

A CASE STUDY OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION
AT A MULTIGRADE SCHOOL IN THE NORTH EASTERN
EDUCATION DISTRICT OF TRINIDAD

By

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Abstract

There is a paucity of research on rural education in the English speaking Caribbean Region. This is a phenomenon that has caused grave concern for the teachers who operate in rural areas under the system unknown to them – Multigrade Schools/Multigrade Teaching. This thesis is a qualitative study of the perception of teachers at a rural multigrade school on curriculum implementation in the North Eastern Education District of Trinidad. The thesis provides an analysis of the views, opinions and expressions of the teachers who implement the curriculum at this school.

The purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perception of Curriculum Implementation at a small rural Multi-grade school. In more specific terms the study was designed to respond to the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do teachers at this Multi-grade school have in Curriculum Implementation?
2. What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?
3. What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

Two main source of information has been used in this study. Information from interviews with teachers attached to the school and observation of the teachers by the researcher.

The research has revealed that in multigrade schools much emphasis must be placed on the training of teachers, the equipping of schools with resources and the exposure of teachers to a

wide range of strategies and pedagogy that is apt at curriculum implementation at multigrade schools.

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To almighty God, to God be the Glory!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research paper is a qualitative study of curriculum implementation of a Multi-Grade School in the North Eastern Education District of Trinidad. The case studied is the perception of teachers as they attempt to implement the curriculum at the school. The fastidious context of the school's history is central to this research therefore sections of this chapter provide a historical overview of the school, the school present staffing and the culture of the school. This is followed by the definitions of key terms that will be used in the research paper, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and the significance of the study follow.

Organization of Study

The present study is organized as follows. Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the study. Chapter Two presents the literature review that situates this study. Chapter 2 discusses the methodologies used in similar studies. This gave a framework for this dissertation's methodology. Chapter Three presents the design of this study, its methodology, and its theoretical and philosophical framework. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for teachers, parents, and students.

SCHOOLS'S HISTORY

North Coast Government Primary School is located on Pablo Street, on the southern side of the Northern Main Road, in the immediate vicinity of the thirty-six-and-a half mile post. The school opened its doors to receive its first intake of students on 1968, September 11th approximately one year after the foundation stone was laid in October 1967.

The school was a gift of the Venezuelan government to the residents of Montevideo, specifically, and the government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, generally. It was built to accommodate seventy-five students and included living quarters for the Principal. The first principal hailed from Princess Town; and the second principal came from Chaguanas and actually lived at the school with his family. As time went by the living quarters became the principal's office.

The student roll of the school has declined steadily from a high of sixty-six in 1971, to forty-four in 1994, to an all time low of thirteen in 2007. The school started with a staff of two teachers and the principal in 1968; the school continued to have a staff of three until 1997, August 28th when another teaching post was added in response to a request by the principal, at that time. Although the additional teacher did help to ease the work load of everyone, both staff configurations still demanded that all teachers do multi-level teaching. This state of affairs still exists with its obvious challenge to deliver the curriculum.

Delivery of the curriculum has historically been further hampered by a rapid staff turnover. For example, between September 1994 and September 2000, there were twenty five different staff configurations, usually with a shortage of trained teachers. This pattern hardly changed until 2003, when we got a fully trained staff.

CURRENT STAFFING

At present the school is staffed with one principal, three trained teachers, one untrained teacher, a school clerical officer on contract for three years, three security guards on a twelve-hour shift rotation, and one cleaner. The various skills and abilities assembled in this group are in the areas of Craft, Singing, Spanish, Music, Cookery, Physical Education and Sports, Gardening, Tour Guiding, Computers, Literature, Accounting and Painting.

SCHOOL'S CULTURE

The school has a school climate that is welcoming and exudes hospitality while still being businesslike. The personnel try building a culture of team-ship and supportiveness as the foundation for greater levels of productivity in the teaching/learning enterprise in the school. The staff is amenable to suggestions for constructive change and responds with excitement and enthusiasm to progressive ideas and is flexible enough to try them.

Established Customs, Plans and or Programmes

Over the last several years some of the practices that have become entrenched are:

1. All students must enter a classroom and begin to read upon arrival at school in the morning.
2. Participation in school garden competitions
3. Participation in song festival
4. Participation in Art and Craft competitions
5. Participation in Athletics at zonal, district, national levels.
6. Biennial Sports and Family Day – Labour Day June 19th

The school's programme of work emphasizes language and literacy across the curriculum. Reading as a subject is done every day in some form. At the beginning of the 2003-2004

academic years the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) was administered to audit the Reading level of every child in the school. Teachers had attended workshops in Language Arts and Reading conducted by facilitators. They were also given guidelines on the correct use of the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). Students and teachers have left since this was done so the exercise must be repeated.

The school's policy is to expose every child to the computer and to help them develop all the basic skills. We intend to use the computer for teaching and learning in all other subject areas; reading, mathematics, spelling, Spanish, social studies etc.

Students have been exposed and will continue to be exposed to music theory and practice. Students will be given the opportunity to learn a musical instrument; keyboard, recorder, guitar, cuatro, drums. Listening to and discussing music will be a regular activity.

Agricultural Science and physical education are being given special attention. We plan to resume our participation in Agricultural Science competitions and to expand our physical education programme.

Vision

We envisage that in five years time Monte Video Government Primary School will be established as a provider of quality education to its clients; through a programme of work that has depth, variety and aesthetics; and delivered by a highly professional, technologically competent staff.

Mission

We will produce a well-rounded citizen in a community that is sensitive to its collective duty in the task of creating a society that is peaceful, enterprising, resourceful, self-reliant, and productive and supports the rule of law.

We will initiate change through the engagement of our clientele in a joint enterprise that fosters learning by the use of technology and social encounters; that elevates self-esteem through constructivism and broadens horizons through cultural exchange.

This Mission Statement arises from the clarion call of a previous statement in the year 1999 which is appended to fixate our minds on our original moorings and intentions.

MISSION STATEMENT – 1999

Monte Video Government Primary School will offer to each (and every) pupil the opportunity to develop life skills through a curriculum that is humane, balanced, holistic and integrative; and will, in partnership with the community – local, national and regional – promote the emotional, spiritual, physical, intellectual, cultural, moral and social development of all its stakeholders.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Rural: Rural areas (referred to as "the countryside") are large and isolated areas of an open [country](#) (in reference to open fields and not forests, etc.), often with low [population](#) density.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rural_area

- Multi-grade school: Multi-grade schools, defined as schools where one teacher teaches two or more grades simultaneously, are common in rural areas throughout the world.

<http://www.iadb.org/sds/doc/Edu&Tech10.pdf>

- Multi-grade teaching: Multi-grade Teaching is a term used to describe the teaching in primary education of children from a number of grades usually in one class.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001038/103817e>.

- Curriculum: A curriculum may also refer to a defined and prescribed course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education.

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-curriculum>.

- Curriculum: In formal education, a curriculum (; plural: curricula,) is the set of courses, and their content, offered at a school or university.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curriculum.

- Implementation: Implementation is the realization of an application, or execution of a plan, idea, model, design, specification, standard, algorithm, or policy.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Implementation

The Problem Statement (Research Issue)

The unfortunate reality is that Multigrade schools form the most neglected part of the education system. For the most part, they are located in isolated, low-income rural areas, and generally have untrained teachers. The few trained teachers usually understand and use only “monograde” pedagogy. National curriculum contents, teaching and learning materials and activities taught at

schools are frequently geared for monograde classes. The result of untrained and inappropriately trained teachers, as well as lack of appropriate teaching learning materials, is that children in multi-grade classrooms spend much of their time relearning material they already know or sit idle and boxed. <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/multigrade> .

Multigrade classes and one teacher schools – where a single teacher is responsible for students of various ages spread over several classes and who study different curricula – offer an answer.

Such classes, which have existed for a great many years in developed countries, made it possible to provide universal primary education in good conditions even for the most isolated rural populations. Since the end of the second world war, the flight to the cities and slowing population growth have caused considerable reduction in the education services provided in the rural areas of Western Europe, and without multigrade classes it would have been impossible to maintain a local school in many villages. International Institute for Educational Planning.

<http://www.unesco.org/iiep>

This report presents the results of survey research into multigrade schools in Belize, Central America. Schools in the sample were 'full' multigrade schools, or those having two or more grades per teacher. Questionnaires were used to collect data across a range of school related issues. The report includes a lot of interesting descriptive information to guide policy makers. It also attempts to compare multigrade schools with other primary schools in Belize on student performance in the Belize primary school leaving examination. Multigrade schools were found to perform on average in the bottom third of all schools nationally.

This Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), report uses the results of the first four-year cycle of inspections to compare the achievements and quality of small schools with larger schools. Two categories of small schools are defined: those with fewer than 100 pupils (small

schools), and those with fewer than 50 pupils (very small schools). In terms of achievement, students in very small schools achieve significantly less than those in larger schools when eligibility for free school meals is low. There is also a wide disparity between achievement in small schools, with more than would be expected in both the top and bottom performing 100 schools. Pupils in small and very small schools are less likely to make unsatisfactory or poor progress than those in larger schools, but those in very small schools are less likely to make good or very good progress.

