S. Tengur side as being a way of salvaging some of their victory. In addition, they knew that many who had been in favour of competition before and who are in favour of competition in all other aspects of life, were suddenly very against the competition around the A+. So, around S. Tengur were people who found themselves opposing progressive measures, not so much because they were against them, but due to the weight of history around the issues. And they are not without reason in questioning the credibility of some of those who are so thoroughly against the A+.

So, the Gokhool Plan got a bit of much-needed support for a while from the reaction against a whole history of elitism that had ruined all rational debate, even more so after the 1993 Select Committees were set up.

The challenge before us today is to transcend all these weighty, past sources of division.

Failure of schools to teach literacy

Literacy is obviously key to all education. Reading and writing are skills that children have to learn, and be taught, quite consciously. This may seem self-evident, but many people confuse the acquisition of language and of literacy. Languages are acquired naturally when they are in the home and the environment, while literacy must be taught. So, the education system has a specific duty to impart literacy to children. In addition, it is also important that adults learn to read and write, when in Mauritius some half of people over 12 years old can’t read nor write according to the UNESCO quite restrictive definition.

We would like here to include a very brief outline of the thinking behind *Lalit*’s giving so much importance to literacy. We realize that as a person learns to read and write, he or she is also learning to put thoughts and words that were part of them, out there into the world⁴¹. This process then, in turn, contributes to one’s ability to learn to think in an organized way, to be able to analyze one’s own and others’ thoughts. Language, once in written form, is not just for communication, but intrinsically linked with learning to understand the world. We develop a new capacity, which we cannot develop very far very easily without literacy. We learn a new language proficiency altogether, not just ordinary interpersonal communication⁴²

skills. Knowledge, science, analysis, intellectual creativity, all of this develops through this new capacity to handle language at a high level, a level that surpasses that of daily communication.

In schools in Mauritius, unfortunately this capacity to handle language at a high level is not developed at all. We go through primary, secondary and tertiary education, without developing this high level language proficiency. We just learn enough reading and writing for daily communication. Taken together with suppression of the natural language of the child in the education system, this actually stunts the development of high-level language proficiency. In fact, our LPT colleagues tell us that adult literacy students who have never been to school almost inevitably have better developed language skills than those who have been to school for six or seven years.

The concept that we have two different language skills (one for ordinary communication, and another for cognitive academic development that is linked to literacy), in turn, has further significance for us in *Lalit*. It is through intellectual work on the part of large masses of people in any given society that permits them to be able to challenge the dominant ideology⁴³, which keeps such a huge majority of people living under the yoke of others. If the broad masses are not increasingly conscious, that is to say that all of us are not in a process of increasingly understanding quite abstract concepts, then it is not easy for people to understand and contribute to the kind of common understanding of the way in which we can change society that is a necessary precondition to changing it.

If now we take this idea together with Paolo Freire's idea that literacy (adult literacy, and also that of children), if the process works well, is a process of reading the *world*, not just the word, and of writing a new *world*, not just taking other peoples' words at face value. Literacy is not just reading words, but understanding the world by means of working with ideas about the world⁴⁴. While an adult is learning, there is a process whereby he or she also, at the same time, teaches the teacher new ways of seeing the world, thus multiplying the learning experience.

Literacy as it is taught in schools, even more so when it is in a language the child does not understand, is an extremely minimal skill. It does not involve the liberation that true literacy brings.

Another kind of school is possible

Almost everyone today would express the hope that their own children be free to express themselves at school and to grow emotionally and intellectually to their own highest potential. Almost everyone wants their own children to get a high level education, and when you put the question to them, you realize that, in fact, they want that for all children, and not just their own. *Lalit* shares this hope. This is what we are always working towards. This is what was also the basis for the wonderful educationally rich projects⁴⁵ like A.S. Neil's⁴⁶ *Summerhill* in England, Celestin Freinet's⁴⁷ techniques developed in France, Paolo Freire's⁴⁸ literacy in Brazil and Chili, and even before them Maria Montessori's⁴⁹ methods developed in Italy and which have become standard in all the best pre-primaries in the world.

