

Catholic Education in Mauritius: Reaffirming specificity and influencing policies through pedagogical practices

Pascal Nadal, Gilberte Chung Kim Chung and Jimmy Harmon

Introduction

Whilst it may be a legitimate expectation that the process of educational reform and/or curricular reviews should be driven by policy makers, in reality this is not always the case. This is because the multidimensional nature of ‘curriculum’ ‘requires other ways of thinking about it – as a concept, as an activity, as an experience’ (Hewitt, 2006, p.33). As such, notwithstanding the fact that government remains an influential agent for the shaping of the educational curriculum (Levin, 2008), the latter is chiefly ‘a socially constructed cultural artefact which (like society itself) has to be made and remade in response to changing historical circumstances’ (Carr, 1998, p.328). Proceeding from the above, policies are often influenced through a grounded bottom-top approach that seeks to underscore experience emanating from the ecology of learners and educational practitioners.

Set against this understanding, we examine in this paper how three different initiatives that are in line with the pastoral philosophy of Catholic education in Mauritius became important catalysts that influenced educational policies at national level, even though they are not always acknowledged as such by the official authorities. These initiatives respectively fall under the headings of ‘Education for Inclusiveness’, ‘Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education’, and ‘Education for Sustainability’. But first, we provide historical insights into the longstanding partnership between the Catholic Church and the state in an attempt to better situate the former’s involvement in the building of the Mauritian nation.

Catholic education in the pre-independence era

Nowadays composed of a network of 67 schools (48 at primary level – eight of which comprising a ‘Special Education Needs’ (SEN) unit for intellectually disabled children – eighteen at secondary level, and one at post-secondary technical level), Catholic education in Mauritius started in the eighteenth century during the French colonization period. The first parish school is reported to have been opened in 1742 by Abbé Chalan, in Port-Louis. Other local priests followed suit by opening schools in various other areas around the island (Diocese of Port-Louis, 2016). The first congregational secondary

school started its operation more than 175 years ago, when the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) set up, in 1846, a girls' school that later became known as the Loreto College Port-Louis. Apart from the IBVM, the other congregations which ploughed the way to education in Mauritius were the Sisters of Charity of 'Bon et Perpétuel Secours' (1850), the Sisters of Mary (1864),¹ the Christian Brothers (1877), the Saint Gabriel Brothers (1969), and the Salesians of Don Bosco (2007). The mission of these congregations was to carry out evangelical work towards the education and training of the Mauritian youth. Today, most Catholic schools are run by lay persons, save for a few cases, namely those schools managed by the IBVM and the Salesians of Don Bosco.

The congregational heritage of Catholic education

Whilst the academic orientation of Catholic education in Mauritius is implemented by the Service Diocésain de l'Education Catholique (SeDEC)² in line with policies outlined by the Bishop of Port-Louis, the heritage bestowed by the various religious congregations engaged in an educational mission on the island since the mid-nineteenth century simply cannot be minimized. In fact, a considerable part of what nowadays constitutes the philosophy and core values of Catholic education has been inherited from these congregations, some of which are still active nowadays in the educational field. We will here focus on six emblematic congregations that left their mark on the local education landscape, namely the IBVM (commonly known as the Loreto Sisters), the Sisters of Charity of 'Bon et Perpétuel Secours', the Lasallians, the Spiritans, the Sisters of Mary, and finally the Brothers of Christian Instruction of St Gabriel.

The educational philosophy of Mary Ward, founder of the IBVM, rests on three pillars that define the school as being i) student-centred, ii) community-centred, and iii) God-centred, thereby underscoring the benefits of Catholic education for the self, the community, and humanity at large (Australian Province of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1977). Moreover, the Loreto schools are inspired by the Ignatian³ educational tradition, according to which, the role of the teacher does not limit itself to that of a provider of information. Instead, the teacher should be a guide who helps learners in their quest for the truth (Charmot, 1943). To this end, the interplay of reflection, action and experience forms the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm.

¹ Commonly known as the 'Filles de Marie'.

² Formerly known as 'Bureau de l'Education Catholique' (Bureau of Catholic Education), the 'Service Diocésain de l'Education Catholique' (Diocesan Service of Catholic Education) forms part of the Diocese of Port-Louis and manages matters concerning Catholic education in Mauritius, together with the religious congregations that still administer schools under their ownership.

³ Named after St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).

The history of the ‘Bon et Perpétuel Secours’ congregation is a special one in that it is the only congregation to have been founded in Mauritius.⁴ Founded in the 1850s by Mother Augustine (civil name: Marie Caroline Adélaïde Lenferna de Laresle), even more noteworthy is the fact that, from the shores of Mauritius, the congregation has spread to various parts of the world, including Europe, Africa, South America, Asia and Oceania. Besides Mauritius, the congregation is nowadays present in thirteen countries.