<http://www.multigrade.ioe.ac.uk/bibliography/annotated%20bibliography%20N-Z.DOC>

The quality of teaching in small and very small schools is reported to be similar to that in larger schools. The biggest weakness is in under-fives provision where teachers in small schools find it difficult to pitch work at an appropriate level, especially when the younger pupils are a minority in a mixed age class. The curriculum is otherwise reported to be as broad and balanced as that experienced by pupils in larger schools. Strengths of small and very small schools potentially lie in their ethos, and the leadership of the head teacher. Although small schools have higher unit costs than larger schools, they are reported to use the money they have wisely effectively.

<http://www.multigrade.ioe.ac.uk/bibliography/annotated%20bibliography%20N-Z.DOC>

In the local context, a high percentage of the students experienced minimal academic success at this school with an even higher percentage either leaving secondary school with no CSEC passes or they would have dropped out (not completed) secondary school.

The teacher turnover has been very high over the last ten years where the staff would have changed at least twenty five (25) times or more during 1993 -2010. The issues of resources and

other materials have been a challenge for administrators and staff at this school mainly because of the geography and socio-economic dynamics of the community.

A number of teachers are also confronted with the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching in a multi-grade school which is a first time experience and a cultural shock for many whether they are trained teachers or assistant teachers and has also contributed to the significance of this study.

From the interviews (formal and informal) and observations with the teachers, salient data arose that impels the researcher to elicit reasons that initially were not fore-thought as to why teachers in districts such as the one that is under study practice their craft in the manner in which they do.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perception of Curriculum Implementation at a small rural Multi-grade school. In more specific terms the study was designed to respond to the following research questions:

4. What knowledge do teachers at this Multi-grade school have in Curriculum Implementation?
5. What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?
6. What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to explore teachers' expression of the curriculum implementation processes at a small rural school. The researcher intends to use qualitative research methods in situations where individual teachers navigate the planning and implementation policies of their practice in a school in the North Eastern Educational District. Through this investigation recommendations will be generated so that the implementation of curricula at Multi-grade schools will inform: North Coast Education (Toco), School Supervision (Curriculum), Administrators of Multi-grade schools, Teachers of multi-grade schools, Parents and their respective PTAs and Other stakeholders in education (School boards and other denominational boards).

CHAPTER 2

RATIONALE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the rationale and literature review for the current study. The purpose of the rationale is to provide good reason for the study and the literature review outlines the input of materials on innovation and implementation studies in the developed, second and other third world countries but the researcher found very little literature applicable to the third world with reference to implementation models of curriculum especially as it relates to multigrade schools. This very notion however, provides the justification for this study since there is very little information on curriculum implementation in third world countries.

RATIONALE

Curriculum Implementation is a critical process in any learning institution. Multi-grade teaching is not a new idea, but it now calls for a much broader operational and technical definition to

address problems and issues facing most educational systems. Thus Curriculum Implementation at multigrade schools must be seen as an even more important process. The traditional mode of teaching in school and classroom settings has remained the dominant way of organizing formal learning. The standard practice is to organize by class or grade, and have one teacher responsible for teaching one grade of pupils. However, socio-economic factors in rural and sparsely populated communities have often changed the traditional way of organizing schooling through designated separate grades under separate class teachers. That is why multi-grade teaching offers a genuine and workable alternative to traditional modes of teaching, because it caters for the needs of teachers and learners in rural sparsely populated classrooms.

As stated by Kaluba (1997) developing quality of education calls not only for increasing levels of budgetary allocation to the sector, but also ensuring that such measures are accompanied by policies and strategies that will create a sustainable and enabling teaching and learning environment, be in urban or rural schools (<http://www.fao.org>). As part of the teaching staff of the institution under study, my association with the policies that guide implementation has given me deep insight and perspective into what obtains at this school, thereby arming me with the relevant paraphernalia for a study of this nature.

The rationale for the study is to examine the teachers' perception of curriculum implementation at this particular school. Additionally, the study will provide information that has the potential for contributing to research literature on curriculum implementation with specifics to multigrade schools and multigrade teaching in the Caribbean. This literature is reviewed in the following section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

McNeil (1990) views curriculum development as policy making. He posits:

In the process of curriculum as policy making, there are external and internal participants who influence curriculum policy making. Some of the internal participants include the teachers, the principals, the superintendents, and the students. External participants include the local school board, the local communities, the regional and state agencies, the testing agencies, the federal government, the suppliers of textbooks and materials, and the pressure groups.

Curriculum is the way content is designed and delivered. It includes the structure, organization, balance, and presentation of the content in the classroom (National Research Council, 1996).

As defined here, curriculum is a set of materials that includes both content and instructional guidelines. The set of materials may be from one publisher or developer or may have been selected from a variety of materials organized by the school or district.

Fullan (1982) identified implementation as:

The process of putting into practice an idea, program or a set of activities new to the people attempting or expecting to change. The change may be externally imposed or voluntarily sought; explicitly defined in advance or developed and adapted incrementally through use; designed to be used uniformly or deliberately planned so that users can make modifications according to their perceptions of the needs of the situation (p. 54).

He further proposes that the question of implementation is simply whether or not a given idea, practice or program gets “put in place”. In focusing on teaching and learning, for example, he has suggested that implementation consists of (1) using new materials, (2) engaging in new behaviors and practices and, (3) incorporating new beliefs (Fullan, 2001 a).

In every school the written curriculum must be implemented thus as Fullan (1982) suggests, be it the ideas or a new program, the people who are charged with the execution of these ideas or programs must buy into them for any success to occur.

The needs of the society must be captured in any curriculum document as posited by Longstreet & Shane (1993) who affirm:

Curriculum design follows a systematic and logically based framework. The purposes of schooling, which respond to the needs of society, provide the basis or conceptual framework that guide the curriculum.

Pratt (1994) added to this phenomenon when he stated:

Curriculum planning must address the problems that affect the world in which education in general and curriculum in particular inhabit. These problems provide the theoretical framework for a curriculum. Pratt observes that "the function of curriculum is to enhance human well-being" (p. 5).

The literature also pointed to the fact that persons involved in curriculum must possess some form of theoretical perspective:

In Oliva's curriculum model (1993), Taba (1962) observes that "any enterprise as complex as curriculum development requires some kind of theoretical or conceptual framework of thinking to guide it" (p. 413).

Oliva (1988) further observes that curriculum development responds and is affected by social forces, philosophical positions, psychological principles, accumulating knowledge, and educational leadership at its moment in history. The influence of educational groups and individuals has been responsible for the implementation of curricular innovations and permanent changes.

Ornstein and Hunkins (1993) indicate that not everyone agrees on what curriculum is or what curriculum development involves. They state that:

"Curriculum development draws on the principles (usually technical or scientific) and consists of those processes (humanistic, humane, and artistic) that allow schools and school people to realize certain educational goals" (p.191). Ornstein and Hunkins observe that in the process of curriculum development there are numerous models that can be followed. These models can be classified as technical-scientific or nontechnical scientific. The model chosen will depend on the purpose of the curriculum.

Zais (1976) observes that there are three interrelated processes related to curriculum work which are:

(a) curriculum construction which refers to the decision making process that determines the nature and design of a curriculum, (b) curriculum development which consists of the procedures for carrying on the construction process, and (c) implementation which refers

to the process of putting into effect the curriculum produced by curriculum construction and development.

Pratt (1994) points out:

Implementing a curriculum conveys change which implies social action that builds a climate of acceptance for the change. Implementing a curriculum includes the following steps: (a) establishing a climate of trust, (b) implementing changes that meet the recognized needs, (c) consult widely, (d) establishing clear goals and limited scope, (e) developing an ethos of collegiality, (f) using personal contact, (g) providing systematic in-service training; (h) providing time and resources, (i) trying not to change everyone, and (j) not despairing.

According to Pratt, these steps should facilitate the implementation process.

Miller and Seller (1985) in discussing curriculum implementation indicate:

Curriculum implementation is a process and that a plan must be developed for curriculum implementation. The curriculum implementation plan, according to them, has seven primary components which are: (a) a study of the new program, (b) identification of resources, (c) role definition, (d) professional development, (e) timeliness, (f) communications system and (g) monitoring the implementation. This plan will help identify difficulties and deal with implementation problems more effectively.

Cohen and Hill, (1998) posited that putting new curricula into practice in the classroom can serve as a powerful professional development opportunity for teachers. Through

using a particular curriculum with their students, reporting on what happens, and reflecting with others on different ideas and activities, teachers learn about their own teaching and their students' learning.

http://www.wested.org/tal/five_film_categories/CURRICULUM/curriculum-implementation.html.

The history of multigrade schools is not a modern phenomenon, this trend goes back even from the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Muse, Smith, & Barker (1987), put forward that in 1918, there were 196,037 one-room schools, representing 70.8 percent of all public schools in the United States. By 1980, less than 1,000 of these schools remained. But the multigrade classroom persists.

For example other studies went on to show the profusion of multigrade schools in America.

