

Introduction

(a) For Whom is this Book Intended?

The book has mainly been written for three groups of people:

1. Planners and administrators who allocate resources to different types of schools,
2. Supervisors and inspectors who advise on the most effective use of resources within schools, and
3. Secondary school principals responsible for day-to-day teaching of practical subjects.

As well as providing ideas which will directly assist the work of these people, the book will also help in an indirect way. Officers at different levels in the education system often have different perspectives on the same problems. For effective teamwork, everybody needs to understand the viewpoints of the others. The book will help them to do this.

(b) What are Practical Subjects?

In some ways, all subjects can be practical. Mathematics has a practical use in the home and in business, languages have a practical use in communication, science has a practical use in industry, etc..

However, in curriculum matters the label is usually reserved for subjects which specifically require students to use their hands. The main ones covered by this book are:

Agricultural
Science:

Agriculture
Animal Husbandry
Horticulture

Business Studies:

Accounting
Bookkeeping
Computing

	Office Management
	Principles of Business
	Shorthand
	Typing
	Word-Processing
Home Economics:	Beauty Culture
	Clothing & Textiles
	Cookery
	Dressmaking
	Food & Nutrition
	Home Management
	Hotel & Catering
	Needlework
	Tailoring
Industrial Arts:	Air Conditioning
	Automechanics
	Building
	Electrical Installation
	Electronics
	Marine Sciences
	Masonry
	Metalwork
	Refrigeration
	Technical Drawing
	Plumbing
	Woodwork.

Practical subjects are usually contrasted with academic ones such as English literature, history, physics, biology and mathematics. Although these subjects may have a practical component (particularly in the sciences), most teaching and learning is from books.

Two terms that are related to the debate on practical subjects are *diversification* and *vocationalisation*. Many governments use these terms when they add practical subjects to an academic curriculum.

* *The Breadth of Subject Offerings* *

* *Most countries in the Caribbean — including the small ones —* *

* *offer a wide range of practical subjects in their secondary schools.* *

* *For example:* *

* *Antigua & Barbuda offers 5 industrial arts subjects, 4 home* *

* *economics subjects, business education, agricultural science and* *

* *building.* *

* *Barbados offers 7 industrial arts subjects, 3 home economics* *

* *subjects, 5 business studies subjects, and agricultural science.* *

* *Jamaica offers 31 pre-vocational and technical subjects.* *

* *Trinidad & Tobago offers 17 craft courses, 13 pre-technical courses* *

* *and 4 advanced level courses.* *

* *St Vincent offers 4 industrial arts subjects, 4 home economics* *

* *subjects, 5 business studies subjects, and agricultural science.* *

* *St Lucia offers 7 subjects at the junior secondary level and 13 subjects* *

* *at the senior secondary level.* *

(c) Alternative Strategies

The different patterns in which practical subjects are offered reflect a choice between two main policy objectives:

- * whether practical subjects are regarded as part of general education preparing students for life, or
- * whether they are considered pre-vocational or even vocational, giving specific skills and leading straight into particular occupations in the world of work.

This book covers both options. The policy objectives help determine whether subjects should be compulsory for all students or whether they

should be optional. If the latter is chosen, the authorities still have to decide whether options will be available to *all* students or whether they should be limited to a few streams.

At the junior secondary level, the usual pattern in the Caribbean is for practical subjects to be part of general education and to be compulsory. However, there is often gender stereotyping, e.g. of home economics for girls, and woodwork, metalwork or industrial arts for boys. In some countries, agricultural science is also considered part of general education for all students.

At the senior secondary level, by contrast, practical subjects are usually offered as options, grouped according to the main areas of industrial arts, agriculture, home economics and business studies. In some countries students are counselled in the selection of options, but important choices always have to be made at the age of 14 or 15 (Form 3 of secondary school). Often, the basic choice is between an academic stream or one of several technical/vocational streams.