Taking its birth in a post-emancipatory Mauritian society marked by the outbreak of a cholera epidemic, the Sisters of Charity of ‘Bon et Perpétuel Secours’ congregation consequently built and/or managed orphanages, hospitals, leprosaria, hospices, nurseries and charitable institutions. This happened at a time when civil authorities were completely overwhelmed by the prevailing sanitary situation and could not attend to the basic needs of the population, especially the former slave population and the indentured labour force that had come from India to replace liberated or manumitted slaves on sugar plantations. In the field of education, the Sisters of Charity of ‘Bon et Perpétuel Secours’ – under the impulse of their iconic leading figure, Mother Augustine – accomplished the remarkable feat of setting up, in just about fifteen years, eighteen schools across the island. History will record that these achievements were attained despite the adversity that the founder of the congregation faced, with the hierarchy of the domestic church under two different bishops, in the 1860s and 1870s.

Next, the Lassallian⁵ educational principles warrant attention, as they have guided the setting up and running of three Catholic boys’ colleges in Mauritius, namely St Joseph’s College, St Mary’s College and Collège de la Confiance. Figure 1 below lists five of the core principles espoused by the De La Salle Brothers (also known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools) in their educational mission.



Figure 1. Source: <https://www.cbu.edu/five-principles>

⁴ See Herminette (2017) for a comprehensive discussion of the (often unacknowledged) contribution of this congregation in the Mauritian post-slavery abolition society.

⁵ Named after St John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719).

As a constant for all congregations offering educational service, the spiritual dimension features prominently among these principles; but we note that the notions of inclusiveness and social justice are equally spelt out. These resonate particularly with the post-synodal decree of the domestic church on the preferential option for the poor ⁶ and the choice made by Catholic education in Mauritius from 2001 onwards to foster inclusive educational communities (e.g. through the setting up of prevocational units for academic underperformers in all its public colleges) and inclusive classrooms, via the adoption of the mixed abilities approach to teaching and learning.

Third, it is in keeping with the Spiritan tradition that the Collège du Saint Esprit was founded more than 80 years ago. Figure 2 below lists the fundamental values of Spiritan education. According to Cleary (2015), the seven core values of Spiritan education – all inspired from the gospel – are articulated around axes such as spirituality, service, excellence, and a special concern for the most unfortunate members of society.

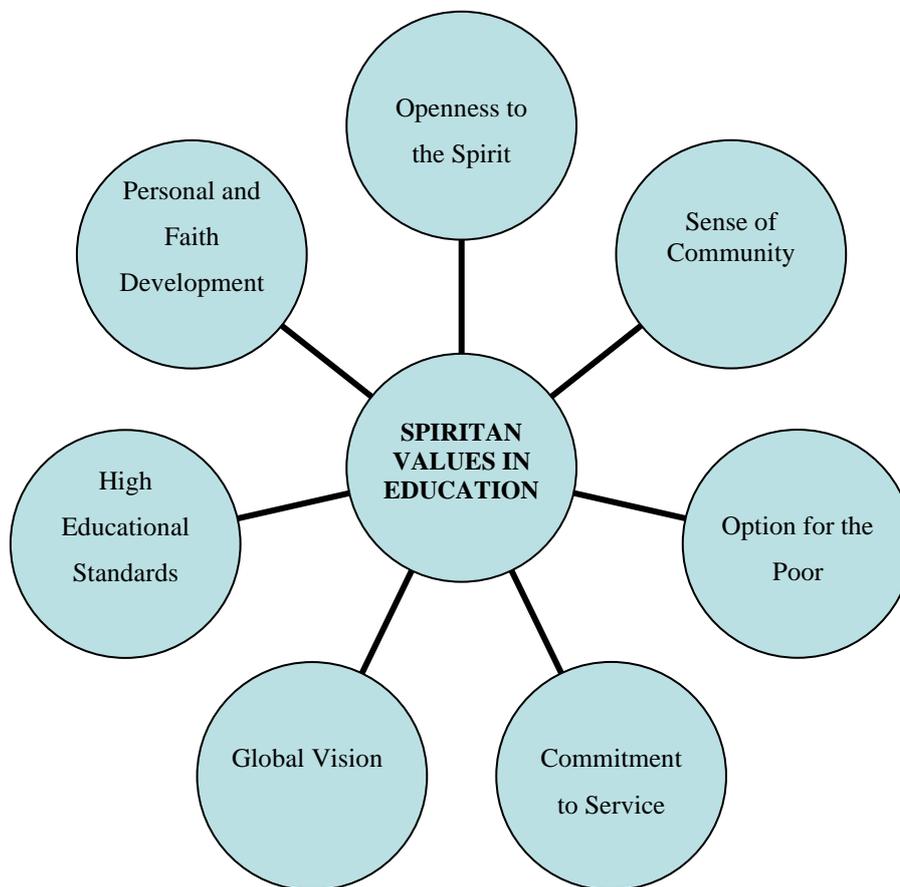


Figure 2.

⁶ Marked, amongst other things, by the construction of four coeducational colleges in mostly rural areas that are often characterised by social and material precariousness.