Rule (1983) for example, in a study consisting of multigrade classrooms of only two grades, used a sample from a suburban district outside Phoenix, Arizona. Of the 21,000 elementary students in the district, approximately 17 percent were in classrooms that combined grades. In rural, small elementary schools the incidence of students served in multigrade classrooms may well be much higher.

Multigrade Teaching experts from two of the most populated countries in the world – China and India respectively – adopt a positive approach to Multigrade Teaching. They are also highly indicative of its potential role in realizing the demand of Education for All. Although almost all countries in the region engage in Multigrade Teaching as a technique, not all share this same optimism.

Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID) states that Multigrade Teaching is known” to almost all member countries of APEID, the exception being Afghanistan where it is not presently utilized in formal education but is under consideration for its own introduction.

Its incidence is varied across the region and ranges from about two-thirds of the number of primary schools in India to about two percent of schools in the Republic of Korea. This is no different to this country and many other Caribbean and Latin American countries.

Surely there is a need for continuous research in this area. Bruce A Miller stated:

While there is a need for more research studies on the effectiveness to be made, the evidence from studies such as that by Bruce A Miller (“A Review of the Quantitative Research on Multigrade Instruction” in *Research in Rural Education*, Fall 1990, Vol. 7, No. 1 pp. 1-8) is encouraging in pursuing this medium of instruction.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001038/103817e.pdf>

Perhaps the major problem facing the training of Multigrade teachers is the inherent contradiction involved in seeking teachers who have highly specialized skills and knowledge concerning Multigrade Teaching, but at the same time, having highly specific local knowledge. The contradiction comes from the fact that the large majority of Multigrade Teaching schools are to be found in remote regions, often where a minority culture lives. Thus, the teacher who is to teach at the Multigrade school needs to be specially trained in Multigrade Teaching techniques, usually in a training institution removed from this local culture. But at the same time the teacher must be someone who is familiar with the local language and area, and also sensitive to and knowledgeable about the minority culture. This problem is further compounded when there is a

difference in the value system held by differing cultures. This issue becomes complicated when the teacher who is from one culture is sent to teach in a region where a different culture predominates.

Olson (1988) adds that:

The culture of society is a central factor in determining how new ideas will fare. Culture lies at the heart of school reform.

Peer teaching is also a potentially useful technique for use in Multigrade Teaching schools. Again, the benefits of the use of such a technique will only occur if appropriate pre- and in-service training is provided to teachers. Quite specific training on the techniques of peer teaching would be required. There is an increasing need for Multigrade Teaching teachers to be able to assess (both on the basis of ability and social factors) the needs of individual students. The requirement for Multigrade teachers to be able to do this is probably more important than for teachers in regular schools because of the wider range of students with whom Multigrade teachers need to deal. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001038/103817e.pdf>

The large-scale innovations of the 60s and 70s have virtually ended. But the multigrade classroom persists, especially in small, rural schools. Yet, here, as elsewhere, most people view graded schools as the natural way to organize education. This norm can be a handicap for anyone (whether out of necessity or by theoretical design) who wants to--or who must--work with multigrade classrooms or schools.

Cohen (1989) affirms that nonetheless, recent proposals for school restructuring reflect renewed interest in multigrade organization and in small-scale organization generally.

Such work may eventually contest the norm of the graded school.

Many teachers, administrators, and parents continue to wonder whether or not multigrade schools have negative effects on student performance. Research evidence indicates that being a student in a multigrade classroom does not negatively affect academic performance, social relationships, or attitudes. As Miller (1990) advocates in his review in thirteen (13) experimental studies assessing academic achievement in single-grade and multigrade classrooms:

There is to be no significant differences between these two systems. The data clearly support the multigrade classroom as a viable and equally effective organizational alternative to single-grade instruction. The limited evidence suggests there may be significant differences depending on subject or grade level. Primarily, these studies reflect the complex and variable nature of school life. Moreover, there are not enough such studies to make safe generalizations about which subjects or grade levels are best for multigrade instruction.

When it comes to student affect, however, the case for multigrade organization appears much stronger. Of the 21 separate measures used to assess student affect in the studies reviewed, 81 percent favored the multigrade classroom (Miller, 1990).

If this is the case, why then do we not have more schools organized into multigrade classrooms?

One response is that history and convention dictate the prevalence of graded classrooms.

However, there is a related, but more compelling, answer to be found in the classrooms themselves and in information drawn from classroom practitioners.

To teach more than one class level can be a huge challenge for assistant teachers and trained teachers alike. In the challenge of teaching multigrade schools in this country, a major factor is the skills or lack of skills by the teachers. Callahan (1962) confirms when he stated that:

The multigrade classroom can be more of a challenge than the single-grade classroom. Skills and behavior required of the teacher may be different, and coordinating activities can be more difficult. In fact, such a realization is one reason graded schools came into being in the first place.

Six key instructional dimensions affecting successful multigrade teaching have been identified from multigrade classroom research (Miller, 1991). Note that each of these points has some bearing on the related issues of independence and interdependence. It is important to cultivate among students the habits of responsibility for their own learning, but also their willingness to help one another learn:

Classroom organization: Instructional resources and the physical environment to facilitate learning; classroom management and discipline: Classroom schedules and routines that promote clear, predictable instructional patterns, especially those that enhance student responsibility for their own learning; instructional organization and curriculum: Instructional strategies and routines for a maximum of cooperative and self-directed student learning based on diagnosed student needs. Also includes the effective use of time; instructional delivery and grouping: Methods that improve the quality of instruction, including strategies for organizing group learning activities across and within grade levels; self-directed learning: Students' skills and strategies for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning individually or in combination with other

students; Peer tutoring: Classroom routines and students' skills in serving as "teachers" to other students within and across differing grade levels.

Cooperation is a necessary condition of life in the multigrade classroom. All ages become classmates, and this closeness extends beyond the walls of the school to include the community. Miller, (1989) adds that:

Multigrade teachers recognize that whole-class instruction must revolve around open task activities if all students are to be engaged. For example, a teacher can introduce a writing assignment through topic development where all students "brainstorm" ideas. In this context, students from all grades can discuss different perspectives. They can learn to consider and respect the opinions of others.

In order to successfully implement multigrade programmed Beneviste and McEwan, (2000) have put forward that:

When considering the implementation of multigrade programmes for countries in Africa and the Caribbean, attention needs to be paid to the 'will' of teachers to implement. This is potentially affected by four factors. These are lack of faith in multigrade pedagogy, professional and social isolation, difficulties of teaching in a multigrade classroom, and 'ownership' of multigrade teaching.

One possible pedagogical underpinning for multigrade classroom organization lies in the multiage literature. This perspective argues that grouping children across grade and age boundaries is beneficial for children both socially and cognitively. A good summary of this position is provided by Pratt (1986). He uses findings from anthropology to show that the

'natural' way in which infants are socialized in many cultures is in mixed age groups. He also points out that age segregation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The biggest advantage for children in a mixed age setting, it is argued, lies in the development of wider friendship groups and a reduction in competition and aggression. A review of qualitative research from the USA by Miller (1991) suggests that, if multigrade school contexts are not overly disadvantaged by virtue of their location, these types of advantages can and do accrue to children.

In developing countries, the evidence that exists of conditions in multigrade schools suggests that they may be extremely disadvantaged by virtue of their location. The UNESCO/APEID study referred to earlier lists several home background disadvantages, such as lack of parental interest in education, poor nutrition, and a mismatch between home and school culture. Other difficulties commonly lie in the supply of materials and infrastructure, and appropriately trained and qualified teachers. However, there is also some evidence that multigrade schools can be very positive places for children when these constraints do not apply.

In Togo and Burkina Faso, Jarousse and Mingat suggest three possible explanations for the differences they found in achievement between students in multigrade and monograde classes. Firstly, they argue that teachers in multigrade classes employ more effective pedagogy. There is more emphasis placed on individual work, peer work, and a wider variety of presentation techniques are used. Secondly, the pupils remain with the same teacher for a two year period. Thirdly, weaker students in the upper grade are able to catch up because some teaching is geared towards the younger children in the class. Lungwangwa also found that the introduction of multigrade techniques in Zambia resulted in a decrease in dropout rates from school, and an increase in enrollment.

In Belize, the more effective multigrade schools in the Nielsen et al study tended to be nearer to main towns, to have two classrooms or more and fewer than three classes per teachers, and to have access to above the national average in textbooks. Their teachers were more mature (above 30), more educated, more likely to be trained, and to live close to the school. Teachers in the high performing schools made more use of peer tutoring and cross age tutoring. They also involved the community in the life of the school. High performing schools had frequent supervisory visits, and a principal who was supportive of her teachers and stayed at the school.

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, Berry found that multigrade teachers were more likely to employ group work than monograde teachers. This is because they had to deal with more than one grade level in the same class. He speculates that as a result of this, multigrade students are more likely to have opportunities to interact together in mixed ability groups. This leads to a more cooperative classroom and advantages for low achievers in particular. In monograde classes, on the other hand, teacher directed lessons with high levels of competition are much less advantageous to under-performing students.

There are, therefore, examples of good practice from both the Caribbean and Africa. In both regions, there is also evidence that the good practice in multigrade classes is in some respects superior to that found in monograde classrooms. This has potential implications for the way in which teachers are trained as will be discussed in the next section.