In Mauritius, alternative kinds of education have been developed by the *Lekol Koperativ*⁵⁰, (secondary level), *Ledikasyon pu Travayer*⁵¹ (adult literacy level), Playgroup⁵² (pre-primary level), Bambous Health Project⁵³ (at the level of health education, preventive medicine, and conceptualization of the body), *Muvman Liberasyon Fam*⁵⁴ (women's biology and concepts around patriarchy). And in turn, these organizations have relied on the experience of other pedagogies, and then developed new forms. All of these are an inspiration for future pedagogy. They represent the beginnings of an alternative pedagogy for Mauritius.

Vision

For us in *Lalit*, education ought to mean none other than the full development of all children. Every child has potential. The school has a duty to enable its fulfillment, in intellectual and physical terms, as well as in terms of emotional development.

Education should also mean the freedom to learn. The first freedom is that of learning through your mother tongue, the language you use naturally, and not through the imposition of a language you are not comfortable in⁵⁵.

Education, at its most basic, means children learning to read, write and use figures. But it means more than this. It means the development of the love of reading. Children need to have the love of books fostered in them from an early age. The love of writing, of writing one's own thoughts, is a separate and important aspect of literacy. It too must be nurtured in all children.

Education also means the full development of the potential humans have for the logical and the rational. It means acquiring scientific method. We'd like education to involve children in thinking and understanding, in being able to be proficient in mathematics, in comprehending cause and effect, and knowing of unintended effects, and dialectics. A love of science, of the history of the universe, of our planet earth, of all that lives upon it, and of the history of humanity, as well as the history of our own country, Mauritius, and how our

own bodies, minds and emotions work. This way children will understand health and illness. Learning science and maths is interesting to some children only when learnt through games like, say, chess, through lab experiments, or even calculations based on football, if that's what motivates some kids.

The celebration of Albert Einstein's birthday could be used to introduce his findings and thinking to young children, and to hold science festivals and conferences for the young. There is no reason why children shouldn't be introduced to all the great scientists and philosophers of the world.

Today "Grafi Larmoni", by providing a regular orthography for Kreol, will help in the translation of any number of texts. The Ministry should raise money and award prizes to the teacher of a subject whose translation is considered best.

High-level education means that we can use more than one language, our mother tongue and one or more others. When English, French, Oriental languages and others are taught, the best methods must be used: the mother tongue until a high level, and then proper language labs and modern methods of *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) and *English as a Second Language* (ESL), which have seen important leaps ahead over the past 35 years.

Children must be able to use computers efficiently, and also have an understanding of the technology involved. This means they must not only know how to use a computer, but also understand its significance, its potential and its limitations as a tool, for study and for understanding.

Children, as they learn, must feel free, so that they are able to learn in an easy, pleasurable way. They must be able to express themselves freely, as they learn. This means, in terms of discipline, that it must be something that springs from the love of knowledge that children naturally have. Discipline must come from the natural curiosity of human beings.

Education, because it means creativity as well, should involve children maintaining their sense of wonder, wonder at the universe out there combined with the desire to create new ideas, invent things, love art, dance, cartoons, music, and want to push science to the boundaries of the universe.

Lalit is proposing a form of education that not only wants the development of what BEC calls "mixed abilities" but also of the "multiple abilities" that children have.

Lalit sees education as encouraging children to work together, in pairs and in groups, without any harmful competition. It means also practicing sports, exercises, games that help children learn co-operation and the love of working together, as well as each child's individual potential for concentration. Everything from Chess championships to public speaking, debates by team from different schools and colleges on tough topics. Each school could have its own band and orchestra so that children can join in and learn different kinds of music as if they are one. And to develop a broad outlook, school-leavers should have the option of a year's voluntary work, which counts as work experience, before heading out, looking for work.

Education must avoid dividing children into boxes -- of different communities, races, religions, or ancestral languages. This means education should be secular, and children should learn about the history of all religions, about all different cultures and philosophies.

The art of life, itself, should be part of education, including everything from the practical things (cooking, planting, animal rearing, how to make knots, fishing, first aid, how to tell stories) to meditation and art appreciation. Some of these subjects can be acquired through residential seminars at the seaside, as the primary schools already do for six-standard children, where people in communities who fish or plant or raise animals, can come in and get involved in education. This way children will become self-confident, gain in self-esteem and learn a relative independence from their own nuclear family.

Education should also mean democracy. Pupils should be involved in decisions about their colleges. Elected Students' Councils should have representatives of each class that meet up. And a few representatives could be elected to sit on a Parent Teachers' Students' Association.