These values of preferential option for the poor are in line with principles that stand at the core of another religious congregation that strove for the socioeconomic advancement of deprived children through education, namely the Sisters of Mary. In fact, it was the abolition of slavery in 1848 in Reunion that led to the creation of this new congregation by Mère Marie Magdeleine de la Croix,⁷ as there was a need to cater for the education of the newly enfranchised population (Eve, 2001). When the congregation opened one college in Curepipe in 1954, namely Notre Dame College, it was with the mission of bringing education to girls from working-class families of mainly the suburban areas of Curepipe. It is presumably for this reason that the school ended up being tagged as a ‘black school’ in the 1960s (Harmon & Bapomme-Iyempermall, 2004), but it never departed from the initial drive in support of the weak and the poor.

Finally, the Montfortian⁸ philosophy upheld by the Brothers of Christian Instruction of St Gabriel (founders of the Saint Gabriel Technical School in 1974) aims at providing much more than plain academic instruction. On the contrary, the ultimate Montfortian goal in education rests upon the holistic development of the mind, body and spirit for a total learning experience that is likely to produce well-rounded individuals. Useful citizenry is often claimed to be the outcome of such an educational philosophy, and all academic disciplines are viewed as means to empower learners to seek the wisdom to realise their full human and spiritual growth (‘The Education Vision of Louis de Montfort’, 2014).

What therefore emanates from the above discussion of the congregational heritage of Catholic education is the strong focus on the welfare of needy students at school and through schooling. It is nonetheless true that – as a result of its own success – Catholic education has in subsequent years deviated from its initial course of action by instead supporting a more elitist academic project mostly longed-for by the well-to-do segment of the population. That is why a glance into the past has allowed Catholic education authorities to apply some perspective and recalibrate their educational philosophy and action for the twenty-first century, as shown below.

A heritage bestowed to a nation

The Roman Catholic Church has been the main provider of education in Mauritius up to the 1950s. Changes at national level started in 1944 when the British government reformed the primary sector with a grouping of all confessional schools according to their religious denominations and created education authorities⁹ such as the Roman

⁷ Civil name: Aimée Pignolet de Fresne.

⁸ Named after Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716). The adjective ‘Gabrielite’ (referring to St Gabriel) is sometimes used as an alternative to ‘Montfortian’.

⁹ An education authority refers to a governing body established by a religious denomination, a local government body or a group of private individuals for the purpose of administering schools functioning under its purview (The Education Act 1957, Ministry of Education, Republic of Mauritius).

Catholic Education Authority (Education Act, 1957). Following the independence of Mauritius in 1968 and the provision of free education at primary level, secondary education was declared free in 1976 with the payment of grants to private educational partners by the government. Thus, parents no longer needed to pay fees for their offspring to attend school. In the years 2000, in the context of the government's commitment for Education for All – in sync with the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2012) – the state invested a lot in the building of additional state secondary schools to increase access to secondary education.

Out of 297 primary schools and 178 secondary schools in Mauritius, there are now 46 Roman Catholic aided¹⁰ primary schools and seventeen grant-aided Catholic secondary schools, operating in the public education system. There are also two fee-paying Loreto primary schools and one fee-paying private diocesan college, as well as one technical school operating in the post-secondary sector. The total student population in Catholic schools amounts to around 32,000 students in terms of intake capacity over a total figure of about 227,000 students, i.e., around 14% of the island's student population for the primary, secondary and post-secondary sectors.

As a major and long-standing partner of the national education system, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Port-Louis has influenced educational policies at national level in many ways, even if it has often had to voice its concern on a number of issues. This was, for instance, the case concerning the language used as medium of instruction at primary level, the rate of drop-outs due to the exclusion of slow learners from the educational system, the disparity in the funding of public and private grant-aided schools, and the inadequate consideration given to children with special educational needs, to name just some. With hindsight, it appears that establishing policy dialogue and influencing national policies require persistent and coherent work on the part of those who want to bring about change. An open-mindedness, coupled with an understanding and an ownership of the principles embedding the proposed innovations, is also warranted from those who have the power to define or amend policy decisions at national level.

This paper precisely aims at illustrating how Catholic educational leadership in post-independence Mauritius has influenced various educational policies at national level, while at the same time ensuring that the specific pastoral cachet of its service is maintained. We will therefore discuss a few pedagogical developments witnessed over the last five decades in the field of Catholic education, with a particular focus on twenty-first century policy decisions advocated by the domestic Catholic church since the three-year Synod¹¹ it organised for the year 2000 jubilee. To this end, we will consider three areas where Catholic education has pioneered reforms in its sector before the same were

¹⁰ An 'aided' or 'grant-aided' school refers to a privately owned school (e.g. by the church or by private individuals) that is fully subsidised by the government and that consequently partakes in the public education project without requiring the payment of any fees by those attending such schools, as it is the case for students attending state schools.