<http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/94851/>

Multigrade teaching technique is one of the means of achieving universalization of education as proposed by The World Education Conferences held in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, the Education for All (EFA) goals of 2000 and Dakar Framework of Action (2001). In the paper, the efforts of

the Federal government of Nigeria at meeting the EFA and FFA goals are highlighted. Two models, 'Multigame Teaching Model' and 'Combination Models' are developed in the paper. The paper further highlights the operation of multigrade classes and the problems facing multigrade teaching in Nigeria.

Figure 1 : Multigrade Teaching Model (MTM)

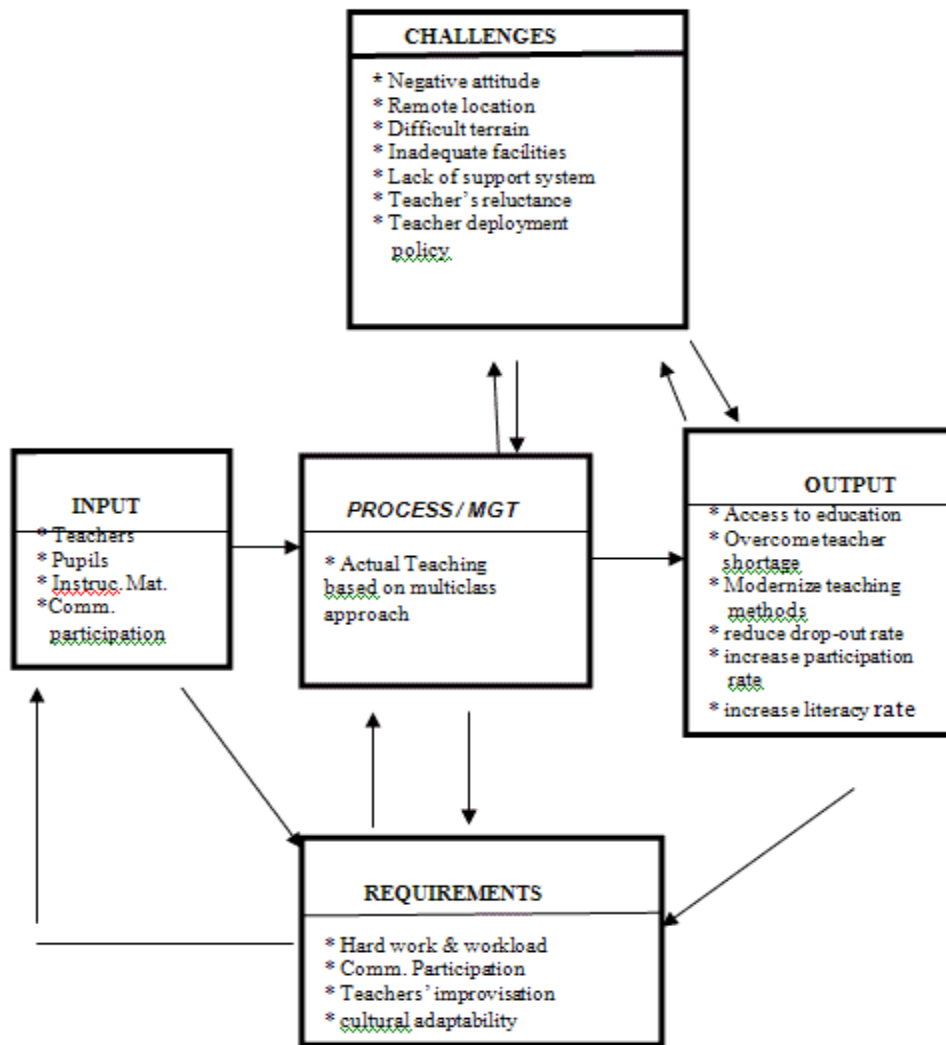


Figure 1 presents a model of multigrade teaching showing the inputs, process and output systems. Also from the model, the challenges posed by multigrade teaching as well as all the requirements to make MGT realistic are shown in the boxes. A single-edged line reveals the direction to which information flows while double-edged lines reveal that there are interconnectivities between the variables in such boxes.

The literature has shown that the head teacher and multiclass teachers determine which of the grades or levels should be grouped together. Five basic variables can help in the identification of

Multiclass. These are: Population of pupils, Population of teachers, Level of training, competency and experience of teachers, Adequacy and quality of instructional materials, and Functional classroom.

Figure 2: Combination Models

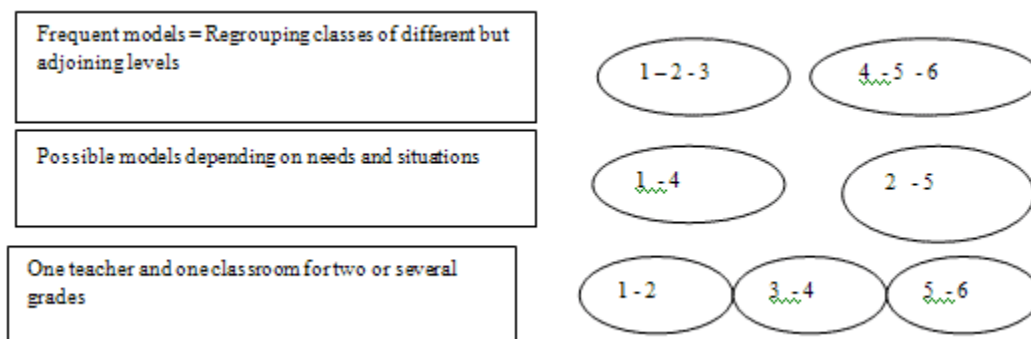


Figure 2 characterizes flexibility and responsiveness to different situations.

The following are the observed problems militating against effective practice of multigrade teaching in Nigeria:

1. Remote location (difficult terrain) of communities that need multigrade teaching.
2. Teachers do refuse posting to multigrade schools for lack of basic amenities and difficult terrain and confidence arising from lack of training in multigrade teaching.
3. Sometimes, teachers prefer to live outside the communities and come to school late or irregularly.
4. Negative attitudes to multigrade teaching.
5. Lack of flexibility in curriculum and time tabling.
6. Inadequate infrastructure and lack of instructional materials.
7. Lack of policy on multigrade teaching and small schools.

8. General lack of knowledge about multigrade teaching even in teacher education institutions.
9. Lack of support systems for multigrade teachers, whether pre-service or in-service

Emphasizing the problems of multigrade teaching in developing countries, (Beneviste and McEwan, 2000) mentioned four potential factors which include lack of faith in multigrade pedagogy, professional and social isolation, difficulties of teaching in a multigrade classroom, and 'ownership' of multigrade teaching. Each of these factors has implications for the development of multigrade teaching programmes in developing countries.

The following are the planning and policy measures that could be evolved to improve multigrade teaching techniques in Nigerian Schools: Sensitization of stakeholders on multigrade teaching particularly, teacher training institutions and commissions and / or institutes such NCCE, NTI and UBEC to raise awareness and correct negative attitudes; Mobilization of communities to support multigrade schools; Make schools child-and teacher-friendly; Provision of adequate instructional materials and infrastructure; Recruitment of teachers from the school communities; Policy statements on small schools and multigrade teaching incentive for multigrade teachers; Opportunities to observe and learn from models of good practice from other countries; Professional support for multigrade teachers through in-service training and appropriate materials for multigrade teachers; Inclusion of MGT in pre-service training of primary and secondary school teachers.

According to Miller (1991), the following suggestions are posited for improving and strengthening multigrade teaching in Nigeria: Clear-cut policies on - maximum and minimum enrolment in multi-grade classes and assignment of school head teachers/ principals and teachers

to manage and organize grade classes; in-service training programs on national, regional, divisional levels for teachers, school administrators and supervisors of multi-grade classes, with emphasis on programming of class activities and budgeting of time, grouping children for instruction, curriculum implementation, preparation of instructional materials, classroom management, priority given to multigrade classes in the distribution of instructional materials and supplies, priority given to schools with multigrade classes in the distribution of extension positions and school buildings, training programs in teacher education institutions included in multi-grade teaching, incentives provided for teachers who have performed well as multigrade teachers in form of merit increase in salary, out of station incentives, additional credits or points in the performance rating and special commendations and /or assistance; Multigrade teaching offered as a field of specialization in pre-service training of teachers and as a special course for non-qualified teachers handling such classes in remote/rural areas; need to evolve national policy on multigrade teaching in the country.

Multigrade teaching approach is necessitated by the need to ensure that pupils in rural areas and difficult terrains are given access to education like their counterparts in urban setting in Nigeria. It is a strategy towards achieving the EFA and FFA educational goals. The efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria at meeting these educational goals are highlighted in the paper. The paper examines the objectives of multigrade teaching and its operation in Nigeria. Two models `Multigrade Teaching Model' and `Combination Models' were developed in the paper. The models emphasise simple system approach to multigrade teaching technique and highlighting the challenges, requirements and class-grouping combinations respectively. The paper further highlights the problems facing multigrade teaching in Nigeria while some planning and policy measures that can improve the approach. <https://www4.nau.edu/cee/jep/journals.aspx?id=284>.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature covers all the topics needed to situate this current study. First, it details curriculum development and policy. This is followed by literature on curriculum implementation and it ends with literature on multigrade schools, practices and problems. This is significant because very little is known about multigrade schools and teaching as it relates to rural education and curriculum implementation practices.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This chapter illustrates the methods and procedures employed in the data collection and analysis of the research. The researcher felt that qualitative methods were most appropriate to embrace the perspective of the interpreters of the curriculum at this particular school. The purpose of this study was to describe experiences and the perception of teachers at a Multigrade school in the North Eastern Education District of Trinidad.