Each school should have special programs to help the integration to the highest degree of any children who have a physical or mental handicap. Children with hearing problems, reading problems, and visual impairment should all be included, and not educated separately.

Pupils should all have access to psychological and health care.

Given that preschool education is a bridge between the home and the school system, in *Lalit* we believe that it should reflect this state of affairs. It's a place where informal knowledge that children already have can be shared in class. The full richness of the education already received at home from the family and from the environment, should be integrated into the education received at the playgroup. School should take into consideration the concept of moving from the known to the unknown. We believe that the system developed and used by the Federation of Preschool Playgroups could be implemented all over Mauritius. The key points of the system are that education be holistic, all the subjects integrated together, that children be considered as individual beings that need esteem, that all learning can be linked to the notion of play, that children have an instinct for play, that stories be introduced in oral form in the mother tongue, and the

writing, too, be introduced in the mother tongue, and this in a holistic way. Children should be introduced to the idea of “a book”, to develop a love of books at the same time. There need to be corners where children can get involved in fairly autonomous activity: the home corner, shop or nature corner, the library corner and so on. Teachers need to be taught to observe children intelligently, and record their observations. Parents and others in the environment must be integrated into the overall education to the highest degree possible.

In many ways, the developments at the preschool level are a kind of forerunner of how education can be one day, in primary and even secondary schools.

But this kind of education that we have a vision of is just not compatible with rote learning, the examination system that there is today, nor the ferocious competition to get into the supposedly best schools or best college. We are horrified that children could be drawn into producing false utilities papers in order to get into “good schools”, or to see their parents buying examination papers. Our vision cannot be contained by a system in which only a proportion of the children even learn to read and write.

The kind of education is Lalit proposing for the Republic of Mauritius

How do we overcome this onerous legacy, and work towards our vision of the future? What kind of proposals will bring the kind of change we all want to see?

Our proposals aim at creating “dynamics”, that is to say, a lively forward-moving process towards a better system for all children.

How do we create dynamics that bring about in-depth changes in education?

Many people agree with *Lalit*'s proposals. Many people, like us, reject the inherent inequality in the present education system, and do not agree with divisions between children.

What we need to do now is to look at what kind of general demand we can push for, what kind of mechanism we can propose that will decrease inequality and competition in the education system, and raise the standard of education in all schools.

Demand

We propose eight demands that can provide a bridge between today's reality and our vision of tomorrow.

1. University Scholarship for each Secondary School!

This is one of *Lalit*'s fundamental demands as it embodies a mechanism to equalize the level of all schools to that of the highest and thus, to raise the standard of education in general. It is a system of *quota of university scholarships for each secondary school*, and works hand in hand with a *quota for each primary school for seats in whichever secondary school parents choose*. (Look at the section “The Quota system” on the next page. It explains how this mechanism will work, and the amazing dynamics it will unleash.)

2. Learning through the Mother Tongue!

To enhance intelligence, and to acquire other languages to a higher level.

3. Abolish national ranking in CPE!

To foster knowledge not rote-learning, nor atrocious competition.

4. Literacy for all children

To read the *world*, not just the word

To write a better world, not just words

5. Remedial Program in the Mother Tongue

To give a second chance to past victims of selection to get back into the mainstream

6. Creativity not Repression

To develop high-level thinking, to nurture the arts & sciences

7. Stop religious categorization of children

For social cohesion and profound humanism.

8. To put the Accent on educational Content

So as to strike a balance between the sciences, logic, the arts, mathematics, philosophy, other languages, education, and all these linked up with the knowledge that parents have accumulated over the years.

The Quota System

Our principal demand (see number one above) requires some effort to understand. We invite you to read our proposal, see if you think it is feasible, and bring forward your own proposals too. Let us debate these questions.

Many people have proposed a quota system to break out of the present deadlock we are in.⁵⁶

Let us now explain our demand:

Each secondary school gets a quota of university scholarships each year. (An easy calculation for a computer to make. There could also be a minimum result required for scholarships). This will tend to equalize demand for secondary schools that teach up to Higher School Certificate (HSC) level. Such a change would need a five-year notice, creating a five-year transition period where parents are able to shift their children to nearer schools should they wish to.