¹¹ From 1997 to 2000.

adopted – either partly or in full – by the Ministry of Education for the sector at large, namely the issue of inclusiveness, the mother tongue-based multilingual approach to education, and the concept of education for sustainability. Besides their relevance for the rest of the sector, these innovations pioneered by Catholic education share the fact that they all stem from the principles of inclusiveness and preferential option for the poor. As endorsed by the concept of Catholic Social Teaching (Trisolini, 2011), reforms in the local Catholic education sector have indeed tried to address issues of periphery and marginality in an almost invariable manner.

Three case studies will, therefore, be presented in this paper to illustrate how educational policies at primary and secondary level have been influenced by Catholic education through pedagogical practices and without departing from the distinctive pastoral Catholic identity. This will be done both through the presentation of empirical findings and non-empirical investigation of secondary/archival records and theoretical analyses.

Inclusive admission policies and pedagogies

Besides the duty to strive towards academic excellence, a Catholic school by nature must cherish an operative educational philosophy that bears witness to authentic values. One main principle spearheading the educational philosophy of Catholic education is inclusiveness, may it be in the admission and recruitment policy upheld or the pedagogy used in the classroom. As pointed out by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, this conviction is rooted in the principles of post-Vatican II Catholic Social Teaching, articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar and episcopal documents centred on human dignity, the common good, the preferential option for the poor, and social justice and peace (USCCB, 2018).

Hence, the pedagogy favoured in Catholic schools should be conducive to education for inclusiveness, which is a student-centred approach to teaching that takes into consideration the varied backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities of all the learners in a classroom (Felder & Brent, 2005; Pantić & Florian, 2015). The prevailing Mauritian education system, we should admit, is one whereby parents and teachers are still finding it difficult to undertake the paradigm shift from academic results, competition and elitism, to learning in a supportive and open environment that fosters social justice and allows each student to be fully present and feel equally valued. Even though, in the strict sense of the word, it might not have constituted an innovation per se, the pedagogical stand embraced by the Catholic education sector about inclusiveness owed much more to a credo or, we could say, to an act of faith in the abilities and uniqueness of each child.

The concept of inclusive pedagogy was introduced in primary Catholic schools in 1996, in the context of the five-year plan (1996-2001) of the Catholic education sector. In a

national education environment where the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) ranking system¹² was still in force, the first people who needed convincing were the heads of schools and teachers, as well as the parents. Resistance particularly came from some of the so-called result-oriented elite schools. However, it became evident that learning outcomes are improved for everyone when teachers attend to student differences and take deliberate steps to ensure that all students – across differences in terms of academic, social, physical, and cognitive abilities – feel welcomed, valued, challenged, and supported along their academic journey.

Consequently, the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA)¹³ embarked on the training of all stakeholders, and twenty years on, initiatives like the diagnostic assessment through the profiling of each child admitted to Grade 1, pupils' portfolios, the 'Getting-to-Know-You' programme, continuous formative assessments, remedial education, pedagogical materials such as the big books and 'Jeux de Regards'¹⁴ are well ingrained in the Catholic educational philosophy. As a further evidence of the validity of the above-mentioned provisions, many of these initiatives were recommended in subsequent national educational reforms for the holistic development of each child, the most recent one being the 'Nine Year Continuous Basic Education – Inspiring Every Child' programme, a national education reform which promotes pedagogies that need 'to respond to diverse learners and their diverse learning needs and paces... in the name of equity' (Republic of Mauritius, 2016, p.11).

Likewise, in the secondary education sector and pursuant to their inclusion policy, Catholic education authorities chose to apply the preferential option for the poor as one of their admission criteria at a time when the list of students admitted in Form I (now referred to as Grade 7) consisted mainly of academic highflyers emanating from the ranking system at the end of the primary cycle, at the age of ten. This provision for the weak and the deprived is anchored in numerous church documents, namely paragraph 69 of *Gaudium et Spes* – The Church in the Modern World – of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council (Pope Paul VI, 1965): 'Men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor. Family and social services, especially those that provide for culture and education, should be further promoted...'. More recently, Pope Francis' message in *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) also made this explicit in paragraph 198: 'The Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness.'

¹² This system regulated access to secondary education and determined the type of secondary school (from low- to high-demand) one would eventually be admitted to.

¹³ The RCEA, within the Service Diocésain de l'Éducation Catholique, is the education authority responsible to the Minister for the good administration of the 46 Roman Catholic aided primary schools in Mauritius.

¹⁴ 'Jeux de Regards' is a pedagogical approach for improving literacy through the use of photography at lower primary level.