Nature of Qualitative Research

“I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material” (Creswell, 1998, p. 13).

Qualitative research is becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences for researchers who are often trying to understand social and human problems by studying things or subjects in their natural settings. In a qualitative research study, the researcher constructs a “complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

According to leading experts such as Merriam (1988), Eisner (1991), Bogdan and Biklen (1998), and Creswell (1998), some of the characteristics shared by most qualitative studies are the following: a) natural setting, b) researcher playing a key role in data collection, c) data collected in words or pictures, d) research outcome seen as a process, not a product, e) inductive analysis of data, f) focus on individual participant’s perspective, g) use of expressive language, and h) persuasion by reason.

The qualitative research method used in this particular investigation is the case study method. A case study is an exploration of a system bounded by time and place (a case or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (which include observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports) rich in context (Creswell, 1998).

The aim of this study is to research the phenomenon of quality education through the procurement of verbal descriptions of teacher perceptions of what quality education entails. The

conduct of such an investigation conforms more appropriately with the stipulations of qualitative research which, although just as systematic as quantitative research, emphasizes gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

Philosophical Assumptions

This study was guided by the five philosophical assumptions that guide all qualitative studies. Being a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that multiple realities exist (the ontological issue), namely the realities of the Asian Indian students, the Asian Indian parents, the teachers, and finally, the researcher. Therefore, I “rely on voices and interpretations of informants through extensive quotes, present themes that reflect words used by informants, and advance evidence of different perspectives on each theme” (Creswell, 1998, p. 76). I have used numerous direct quotes from the participants. Secondly, because I am a part of the Asian Indian community, I had no problem abiding by the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research—that of minimizing the objective separateness of the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 1998). As an insider, I had no problem establishing relationships of trust and assuring the participants that I was not there to make judgments, but to gather information for research. The third philosophical assumption to guide this study was the axiological assumption. “In a qualitative study, the investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 1998, p. 76). I was aware that my research is filled with the values of the participants and of the researcher. I have reported the values and biases of my participants, as well as my own perceptions and biases. Fourthly, true to the rhetorical assumptions of qualitative research, I used first-person to describe individual stories. Words such as explore, describe, understand, and discover, meaning, nature, and characteristics are important rhetorical markers in my purpose

statement and in the research questions. Finally, my study reflects the methodological assumptions of qualitative research. My study is truly exploratory, and I did not specify any codes or categories at the onset of the project. The codes and categories of my research emerged from the data collected from my participants. Thus, all five philosophical assumptions broadly guided my research study.

Research Design

A multiple case study design was used. Each of the four participants were interviewed was defined as a separate case. Common themes or patterns among the participants as well as unique qualities each participant might possess were examined via one and one recorded interviews.

Role of the Researcher

The problem in conducting research among the members of the same group to which the researcher belongs is often referred to as the “problem of over identification” (Dasgupta, 1989, 31). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to this as doing research in “your own backyard—within your own institution or agency, or among friends and colleagues’ (21). Creswell (1998) strongly advises against such research because the participants might withhold information, or change the information so that they can maintain a certain social image. He believes that it is extremely difficult to observe objectively the phenomenon in which the researcher is deeply involved. This type of research would actually be more productive because the researcher’s involvement in the institution/culture would help her/him to understand the participants and see the world through their experiences. These problems can also be avoided if the researcher is aware of the possibility of over identification (Saran, 1985). These problems could also be avoided by

triangulation of research sources. Therefore, I conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with the teachers so I was able to collect rich, thick data.

Participant Selection

This study was focused on four teachers with varying years of teaching experience at the same school. They possessed a variety of training in the phenomenon under study so an objective conclusion can be arrived at based on their own interpretation of the situation in which they practice their craft daily.

Instrumentation

The interview protocol for the participants was developed around the three research questions. The questions were centered on the participants' knowledge of curriculum implementation, knowledge on multigrade schools and classes, strategies of implementing curricular in a multigrade setting and the problems of implementing curricular again in a multigrade setting (see appendix A).

Interview Plan

The plan for conducting the teacher interviews consisted of calling each participant to set up an interview at a site that was mutually agreeable to both parties. The researcher wanted to conduct the interviews at his office. This would be a neutral location, where the teachers could be more

comfortable and candid in their responses. All other interviews occurred in school's library. Some of the interviews took place during the afternoon, at the lunch break and after school.

Data Collection & Data Analysis

In qualitative studies such as this one, the researcher is well recognized as the principal research instrument (Patton, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Berg, 1995). The researcher's role is to gain insight into the case under study and interpret the data collected through various means. For this project, the researcher used lengthy interviews with the participants and follow up discussions.

The interviews were 15 to 20 minute in-depth interviews of the teachers lived experiences at the school in which they worked. The purpose of in-depth interviewing was not to test hypotheses or to evaluate (Patton, 1990), but to try to understand the experiences of the participants and the meanings they find in those experiences (Stoney, 1999). After the interviews were transcribed and made available to the participants, some of them made some minor changes to the transcription on the paper copy. The researcher then revised the information. These revised versions were used by the researcher for data analysis.

Ethical Issues Involved in this Study

Regardless of the exact method used, a qualitative researcher is always faced with a number of ethical issues that arise at different junctures of the research process, such as data collection, data analysis, and data sharing. Qualitative research experts such Bogdan & Biklen (1998), Merriam (1998), and Creswell (1998) have set numerous guidelines to maintain the ethical standards of qualitative studies such as: a) the researcher must protect the anonymity of the participants, b)

the researcher must treat the participants with dignity and respect, c) the researcher must not engage in any deception about the nature of the study and must explain the purpose of the study, d) the researcher must present the truth when reporting the research findings, e) the researcher must not report information shared with them off the record, and f) the researcher must seriously consider whether to share personal experiences with the participants.

The researcher abided by these guidelines. Aliases were assigned to the participants. When appropriate, personal experiences relevant to the study were shared with the participants.

In the data analysis and interpretation stages, the researcher made sure that the identities of the participants were kept confidential.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In qualitative research establishing trustworthiness, or “the study’s truth-value” (Stoney, 1999, 93) is extremely important. “Trust is a developmental process that is established between the researcher and participants”, (Stoney, 1999, 86). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) there are four main standards of ensuring trustworthiness: a) credibility, or producing believable findings and interpretations for critical readers, b) transferability, or writing a sufficiently thick description to enable persons who are interested in transferring this knowledge to their own circumstances to be able to do so, c) dependability, producing results that can be trusted, and d) confirmability, or making sure that the data support the conclusions accurately. In the current study, these four standards were met in the following ways.

Credibility

“Credibility relates to the degree that the study achieves truth”, (Stoney, 1999, 86). In the current research study, credibility was achieved in the following manner:

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortion, and building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 301). To ensure prolonged engagement, the researcher collected data for over two months.

Member Checking

Member checking provides “the participants the opportunity to clarify interpretations and provide additional information” (Stoney, 1999, 89). After the individual interviews with the participants were transcribed, the researcher asked the teachers to read them and make sure the essence of their views have been captured.

Transferability

According to Krathwohl (1998), “the rich and detailed illustrations of qualitative research” (343) allow readers to see if these descriptions fit their own experiences, and thus transfer to new situations. This study includes thick, rich descriptions of the participants and the setting.

Dependability

Dependability ensures that if a study were to be replicated using the same type of participants in the same context, the findings would be then replicated (Erlandson, et al., 1994). The researcher took field notes during interviews and during peer debriefing. This left an audit trail, which helped establish dependability. Triangulation of participants also served to maintain dependability of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the “degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interest, or perspectives of the inquirer” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 290). The audit trail and triangulation also helped in establishing the confirmability of this study.

Methodological Limitations of the Study

A lack of generalizability is often cited as one of the inherent limitations of qualitative research. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), generalizability refers to “the ability to generalize or transfer the use of qualitative findings to other populations, settings, and context” (144). However, qualitative studies are very context dependent, and are therefore not transferable or generalizable.

A second limitation of qualitative research is the use of a human as the principal instrument of data collection. Bogdan & Biklen (1998) suggest a number of ways to reduce this limitation. First of all the researcher was always aware of the fact that the primary goal of this research was to understand, not judge. The researcher also took extensive notes with ample subjective and objective reflection. In addition, the researcher submitted interview transcripts to the students for verification. This procedure is called member check (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Limitations of the Study

The following limitation should be taken into account when interpreting the finding of this data: data collection is unique to the specific context, study deals specifically with the perception of

the teachers, teachers are not formerly trained in curriculum implementation practices, sample size limits true representation and therefore its findings cannot be generalized to a larger sample, researcher's bias and an all female samples.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is restricted to four teachers in one school in one education district over a period of time. It is also delimit to the teachers' experiences and training that they would have gained over the years of teaching at this particular school.