A quota system for university scholarships is after all, nothing new. At present, there is a quota for girls and boys, a quota by subject (science, economics, art); and a quota on a geographical basis for Rodrigues Island. What we are proposing is simply a quota of university scholarships per HSC school. What will immediately start happening is that most parents everywhere in Mauritius will want their children to go to the nearest HSC school, and this will in fact *increase* the probabilities that their child will get the university scholarship that is so much prized (and desperately so because of the rising cost of tertiary education). So this mechanism will have very creative indirect effects. It will raise the standard of education in *all* schools, which is exactly what we are aiming at. There could, at the same time, be University of Mauritius scholarship quotas introduced for each HSC school.

If, at the same time, a quota of “first choice” secondary school were introduced for each primary school, this would establish a parity of esteem for each and every primary school. This would also require a five-year notice and transition period.

All this will mean that national ranking for CPE will disappear, and will only exist at primary school level, in each primary school. Even though 6th standard examinations are organized nationally, the results with this new system would not be computed at the national level. This would result in first of all, decreasing the unmanageable competition and limiting it to the boundaries of the school, where it is within social control. Secondly, given that there are intelligent children spread out in all schools, all these children will be given the same possibilities, even though their results might not be similar due to social inequality. Thirdly, there are not only mechanical or linear changes that will be set in motion, but also some other very interesting dynamics. Let us explore some of them:

When there is a new system of quotas of seats in “first choice” HSC secondary schools; a quota allocated to each primary school, parents (especially the more adept ones) everywhere in the country will want their children to go to the nearest school instead of trying to put them into schools that are at present considered “good” schools, and that are far from home. If each primary school has its own quota, why on earth would parents have to wrestle for seats in the small number of existing “good” schools? Such a quota system will certainly discourage parents from seeking out fake electricity or water bills to get their children into schools that they consider “good”. This will bring more individual integrity. Capable parents contributing towards improving their local primary school will also bring about another dynamic that will raise the standard of education everywhere; a dynamic that might appear surprising, but is predictable even so. In villages and town fringes, middle class families (civil servants, shop keepers, professionals) will no longer find deceptive means to get their children into high status primary schools. They will prefer keeping their children in the local school to give the child a better chance of getting a scholarship, and parents will work towards making the school a better one.

The same reasoning will apply to teachers too. They will prefer to stay in the primary school nearest to their home, and stop squabbling to teach in the scholarship-reaping primary schools in towns. All parents and teachers will be able to contribute to make Parent-Teachers-Associations (PTA) really work, and at the same time, to make their primary school flourish. The PTA will have the responsibility to ensure that the government is providing all the artistic, cultural, sanitary infrastructure needed for the school. It will also be responsible for ensuring that all children in the school have the means to come to school with appropriate school-wear and that they get nutritious food at school. The government must provide PTA’s with the resources to be able to do this. In this way, the standard of schools will rapidly rise. In the meantime, if necessary, school “regions” can be re-defined so that each region has the same number of primary schools.

Perhaps, for a time, “good” schools will still be in great demand. This will only be a historical left-over, and the situation will change quickly, especially if a quota of university scholarships are introduced for each secondary school at the same time.

If ever secondary schools that are in demand remain so, we could always resort to the mechanism of Minister Obeegadoo where “high demand” secondary schools are transformed into Form 6 schools. We, in *Lalit*, do not believe this will be necessary.

We propose that the same quota system be applied to the island of Rodrigues as well, and becomes fully integrated into the national system

Our aim is to improve *all* schools. The government already invests more or less the same amount of resources on each school: on physical infrastructure, on teachers, on facilities for all primary schools. What

we need to do now is to introduce a mechanism that will minimize the effects of class inequality that brings elitism into the classroom. There is disparity between secondary schools in terms of government expenditure, which should be done away with gradually, as the new quota system equalizes and raises the standard of all secondary schools.

Conclusion

We started off with the point that real equality in education, is inextricably linked to the broader struggle to abolish class inequality in society at large.⁵⁷ So when people tail-end the MMM or other “anti-A+” currents, they get to hear all the good ideas *against* competition in the education system, but are not told that such competition is bad in the rest of society as well. The reason is simple: they *agree* with competition in society in general. They only oppose it when it comes to the education system. Such hypocrisy puts their credibility in question. And this credibility gap, in turn, makes Minister Gokhool appear to be relatively more credible. After all, Minister Gokhool is in favour of competition at all levels, including the education system. So it is important to link up demands for changes in the education system with demands for general equality.