Such a policy for the underprivileged, marginalized and weakest members of society led Catholic education in Mauritius to explore innovative pedagogical practices around concepts like differentiated teaching and learning in mixed ability classes. From 2004 to 2006, major training sessions were conducted, with a second wave spanning from 2011 to 2013, first at the level of teachers, heads of department and rectors, then through a whole-school approach. Major themes were discussed, like the middle years of schooling, differentiation in the classroom, differentiating the curriculum, meaningful assessment strategies, the constructivist classroom, brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, engaging bright students in diverse classrooms, as well as remedial education. All these areas of learning have been, and still constitute, a challenge. The SeDEC is still a long way from having ensured that practices meant to foster differentiated instruction, such as the Student Individual Learning Plan and the Teacher Professional Learning Program, are regular and established practices in its schools. However, the inclusive educational philosophy is very much present in the Catholic education sector and there is definitely work in progress.

Furthermore, the inclusive praxis in Catholic schools has led to three actions worth mentioning. First, the Loreto Development Centres that have been in operation since the 1970s for the education of academically underperforming students have contributed to the setting up of the prevocational stream (for those who had twice failed the end-of-primary cycle exams) in the national education system in 2001. The initiative was commended by the Truth and Justice Commission (2011) set up to investigate the consequences of slavery and indentured labour on the contemporary Mauritian society:

The Prevocational Education Scheme proposes a shift in the pattern of traditional academic elitist educational goals to a more child-centered and need-based learning... [In the] Bureau d'Education Catholique (BEC) schools, much emphasis is laid on an inclusive pedagogy, where students are encouraged to participate in the various activities tailored according to the needs of those students.

(p.298)

Second, the Special Education Needs (SEN) sector has been integrated in Catholic education in 2017 when the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA) made a request to take over eight SEN schools run by the APEIM,¹⁵ an NGO catering for children with disabilities and which had decided to close its schools due to financial difficulties. Thus, some 250 pupils with an intellectual disability have been integrated in the system, together with some 65 staff members. Such an initiative heralds an authentic inclusive education system in which all children have the same rights to free education, even though here again, this is a work in progress.

The last example of inclusiveness lived out in the field of Catholic education for a different profile of learners concerns the Open Community School for Adults (OCSA)

¹⁵ 'APEIM' is the acronym for 'Association de Parents d'Enfants Inadaptés de l'île Maurice'.

project. Launched in October 2010, the OCSA¹⁶ filled a gap between basic adult literacy, adult vocational and adult tertiary education programmes by offering pioneer adult evening and Saturday education programmes. This outreach programme, which ran from 2010 to 2016, showed that adult returners could reverse unrewarding educational experiences through a second-chance programme, and thereby undergo a change in their social, human and identity capital, through lifelong learning. Chung Kim Chung (2017) describes such a process as one that has the capacity to heal and bring transformation.

The following prophetic words from a 30-year-old adult returner who, after passing her 'O' levels in 2012, went on to study for her 'A' levels, and is now enrolled on an undergraduate course, speak volumes about the value of inclusiveness in education:

I dropped out of school after my Form V, as I had not passed in all my subjects. I could not be promoted to Lower VI. I did not want to repeat my School Certificate, as I was too discouraged. When I saw the advertisement in the newspaper for the Open Community School, I called... It was in January 2011... It was not always easy to come back home from work and after all the house chores and the children, to find time for studying. I needed a lot of courage and motivation... These 5 'O' levels that I have obtained represent a lot for me. I am so happy to have made it and I want to continue, to study for my 'A' levels and who knows? Maybe one day, I'll go to university...

Catalysing the recognition of KM in formal education

In 2001, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research took a major policy decision by accommodating a prevocational stream alongside the main stream in all secondary public and public-funded private schools for students who had twice failed the CPE. A Prevocational Education programme was thus elaborated with key collaborators from the Catholic education sector. The programme provided a three-year course to those students who had experienced academic failure at primary level. Upon completion of the prevocational programme, they could then join technical or vocational centres or join the mainstream secondary education field at Form 3 (now Grade 9) level.

However, the need to accommodate prevocational students on the same premises as mainstream students brought an abrupt change in the setup of secondary schools. Some stakeholders found such a government policy disturbing. Therefore, the success of this policy decision relied heavily on its effective implementation in Catholic schools. Even though the student population of Catholic schools roughly represents only 20% and 8% of the national school population at primary and secondary level respectively, securing the collaboration of Catholic educational authorities was crucial for the policymakers, given the long-lasting tradition of credibility enjoyed by these authorities.

¹⁶ The premises of St Mary's College, a Catholic secondary school in Rose-Hill, were used for the project.

When the first cohort of prevocational students completed the programme after three years, Catholic authorities conducted a stock-taking exercise, which revealed that a significant number of students still could not read, write or count. Catholic authorities therefore expressed their concern to the government, and after a long period of consultation and discernment, the Bishop of Port-Louis finally asked Catholic education authorities to implement a mother tongue-based, prevocational programme. A linguist was contacted to elaborate it and a Project Coordinator¹⁷ appointed for what came to be known as the 'PrevokBEK'.¹⁸ This decision brought a revolution in Catholic education and in the domestic Catholic Church at large, as it was an additional step towards the valorization of Kreol Morisien(KM)¹⁹ as a language capable of fostering learning.