Data Collection and Sample

Observations of participants, interviews with the four (4) participants that vary in their experiences in teaching and the teaching experiences it must be noted however, that the teaching experiences of the teachers vary from less than one year to eleven (11) years among staff.

Data Management and Analysis

- Verbatim transcription of data collected.
- Coding by themes

Use of themes to make general conclusions about this research.

Chapter Summary

Using a case study design, the researcher explored the curriculum implementation experiences of the teachers at this multigrade school. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the nature of qualitative research, philosophical assumptions that guided this study and the theoretical

framework for this study. In explaining his research design, he discussed the role of the researcher and the limitations that accompany being a member of the participant group. The next section discussed the processes of data collection and data analysis. For this project, the researcher used interviews for the core-curriculum teachers. The next section detailed how the researcher dealt with the ethical issues such as protecting the anonymity of participants and establishing trustworthiness. The chapter ends with a discussion of the methodological limitations of the study.

Chapter Four

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research findings of the Curriculum Implementation experiences of the four teachers as they attempt to execute curriculum delivery at the school that is under study. Three primary themes emerged from the research, which led to several sub-themes during coding and data analysis. In this discussion of themes and sub-themes, I have included direct narrations by the participants in an attempt to capture the true essence and richness of data.

This chapter presents the findings (in the form of themes) from data analyses which are based on the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do teachers at this Multi-grade school have in Curriculum Implementation?
2. What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?
3. What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

Three major themes evolved from these research data: a) a state of confusion b) strategies employed in curriculum implementation and c) problems of curriculum implementation. Further

to this, sub-themes emerged from the main three. The themes are mainly discussed from the point-of-view of the participants. At the conclusion of this chapter, a summary of the analyzed data is given in themes.

A state of confusion

Three out of the four participants demonstrated by their answers that they were very much confused by the notion of Curriculum Implementation. Responses from participant II on the question: What do you know about Curriculum Implementation?

Okay that's implementing the curriculum in the classroom; it is what the way you teach and what the teacher teaches.

Participant III:

I think that has to do with the syllabus and how you use it, to teach the children, how you deliver it in the classroom, how you use it to probably to more or less like ah...the scheme of work where we take out topics from the syllabus and plan a programme of work for the term and maybe how we go about to teach...

Participant I:

Not much! According to my understanding it is a set structured document that gives out knowledge to the students on the different subjects that you teach.

Participant IV:

Curriculum is what you teach and curriculum implementation is how you go about teaching the curriculum.

All participants demonstrate either a vague understanding of curriculum implementation or a bemused response based on the type of responses that they give. The perception of a definition of what curriculum implementation is, fell outside of what the experts suggest.

Strategies used in curriculum implementation

The second theme that arose from the data is that of strategies that the participants employ in curriculum implementation at the school. From the data collected it showed that the individual participants use different strategies in the different classes. Seven sub-themes emerged from the data which varied across classes and teachers' practice:

1. Group Work
2. Peer Discussion/Peer Teaching
3. Matching of Content
4. Thematic Units
5. Projects
6. Testing and Diagnosing
7. Individual Teaching (Individual Attention)

Group Work

Participant III and Participant IV indicated that group work is one of the strategies that they utilize in their implementation practices. This demonstrated that fifty percent of the teachers at this school use group work as a strategy.

Participant III shared this:

I put the students in group of two or three because of the number of students in the class and allow them to work on solutions for different problems in the different content areas.

Participant IV had this to say:

I try to make the standard three and four work in groups so if I group them so that a standard three is grouped with a standard four, the standard four will help the standard three although at times the standard three will help the standard four.

Peer Discussion/Peer Teaching

One participant used this strategy in the delivery of the curriculum. Participant III put forward this:

It is easier to allow a student that is more knowledgeable to work with another student that is weaker because at time a peer might be able to explain a phenomenon better to his/her peer than the teacher.

Matching of Content

It was realized from the data collected that this strategy was more common among the four teachers that were interviewed. Three out of the four teachers use this approach.

Participant I said:

Since I have two classes to teach at times I match topics that correlate according to the objectives of the syllabus for these specific classes.

Participant II had this to say:

Well I teach a multigrade class, First Year and Second Year Infants so I use the Second Year curriculum for both classes.

All the students that I have went to preschool before so they have basic knowledge of the First Year infants work so I was think that doing the First Year Infants work is like doing over the preschool work again so I would like if I do the Second Year infants work with them it will be like a boost for Second Year Infants and a help for standard one. Because they knew the preschool work which was part of First Year infants and they knew it good so it is not like they needed remediation work so there is no need to do it over again. Like math where they would not have gone far at the preschool level I will do this area with

them. But if there are students that did not attend preschool, we will have to go through the First Year infants work.

Participant IV adds:

Well I can tell you the strategies that I use. I try to merge the classes as close as possible so some of the topics you will find them in the two classes so I teach standard three and four so like in mathematics, when they are doing rounding off to the nearest, then one class may have to round off to the nearest thousand while a next class may have to round off to the nearest million so I start with the concept and just stretch the standard three a little more so that the standard fours will get covered. So I try to merge the two and stretch so that sometimes the standard fours loose and the standard threes loose because they cannot all win because you try to work the two together.

Thematic Units

From the data one participant makes use of this strategy in implementing the curriculum at this particular school. Participant II had this to say:

Strategies will be ...thematic units for one as the Principal suggested at the beginning of the academic year. I have begun to try that approach.

Projects

One of the participant also made mention of this strategy as a mechanism to implement the curriculum at this school. Participant II had this to say:

Well I started this term with the project. I have not done the project seriously before except for this term I took it seriously when the Principal suggested that a project for the

infants should take about two weeks. I started with the aquatic habitat. I am hoping to do at least three projects for the term hoping to capitalize on more work to be done.

Testing and Diagnosing

One of the participant made mention of this strategy in curriculum implementation at this school.

Participant III says:

Being that the classes are together, first to begin you have to ascertain the levels/class to be taught, the teacher has to figure out from what level the unit/s of work must be taken from using the different syllabi...

Well some form of testing is done; diagnostic testing/test is done or given.

Information gathered from the diagnostic test will be used to plan the different units of work from the different syllabi.

And participant II made an implication of some form of testing and diagnosing. Participant II states:

All the students that I have went to preschool before so they have basic knowledge of the First Year infants work so I was think that doing the First Year Infants work is like doing over the preschool work again so I would like if I do the Second Year infants work with them it will be like a boost for Second Year Infants and a help for standard one. Because they knew the preschool work which was part of First Year infants and they knew it good so it is not like they needed remediation work so there is no need to do it over again. Like math where they would not have gone far at the preschool level I will do this area with them. But if there are students that did not attend preschool, we will have to go through the First Year infants work.

Individual Teaching (Individual Attention)

Participant III had this to say:

One on one teaching by the teacher (Individual Attention) is another strategy that I used quite frequently.

Problems of Implementing the Curriculum

From the data six sub-themes emerged under the main theme of Problems of Implementing the Curriculum. These are:

1. Lack of training of teachers in multigrade teaching.
2. Students possessing low levels of Literacy and Numeracy Skills.
3. Students possessing a non competitive/cooperative spirit towards work.
4. Lack of Parental Involvement.
5. Lack of Resources.
6. Curriculum Overload and Lack of Planning

Lack of training of teachers in multigrade teaching

Three out of the four participants cited that training to meet the demands of multigrade schools and training to teach in such schools is a serious obstruction for students' success at these types of schools. These observations by the participants are well backed by the literature that was reviewed.

Participant I: I think that teachers coming into this school or schools of a similar construct should be trained in curriculum implementation and also in the teaching of multigrade classes so that they will be able to adequately cope and deal with situations

that they meet which will pose a challenge for any teacher who is ill prepared to deal with this unique situation.

Participant III: Well the multigrade setting that we have here other school do not operate other the same conditions – one teacher more than one class and I do believe it requires special training to teach in this situation that is to really be effective.

Participant IV: I do not think that there was any form of training that would have help teachers to deal with this multigrade system. I remembered going to a multigrade workshop once and ah... the issues that were dealt with were of little help to the actual multigrade situation. If the speaker is not a multigrade teacher then it will be difficult for that person to understand what a multigrade teacher has to deal with and even a multigrade situation within one class there are students with varying abilities so it is like a multigrade within a multigrade. And I believe that is where it becomes difficult and I think that there is no actual formal training for teachers of multigrade classes within a multigrade class.

Students possessing low levels of Literacy and Numeracy Skills

The data revealed that all participants agreed that literacy and numeracy skills impeded curriculum implementation at the school.

Participant II: In this school per se we have a lot of am... help me with a word... well though you teach two classes there are still students with problems in reading and writing so which means that although you teach two groups there are different levels of leaning within these two classes.

The participant further states:

Well for one, some of the classes hardly do phonics then when some of the students go home they hardly have time or they do not find time to do their work at all so what they learn during the day they come back... without the needed knowledge.