We should keep in mind that a good education system can open up the minds of young people, but at the same time, it will not, by itself, change society as a whole. The education system, in the final analysis, is there to hold up the class system. However, because it deals with the development of human thought, of ideas, it is potentially something that can liberate the mind.

Students can discover through education that “equal education”, when looked at up close, only means an opportunity to get into different layers of an unequal and even immoral hierarchy. Students might find out that the “equal opportunities” philosophy is a blunt attempt to justify social inequality through the pretense that there is equal access to places in the stratum of inequality. So we must learn to be wary of such concepts, and learn to decipher their real meaning.

Even if education, by itself, cannot change the world, we realize, in *Lalit* that even if the great majority of people accept inequality in general, they do not agree with it when it comes to innocent children. This is a contradiction in the capitalist system. There is yet another contradiction: because knowledge is, in itself, a form of liberation, when children are at school, as a group, that too is potentially liberating: school children can become agents of change.

Paolo Freire said that education should be “a means whereby people can perceive, interpret, critique and finally transform the world.” This is what “*world class quality education*” should aim at. This is the kind of education students of the May ’75 movement sought. This is what the *Lalit Program on Education* is calling for. No more, no less. We want good school for all children the Republic of Mauritius over. How can we want less than that?

And one day, during the transformation from our present post-slavery society to a free society without social classes, the nature of education will start changing. It will become the means whereby children will truly discover the wealth of knowledge in the world around them. It will be restored to its original Latin “*e-ducere*” meaning from which the word “education” is derived: to draw out a person’s innate potential so that it is developed to the full.