In 2004, only nine out of seventeen Catholic secondary schools embarked on the innovative PrevokBEK project. Eight other schools did not feel ready and prepared to do so. Originally, the PrevokBEK started with literacy and numeracy activities incorporated into the national prevocational programme. Then it evolved rapidly into a full-fledged mother tongue-based curriculum alongside multilingual education. KM was taught as a language subject and was, at the same time, used as medium of instruction for the teaching of Mathematics and Sciences on a bilingual (KM/English) mode. Lessons and instructional materials in KM were designed by teachers and used in schools for the first time in Mauritius. Innovative pedagogical practices were experimented. As from then, successive developments brought KM into the limelight.

Some of these events warranting mention here are, namely, a stand-alone module in KM²⁰ offered to the public by the University of Mauritius in 2008, the publication of the first unilingual dictionary in KM (Carpooran, 2009), as well as the initiative of Ledikasyon Pu Travayer²¹ to organize an International Hearing on the Suppression of the Mother Tongue. The latter event was marked by the presence of three international academics of world repute in the field of mother tongue-based multilingual education, alongside Mauritian panellists. Also, the PrevokBEK project was selected amongst the ten finalists of the Commonwealth Good Education Practice Award (CEGPA) in 2012. If any proof were needed of the relevance of initiatives taken by Catholic education in support of the mother tongue-based approach to multilingual education, local press comments quoting the Commonwealth Partnership 2012-2013 Report are unequivocal: 'PrevokBek breaks taboos about the status of Kreol Morisien. Since 2005 it gradually influenced public opinion and informed government policy decision' (2012-2013 Report, 2012).

¹⁷ One of the co-authors of this paper.

¹⁸ 'Prevok' is the Kreol word for the English abbreviation 'Prevoc' (diminutive of prevocational) and 'BEK' is the Kreol acronym for BEC ('Bureau de l'Education Catholique', French appellation for 'Bureau of Catholic Education').

¹⁹ Mauritian Kreol.

²⁰ A full-fledged joint degree programme in French and KM was later offered by the University of Mauritius, with the first students graduating in 2017.

²¹ A local organization militating, amongst others, in favour of the promotion and recognition of vernacular languages of Mauritius through diverse means.

The impact of KM on local politics was so considerable that it became a major political issue on the national agenda, leading to the introduction of the language as an optional subject at primary level as of January 2012. For all these developments regarding the promotion of the mother tongue in education, Catholic education definitely acted as a catalyst.

Education for sustainable development

Reflections around the contribution of education to ecological maintenance particularly gained prominence following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. This conference had called attention to sustainable livelihood as part of Agenda 21. Around the same period, the foundations for ecological literacy were established by Orr (1992).²² Two decades later, the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 initiated the process for the development of sustainable development goals. The Republic of Mauritius promptly responded to these international commitments by launching its 'Maurice Ile Durable' (MID) Policy, Strategy and Action Plan in 2013. It is noteworthy that education featured among the five 'E's – alongside environment, employment/economy, energy and equity – in the elaboration of policies and strategies for green economic growth spelt out in the MID²³ policy.

Whilst the notion of Education for Sustainability features prominently as an overarching cross-curricular area encompassing life skills, sexuality education, and intercultural education in the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education reform implemented by the Ministry of Education, initiatives in favour of ecological literacy in Mauritian Catholic schools date back to 2011.²⁴ Indeed, under a programme targeting colleges that form part of the local Catholic education network, some 12,000 students from eighteen colleges were exposed to ecological literacy and the fundamental principles of sustainable livelihood. With the help of about 70 trained teachers, these schools were also called upon to measure their ecological footprint in terms of their consumption and waste production (Chung Kim Chung & Smitsman, 2014). This initiative, as pointed out by Bangari *et al.* (2014), located itself in the ever-increasing interest on the international front in Ecological Footprint Analysis (EFA) for educational purposes among schools and non-governmental organizations.

²² As spelt out by Smitsman and Deenapanray (2014), these foundations are respectively: i) All education is education for sustainability; ii) Systems thinking and holistic approach to education; iii) Experiential learning in and from nature; iv) Education in dialogue with place; and v) Schools as learning communities.

²³ Mauritius Sustainable Island.

²⁴ The concept of education for sustainability in Catholic secondary schools of Mauritius is lengthily discussed in one special issue of 'Studies in Applied Pedagogy', edited by J. Harmon and published in 2014 by the Institut Cardinal Jean Margéot.

The need for Catholic schools to foster better ways of being and living together was particularly underscored following the publication of the pastoral letter titled 'Developing a New Art of Ecological Living' (2011) by the Bishop of Port-Louis. Consequently, relevant policies for sustainable education underpinned by evangelical insights were developed, as well as concrete actions like photovoltaic energy production in 39 schools, rainwater harvesting, and the setting up of medicinal, vegetable and endemic gardens. However, as pointed out by Harmon (2014, p.1), when viewed from a theological perspective, environmental education is not a 'neutral discourse of "waste management", "rain harvesting" or what could be called the "green rhetoric"'. Instead, it aims at creating in learners the critical awareness needed to question aspects of their living and specifically the 'living together' element, such as, for example, the social inequalities created by the free market economy.