Participant IV: Well, the major problem that I have in implementing the curriculum is getting the students to settle down and that's because of their own social issues. And then when you get them to settle down and you look back on what should be the previous knowledge and you take for granted what should be previous knowledge it is not. So the concept has to be deeper than what you would have previously planned your concept lesson to be. That's is one of the biggest problem and some of the students within the multigrade may really be at a lower class level so even though it is a standard three you may have students at a standard one level. So this strains the whole lesson and the reading problem is also a problem.

Participant I: At times in trying to matching topics at times students have problems in catching up to the concept that you are trying to bring across, so at times I have to go below the level so that students can catch up. This can be very time consuming and results in the volume of content areas not been covered. At times some of the brighter students are kept back because of the pace of the other students.

Students possessing a non competitive/cooperative spirit towards work

Some of the participants found that a non competitive/cooperative spirit exist among students in the different classes.

Participant III: They don't drive the Teachers working with them so they do not show that kind of appreciation. When I say that probably they may find that the teacher is getting too close to them and they may take it in a different way or start to think like the teacher is getting too inquisitive into them. They really trying to help but they believe that the inquisitiveness is not what they desire.

Participant II: the class sizes, it should be easy but it is not since the small numbers remove the element of competition for the children.

Lack of Parental Involvement

Two out of the four participants stated that a lack of parental involvement impacts negatively on curriculum implementation according to the data.

Participant II: Well for one, some of the classes hardly do phonics then when some of the students go home they hardly have time or they do not find time to do their work at all so what they learn during the day they come back... without the needed knowledge.

Participant II further suggests:

I guess that's lack of parental support and guidance from the home.

Participant III: Parental involvement is definitely one the problems that I can recall at this time.

Lack of Resources

Participant III underscores the effect that a lack of resources has on the implementation process at the school when she states:

Resources and all these things that help children learn. Teachers do not have sufficient resources or they may not use enough resources for example books, text books etc. to maximize the implementation process.

Curriculum Overload and Lack of Planning

Participant III and II lament that the curriculum is overloaded in the context of the situation in which they operate. Participant III states:

Teachers are not using the time properly, what I'm trying to say is like okay when you have this amount of time for mathematics and this amount of time for language arts, the time runs out. Yes! Because things that you may have to do you may have to blank it off because of the time and you have so many things to do. I guess I am saying that the curriculum part is overloaded, there is too much to teach at anyone time!

And Participant II also states:

Well the multigrade school/classes and the levels of students. That is a problem because the teacher has two separate curriculums to teach.

Participant III had this to say about a lack of planning:

Teachers are not using the time properly, what I'm trying to say is like okay when you have this amount of time for mathematics and this amount of time for language arts, the time runs out.

Participant III further states:

Because things that you may have to do (teach) you may have to blank it off because of the time and you have at your disposal and so many other things to do - curriculum work.

Summary of Chapter

The study found that notwithstanding the difficulties of curriculum implementation at this school there is a positive environment existing at the institution. The data in this chapter make obvious the need for proper planning and assessment as critical variables for successful application of teacher input into the everyday practices at this particular school. It has been revealed that for true success to emerge, policies must be made clear to all practitioners at the school so that all members can operate at the same level and that intended outcomes will be known to all implementers.

The study found that the single most important factor that affected implementation at this particular school is the training of the teachers. This training seems to be very important because the phenomenon that teachers faced at the school is seemingly more than they can collectively bear. Further to this, the constant changing of staff, lack of resources and other factors such as curriculum overload and lack of parental involvement were all viewed as hindrances to the success of implementation at this school.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize this study. The design, problem, and purpose of the study are reviewed, and a summary of major the findings of the research are presented. Presented are the following topics: a) overview of thesis design, b) discussion and implications of the findings, b) the researcher's perspective on the investigation, c) recommendations for further research and for practical applications in schools.

Overview of Thesis Design

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the teachers' perception of Curriculum Implementation at a small rural Multi-grade school in the North Coast of rural Trinidad. The case studied in more specific terms was geared to respond to these three questions:

1. What knowledge do teachers at this Multi-grade school have in Curriculum Implementation?
2. What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?
3. What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the experiences of the four teachers who were appointed to implement the curriculum at this rural multigrade school and who also had limited experience and training in the field of curriculum implementation and multigrade school and class teaching. This study described and interpreted experiences of the four teachers in the following areas: a) a state of confusion b) strategies employed in curriculum implementation and c) problems of curriculum implementation. All themes are discussed strictly from the perspective of the participants.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of the Findings

Three research questions were used to focus the collection and interpretation of data. The questions are summarized and the findings are analyzed in this chapter.

Research Question One

What knowledge do teachers at this Multi-grade School have in Curriculum Implementation?

Three out of the four teachers demonstrated a very vague understanding of a definition of Curriculum Implementation. Researchers have found that teachers do encounter lack of knowledge in curriculum reform and implementation. Wang and Cheng (2005) concurred, saying that teachers' failure to implement policy as policymakers hoped may signal their uncertainty about outcomes and their assessment that new practices are not as good as the previous ones. Researchers (Gross et al., 1971; Spillane et al., 2002) have discussed impediments to implementation and reasons of why implementation fails in actual practice on the part of teachers, the implementers. In summary, these obstacles are: teachers' lack of clarity about the innovation; lack of knowledge and skills needed to conform to the innovative initiative. From the data, it is clear those teachers who operate in schools that are dubbed 'multigrade schools', some form of training must be advanced to them so that the implementation practices in curriculum can be worthwhile to all stakeholders. The fact that the understanding of what curriculum implementation means is not articulated by all the teachers suggests that the implementation processes are been done haphazardly.

Research Question Two

What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?

Putting new curricula into practice in the classroom can serve as a powerful professional development opportunity for teachers. Through using a particular curriculum with their students, reporting on what happens, and reflecting with others on different ideas and activities, teachers learn about their own teaching and their students' learning (Cohen and Hill, 1998). The issue of

strategies according to the data revealed that there is a great disparity amid the strategies employ amongst the staff at the school.

Collectively the teachers utilized seven strategies to implement the curriculum at this particular school. It is evident from the data that there is no clear policy that guides all members of staff as to how the curriculum should be implemented. All members of staff were seemingly employing what they perceived to be the best way of implementing regardless of the results – successes of the students.

Question Three

What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

Emphasizing the problems of multigrade teaching in developing countries, Beneviste and McEwan, (2000), mentioned four potential factors which include lack of faith in multigrade pedagogy, professional and social isolation, difficulties of teaching in a multigrade classroom, and 'ownership' of multigrade teaching. Each of these factors has implications for the development of multigrade teaching programmes in developing countries.

These problems as highlighted by Beneviste and Mc Ewan (2000) were much evident in the data that was collected among participants. Six problems were identified by the participants that were not peculiar to each individual practitioner. The six problems were:

1. Lack of training of teachers in multigrade teaching.
2. Students possessing low levels of Literacy and Numeracy Skills.
3. Students possessing a non competitive/cooperative spirit towards work.
4. Lack of Parental Involvement.

5. Lack of Resources.
6. Curriculum Overload and Lack of Planning

In looking at the problems of implementing the curriculum among the teachers overwhelmingly, the major obstacle that was cited was training to meet multigrade teaching. A lot of the research especially those targeting implementation processes in multigrade schools highlights the inefficiencies of untrained teachers in dealing with this phenomenon.

According to Miller (1991), the following suggestions are posited for improving and strengthening multigrade teaching in Nigeria:

Clear-cut policies on - maximum and minimum enrolment in multi-grade classes and assignment of school head teachers/ principals and teachers to manage and organize grade classes; in-service training programs on national, regional, divisional levels for teachers.

The data revealed the evident need for training as do the literature (research) suggest that training be compulsory to teachers who are being assigned to such schools.

Implications of the findings

Although this is a very small study that is very restricted in terms of the sample size, the implications to the following stakeholders below is much of an imperative to all.

Implications for:

1. Teachers:

There are many rewards for teaching in the multigrade classroom, but there are challenges, too. Instruction, classroom organization, and management are complex and demanding. A teacher

cannot ignore developmental differences in students nor be ill-prepared for a day's instruction. Demands on teacher time require well-developed organizational skills. For this reason, all teachers of multigrade classes must take upon themselves to learn from the information that is present so that they can tool themselves with the necessary pedagogical skills that are needed to deliver effectively in these unique type schools.

2. Principals:

The data made known the fact that staffing is important and experience within staffing is also critical. Team teaching is a useful technique in terms of a teaching strategy, particularly for newer, inexperienced teachers beginning their careers in a school where a more experienced teacher is available. However, the use of such a strategy would require teachers to be trained in its use. Thus, specific in-service training would be required to maximize the potential benefit of such a strategy for use by experienced teachers.

Principals of multigrade schools also need to be contemporaneous with the trends in multigrade school operations via modern research. Hence, Principals must be continuous readers and researchers in that regard so that they will be able to execute their function as instructional leader to the best of their abilities.

In the multigrade classroom, more time must be spent in organizing and planning for instruction. Extra materials and strategies must be developed so that students will be meaningfully engaged; this must be a priority for Principals in the supervision of teachers.