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End Notes

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- ²⁴ *Eski Guvernman pe Tuy Bhojpuri ek Kreol? Zenosid Lingwistik dan Lekol ubyen Diversite Langaz?* by Tove Skuttnab-Kangas, LPT, 2003
- ²⁵ International Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Genocide Crimes UN 1948
- ²⁶ LPT open letter to Minister Obeegadoo, October 2003
- ²⁷ *International Covenant on Rights of the Child* adopted by UN on 20 November 1989
- ²⁸ UNCCPR, Paragraph 4 Concluding Observations: 31 March 2005: “ The Committee also notes with satisfaction the measures taken by the State Party to promote the use of written Creole in the schools.”
- ²⁸ A series of press articles criticized Cambridge, after several errors were detected in the 2005 examinations, and Cabinet approved a document entitled *Towards a Quality Curriculum* in which there is a proposal to have recourse to the International Baccalaureate, if there is no joint MES-Cambridge examination.
- ²⁹ In a BEC seminar for Mother Tongue Day, 21st February 2006
- ³⁰ BEC document: *An action research strategy for the use of mother tongue in schools*.
- ³¹ In France, teachers’ trade unions take stands on all aspects of education: see article in *Rouge* No.2144, 2 February 2006, p.4.
- ³² Jean Claude de L’Estrac in *L’Express* 10th February 2004. Also several editorials of G.Ahnee in *Le Mauricien* and Georges Chung in *La Vie Catholique*.
- ³³ See Ramesh Ramdoyal’s book: *The Development of Education in Mauritius 1710-1976*, Reduit,MIE, 1977; Dev Virahsawmy’s *Le système éducatif mauricien: problèmes et possibilités, Etudes Creoles*, 1984”; Sheila Bunwaree’s *Mauritian Education in a Global economy*, Ile Maurice, EOI, 1994.
- ³⁴ Report of the National Seminar on Language ‘*The Language Issue in Mauritius*’, October 1982.
- ³⁵ *Langaz Kreol Zordi*, LPT 2002 has brought together several papers on the progress of the mother tongue.
- ³⁶ See LPT paper in Festival Kreol Sesel 1999, in *Textes-Etudes et Documents* 9, Ibis Rouge Ed, 2001
- ³⁷ *A Harmonized Writing system for the Mauritian Creole Language Grafi Larmoni*, 2004 by the Committee set up by the Government, presided by Prof. Vinesh Hookoomsing.
- ³⁸ A list of organisations in *Evolision Dinamik Lortograf Kreol Morisyen* by Alain Ah Vee in *Langaz Kreol Zordi*, LPT 2002.
- ³⁹ GN114, when Minister Parsooramen made discrimination on the basis of race or religion illegal as regards school staff, this causes an uproar in the Catholic Church, which at the time, had a conservative, even reactionary hierarchy. This historical error of the Church caused many problems such as on the question of reserved seats, etc.
- ⁴⁰ the L’Estrac Select Committee was called “The Select Committee on Confessional Schools”, and that of Dulloo “The Select Committee on the Certificate of Primary Education/Oriental Languages”, December 1993
- ⁴¹ Paolo Freire in his book *10 letters to Teachers* develops this line of argument really well.
- ⁴² Jim Cummins calls this Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), whereas spoken language is developed just for Basic Inter-personal Communication Skills (BICS).
- ⁴³ Antonio Gramsci has made an important contribution on this question. He talks of “organic intellectuals” within dominated classes that need to develop a counter-hegemony to prepare for the overthrow of the capitalist system. See his *Prison Notebooks*.
- ⁴⁴ Alain Romaine explained this concept in a speech in the BEC Seminar, 11 September, 2006
- ⁴⁵ *Ledikasyon pu Travayer* held a Seminar on the 9th of September, 2006 on these 4 pedagogues.
- ⁴⁶ *Summerhill*, by A.S.Neill, 1968, Pelican Books.
- ⁴⁷ Celestin Freinet, *Les Techniques Freinet de l’Ecole Moderne*, Collection Bourrelier/Librairie Armand Colin, 1980 and *Pour l’Ecole du Peuple*, 1969.
- ⁴⁸ Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Sheed&Ward, Penguin, 1972.
- ⁴⁹ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind* (Paperback) 320 pages, Owl Books (NY); Reprint (September 1995).
- ⁵⁰ Lekol Koperativ also known as ATSCASE, (Association of Teachers and Students Co-operating for Adult and Secondary Association) was an association of students and teachers (with parent and family participation) based in Port Louis. The courses were run in Mezon de Zenn, Sant Sosyal Marie Reine de la Paix, College Alpha, College Trinity, St. Francois Xavier) and also in Curepipe, Surinam, Bambous, Petite Riviere, Mount Ory. Was very active in 1976 - 1983. It was an association that organised “group work”, in response to commercially-run private lessons and used modern and creative pedagogy. Was run by student and teacher members.
- ⁵¹ *Ledikasyon pu Travayer*, that was awarded the UNESCO WORLD LITERACY PRIZE in 2004, was founded in 1976 for adult literacy, promote mother tongues, promote art and literature, and promote the emancipation of the working class. The LPT uses advanced pedagogy based on Paolo Freire’s work.
- ⁵² Federation of Pre-School Playgroups, also known as “Playgroup”, was founded in 1975 to set up self-run neighbourhood level parent-teacher associations for education, especially good pre-school education. They have promoted the pedagogy of learning through play, integrated and holistic pedagogy, and mother tongues.
- ⁵³ *Bambous Health Project*, and especially Dr Ram Seegobin who was active in the association over 25 years, developed an advanced pedagogy in health courses held under a tree or on people’s verandas, and equally through a one-year health course where

anatomy, how the human body functions, pathology, philosophy behind medical treatment was taught. See booklet *Le Bambous Health Project*, LPT, 1998.

⁵⁴ *Muvman Liberasyon Fam*, founded in 1976, developed its pedagogy through its courses called “Biolozzi Fam” . See *The Women’s Liberation Movement* in Mauritius, LPT, 1998; *Who Owns What and Why: Women Pose the Question of Ownership and Control*, MLF, 1999. Also two series of magazines *Nuvel Fam*, and *Fam Lite*.

⁵⁵ Derek Bickerton’s two key books: *The Roots of Language*, *Language and Species*.

⁵⁶ Kumara Venkatasamy, *Taking the sting out of the CPE selection exercise*, L’Express, 27th September, 2006. MES officers have also made similar proposals.

⁵⁷ There are two key articles on this question by Lindsey Collen *How All Children can get a Wonderful Education*, Le Mauricien 18th and 19th January, 2006 and *The MES Findings and What Lalit in Fact Says* Le Mauricien, 31st July, 2006.