It is in this perspective that the Ecological Literacy Programme (ELP) developed in 2011 for Catholic secondary schools evolved into a formal Education for Sustainability (EFS) programme in three colleges for a pilot project aiming at integrating EFS in the curriculum and activities. These initiatives, which coincided with the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), culminated in the signing of an EFS Charter and Pledge in 2014. Meanwhile, students in the pilot schools had been sufficiently empowered to autonomously lead activities such as Eco-Clubs and 'Education for Sustainability' actions like recycling, upcycling and reusing. The schools also received recognition for their initiatives. At the Eco-Schools Award Ceremony in 2017, for example, Loreto College Curepipe was awarded the 'Eco-School' label, and together with Collège Bon et Perpétuel Secours, it obtained the Green Flag symbolizing sustainability.

The relevance of these ESD pursuits in the Catholic education sector is probably best encapsulated in the words of one of the participating teachers, as they echo the centrality that the child warrants in the Catholic education process and the importance that values command: 'In EFS, the student is the very core of a value-based education meant to develop his/her intrinsic values to give birth to a unique individual who will interconnect harmoniously within the puzzle of existence...' (Lee Hon Chong *et al.*, 2014).

Final thoughts...

This paper has showcased three axes along which Catholic education in Mauritius has lived out its academic and pastoral mission for the holistic development of learners. Even though breakthroughs haven't been even in all three areas discussed – for instance with the existing possibilities for improvement in classroom practices to ensure that differentiated teaching and learning is indeed transacted – yet, the various examples provided here have shown that policy decisions at national level have, in all three cases,

been positively influenced. Also, the time taken for this to happen inspires hope about the enhanced reactivity or even the proactivity of policy makers. Indeed, if it took 30 years for the state to inspire itself from the experience of the Loreto Development Centres to launch the prevocational education, and twelve years for the PrevokBEK experience to pave the way for the unilateral introduction of KM at primary level, recent developments in the field of Catholic education have found an echo much more rapidly at higher level. For instance, the Affectivity and Sexuality Education programme developed by the sector has been extended to all secondary schools of the island, at the request of the Ministry of Education, just three years after its introduction in Catholic schools. This augurs well for some of the recent developments witnessed in the sector, such as the elaboration of the very first formal programme of Intercultural Education in Mauritius.

***Dr Gilberte Chung Kim Chung** holds undergraduate and master's qualifications in languages from the University of Reunion. Her career as a secondary school teacher and then as a school principal led her to obtaining a Post Graduate Certificate in Education from the Mauritius Institute of Education and a Master's in Educational Leadership from the Australian Catholic University. After a two-year service as Project Manager/ Technical Advisor at the Ministry of Education in the field of Special Education Needs, Gilberte was appointed Director of Catholic Education in Mauritius in 2007. In 2017, she obtained her Professional Doctorate in Education from Liverpool Hope University, UK. Her interests range from special education needs and inclusion to school leadership, adult education, ecological literacy and education for sustainability.*

***Dr Jimmy Harmon** is currently Deputy Director/Head of Secondary for Catholic Education in Mauritius. He holds an undergraduate qualification in languages from the University of Reunion, a P.G.C.E. from the Mauritius Institute of Education, an MA in Educational Leadership from the Australian Catholic University and a PhD in language studies from the University of Western Cape, South Africa. His research interests revolve mainly around language, history, memory and identity construction. After a career as teacher and Vice-Principal, Jimmy served a term of office as Project Manager for Prevocational Education at the Ministry of Education (2004-2005), before assuming duty as Head of Applied Pedagogy at the 'Institut Cardinal Jean Margéot' (2010-2014). From 2014 to 2017, he was Director of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture and is currently a Board Director of the Intercontinental Slavery Museum.*

***Dr Pascal Nadal** holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Mauritius. He is currently Deputy Director in charge of Training and Pastoral Care at the Mauritius Diocesan Service of Catholic Education. Prior to this, he was a Senior Lecturer in English at the Mauritius Institute of Education and the University of Seychelles. He also teaches part-time with diverse higher education providers, such as the University of Mauritius and the Open University of Mauritius. Pascal regularly collaborates with various local and international bodies in the field of education, such as the National Research Foundation of South Africa, the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, the Mauritius Qualifications Authority, and the Human Resource Development*

Corporation. His research interests revolve mostly around languages, creolistics, curriculum studies and educational policies.