3. Teacher Training Programmes:

The data suggests that all teacher training institutions should and must have as part of their programme a practicum component of teacher-training programmes targeting Multigrade School complexities and Multigrade Teaching. This practical experience is considered to be a vital part of teacher preparation in rural education. However, the provision of Multigrade Teaching practical experience is not always easy. It is the case that not all teachers will need to teach in such situations; therefore making such a practicum a compulsory component for all trainee teachers is not appropriate.

4. Parents:

The research has given rise to one salient factor regarding parents, the need for greater involvement on the part of parents must be considered as one of the top priorities by all policy influencing stakeholders – schools via the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Principal and teaching staff and The Ministry of Education and its related factions.

5. Ministry of Education:

The data points in the path of the Education directorate to be a forerunner in the area of facilitating multigrade teaching. The completion of materials for teacher training courses, a review of classroom equipment and furniture to allow for Multigrade Teaching textbooks and an increase in the number of classrooms and the provision of appropriate furniture for Multigrade Teaching must become a priority of central education planners.

Recommendations for further Research

Further research is needed in the area of curriculum implementation at multigrade schools especially among Caribbean Region with emphasis on Trinidad and Tobago. Quite a number of schools are in rural parts of this country and according to the literature special training and

curriculum design must be part of multigrade school planning and implementation practices. It will be very crucial to all stakeholders of multigrade schools if continuous research be done in this area.

Chapter Summary

The results of this study indicate that attention needs to be paid to multigrade schools via training of personnel, curricula and all other dimensions of school administration with specific guidelines to curriculum implementation. All staffing must be given some form of training with regard to the peculiarities of multigrade schools and teaching. if the education system could recognize this, then certainly some of the ills that occur at these type of schools can be greatly alleviated.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Salutations:

Ethical Considerations:

Length of time teaching

How long have you been teaching? And how long have you been working at this school?

What do you know about curriculum implantation?

Have you any form of training in C I?

What are the policies on Curriculum implementation at this school?

How are these policies formed?

Is this school different from other schools in terms of CI? If so how different is it?

Are you aware that this school is a multigrade school?

What Strategies do teachers at this Multi-grade School use in curriculum implementation?

What training do teachers of this Multi-grade have in Curriculum Implementation?

What problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

Appendix B

Transcription of participant IV (Upper Juniors)

Interviewer: Pleasant good afternoon Ms.

Participant 4: Good afternoon Sir.

Interviewer: Well I went through the ethical aspect of the research and now I will be going through the formal part of the research so how long have you been teaching?

Participant 4: Yes Sir you have.

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching?

Participant 4: About 9 years 10 years come January 2011.

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching at this school?

Participant 4: 7 years.

Interviewer: What do you know about C I?

Participant 4: Curriculum is what you teach and curriculum implementation is how you go about teaching the curriculum.

Interviewer: Have you any form of training in C I?

Participant 4: Not formal... I guess some training but not specifically in C I but some aspect that would have gotten you ready to implement the curriculum.

Interviewer: Have you ever been to any workshop on C I targeting Multigrade school and teaching?

Participant 4: C I may not have been the heading of the workshop but they would have touched on some aspects of C I but not in full.

Interviewer: What are the policies of curriculum implementation at this school?

Participant 4: Well at this school we try to vary the implementation process and the strategies but I think a lot of times we move away from what we think would be the ideal and go to what works faster or easier (laughs) I guess.

Interviewer: Can you explain exactly what you are trying to get at?

Participant 4: Well, we know that some students need different strategies to get it but we also keep in mind the constraints and sometimes we don't do exactly what is necessary for each child.

Interviewer: So at this school we are talking about C I policies, can you specify examples of policies at this school? Are there strict policies?

Participant 4: I do not know if there are strict policy as to how you implement the curriculum I think it is more open ended that you choose an implementation strategy I am not sure if there is a specific policy as to how to implement the Curriculum.

Interviewer: So in other words in implementing the curriculum then do teachers go through a specific routine and so on, is every one doing the same thing at a particular time before the Curriculum is implemented.

Participant 4: I am not too sure if I understand what you are asking?

Interviewer: Okay are their policies in your classroom, do you have policies for students?

Participant 4: As to how I implement the curriculum?

Interviewer: Or you're... not just the implementation but I looking for an example of what a policy is so that you can answer the question appropriately so then in your classroom are there policies? Policies are rules and guidelines to follow. So in C I at this school are there rules and guidelines that you must follow?

Participant 4: Well one of the rules that I will follow in my class is to try to match the curriculum that I teach to the one that the government expects at the end of the year so with regards to National Test so you try to structure your questioning and everything to line it up with National standards so even if the children experience different things you try to give them that common ground on which they will be tested on at the end of the year.

Interviewer: So in your mind at this school there are no set policies?

Participant 4: Yes, no set policies.

Interviewer: Or no policies were ever formed?

Participant 4: I don't think that no policies were ever formed but I just think that we do not follow a set policy.

Interviewer: So I'm asking are there policies at this school?

Participant 4: Well yes, probably there are policies. (Giggles)

Interviewer: Probably connotes uncertainty – being sure or unsure.

Participant 4: I don't know! (Continues to laugh)

Interviewer: You were here for the past seven years (5 years) at this school, so if someone were to come to this school and ask whether there are policies regarding C I, written or unwritten, what will you say?

Participant 4: I guess that there are unwritten policies yes.

Interviewer: Is there a policy document at this school?

Participant 4: Yes there is a school policy document.

Interviewer: In that document does it specify things on curriculum implementation according to your recollection?

Participant 4: What, the curriculum? Yes!

Interviewer: So I ask the question again, are there policies on C I at this school?

Participant 4: Okay yes, when I think back at the policy document I know that we had listed in that policy document to provide a curriculum that will develop the children in all areas – holistic – emotional – physical, yes so there are policies.

Interviewer: Okay, how were these policies formed?

Participant 4: By discussion, by looking at the community first of all, we looked at the community first because that was when we were developing the School Improvement Programme when we started to come up with the policies and we looked at some of the things that we had to deal with in the community and from there we looked at where we wanted our students to be in years to come and its from there we develop that policy. We wanted to get our

students as close as possible to the students that were outside of this community even though the students here are at a disadvantage.

Interviewer: is this school different from other schools in terms of C I?

Participant 4: I think yes, I think yes because it depends on what type of school too because our school is so multigrade because the infants one and two are together and standards one and two are but it is not even always like that. Not all the time you may have four and five together, sometimes you might have three and four and because at times the grades keep switching it is difficult, a lot of the other schools are moving away from multigrade classes because of the difficulties they are more using single class teaching.

Interviewer: What strategies do teachers at this multigrade school use to implement the curriculum?

Participant 4: well I can tell you the strategies that I use. I try to merge the classes as close as possible so some of the topics you will find them in the two classes so I teach standard three and four so like in maths, when they are doing rounding off to the nearest, then one class may have to round off to the nearest thousand while a next class may have to round off to the nearest million so I start with the concept and just stretch the standard three a little more so that the standard fours will get covered. So I try to merge the two and stretch so that sometimes the standard fours loose and the standard threes loose because they cannot all win because you try to work the two together.

Interviewer: So are there other strategies that you use?

Participant 4: Other than merging the curriculum?

Interviewer: Yes!

Participant 4: I try to make the Standard three and four work in groups so if I group them so that a standard three is group with a standard four, the four will help the three although at times the three will help the four.

Interviewer: Okay that's three strategies that you have mentioned, alright.

Participant 4: Yes.

Interviewer: Merging of the curriculum, peer teaching and group work.

Participant 4: Yes.

Interviewer: are there any other strategies that are utilized at this school?

Participant 4: Delay....well not that I can think of at this time.

Interviewer: What training do teachers of this school has, have you in implement the curriculum at this school? Do you think that there are teachers here who are trained?

Participant 4: Trained to use multigrade.

Interviewer: Yes!

Participant 4: I do not think that there was any form of training that would have help teachers to deal with this multigrade system. I remembered going to a multigrade workshop once and ah... the issues that were dealt with were of little help to the actual multigrade situation. If the speaker is not a multigrade teacher then it will be difficult for that person to understand what a multigrade teacher has to deal with and even a multigrade situation within one class there are

students with varying abilities so it is like a multigrade within a multigrade. And I believe that is where it becomes difficult and I think that there is no actual formal training for teachers of multigrade classes within a multigrade class.

Interviewer: Well what problems do teachers encounter at this school in implementing the curriculum?

Participant 4: Well, the major problem that I have in implementing the curriculum is getting the students to settle down and that's because of their own social issues. And then when you get them to settle down and you look back on what should be the previous knowledge and you take for granted what should be previous knowledge it is not. So the concept has to be deeper than what you would have previously planned your concept lesson to be. That's is one of the biggest problem and some of the students within the multigrade may really be at a lower class level so even though it is a standard three you may have students at a standard one level. So this strains the whole lesson and the reading problem is also a problem.

Interviewer: Any other problems?

Participant 4: No just these. The behavioral problems, the previous knowledge and their ability to understand instructions and the reading are the problems that I have encountered.

Interviewer: Interviewer: Miss I want to thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate in this exercise.