References

- Australian Province of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (1977). *Loreto Educational Philosophy*. Retrieved from <http://www.loreto.sa.edu.au>
- Bangari, A. B., Deruisseau, S., Moosajee, S., Deenapanray, P. N. K., and Smitsman, A. (2014). 'Ecological Footprint as a Tool for Ecological Literacy'. *Studies in Applied Pedagogy*, Special Edition 2014, pp.73-84.
- Carpooran, A. (2009). *Diksoner Morisien*. Sainte Croix: Koleksion Text Kreol Ltée.
- Carr, W. (1998). The curriculum in and for a democratic society. *Curriculum Studies*, 6 (3), pp.323-340. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14681369800200044>
- Charmot, F. (1943). *La Pédagogie des Jésuites: Ses principes – Son actualité*. Paris: Editions Spes.
- Chung Kim Chung, G. and Smitsman, A. (2014). 'The Education for Sustainability Charter and the BEC Commitment'. *Studies in Applied Pedagogy*, Special Edition 2014, pp.8-16.
- Chung Kim Chung, G. (2017). 'Voice, Hope and Identity: Educational Journeys of Adult Returners to the First Open Community School for Adults in Mauritius'. In *Faith, Hope and Educational Research, Volume Two: Extracts from Research at the National Centre for Christian Education, Liverpool Hope University 2010-17*, A. Morris (ed.), Liverpool: Liverpool Hope University Press, pp.75-105.
- Cleary, B. (ed.). (2015). *Spiritual Schools*. Dublin: Des Places Educational Association.
- Diocese of Port-Louis (2011). *Développer un nouvel art de vivre écologique. Lettre pastorale de carême 2011*. Roche Bois: Regent Press Co. Ltd.
- Diocese of Port-Louis (2016). *Kleopas. L'école catholique. Cinq chantiers à entreprendre*. Beau-Bassin: Cosmoprint.
- Eve, P. (2001). *Mère Marie Magdeleine de la Croix (1810-1889)*. Saint André: Imprimerie Graphica.
- Felder, R. and Brent, R. (2005). 'Understanding Student Differences'. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94 (1), pp.57-72.
- Harmon, J. (2014). Editor's Note. *Studies in Applied Pedagogy*, Special Edition 2014, pp.1-2.
- Harmon, J. (2017). *Critical ethnography, a study of Kreol Morisien*. Pointe-aux-Sables: Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture Trust Fund.
- Harmon, J. and Bapomme-Iyempermall, N. (2004). *Collège Notre-Dame, Filles de Marie, 1954-2004, Hier, Aujourd'hui et Demain*. Port-Louis: Diocèse de Port-Louis.
- Herminette, L. (2017). *The untold contribution and tribulations of Mère Augustine and the Sœurs de Bon Secours in post emancipation Mauritius 1850-1870* (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Mauritius, Réduit, Mauritius.
- Hewitt, T. W. (2006). *Understanding and shaping curriculum: What we teach and why*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lee Hon Chong, J., Leve Hang, L., Hosenbocus Z. H., Pauvaday, U., Yu Tim Lun, G., Bangari, A. B., Deruisseau, S., Moosajee, S., Larosée, S., Jacques, J. B., Jaumeer, Y. and Padiachy, K. (2014). 'Messages from the Field – Voices from the EFS pilot schools in Mauritius'. *Studies in Applied Pedagogy*, Special

Edition 2014, pp.85-99.

Levin, B. (2008). 'Curriculum Policy and the Politics of What Should be Learned in Schools'. In *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction*, F. M. Connelly, M. Fang He and J. Phillion, (eds.). London: Sage, pp.7-24.

Orr, D. (1992). *Ecological Literacy – Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Pantić, N. and Florian, L. (2015). 'Developing teachers as agents of inclusion and social justice'. *Education Inquiry*, 6 (3), pp.333-351.

Pope Francis (2013). *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vatican.va>

Pope Paul VI (1965). *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Gaudium et Spes*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vatican.va>

Republic of Mauritius (2011). *Report of the Truth and Justice Commission 2011*. Prime Minister's Office. pmo.gov.mu/English/Documents/TJC_Vol1.pdf

Republic of Mauritius (2013). *Maurice Ile Durable: Policy Strategy and Action Plan*. Port-Louis: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Republic of Mauritius (2016). *Inspiring Every Child – Nine Year Schooling*. Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research.

Smitsman and Deenapanray (2014). 'The Education for Sustainability Programme'. *Studies in Applied Pedagogy*, Special Edition 2014, pp.52-72.

The Education Vision of Louis de Montfort (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.stgabrielinst.org>

Trisolini, J. (2011). *Catholic Social Teaching*. Seoul: Catholic Publishing House.

UNESCO (2012). *Millennium Development Goals Report*. New York: United Nations.

USCCB (2018). 'Seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching'. *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Retrieved from <http://www.usccb.org>

2012-2013 Report: 'PrevokBek breaks taboos about the status of Kreol Morisien'. (2012, September 1), *Le Mauricien*. Retrieved from <https://www.lemauricien.com>.



The authors would like to thank Father Alain Romaine, Episcopal Delegate for Catholic education in Mauritius, for his contribution in delineating the contours of this paper and as pre-submission reviewer.