

**Sub-regional Seminar on Curriculum Development for “Learning to
Live Together”**

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Country report - St. Lucia

Prepared by June Sifflet

Introduction

MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM CHANGE

The mission, values, principles, key policy objectives and priorities espoused by the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports, guide curriculum reform in St. Lucia. Curriculum reform is guided as well by the findings of research carried out by local, regional and international agencies. The Curriculum and Materials Development Unit (CAMDU) of the Ministry of Education is responsible for spearheading the Curriculum Development / Reform process. This unit is currently staffed by a number of curriculum specialists (one per subject area--Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Music, Health and Family Life, Agriculture and Home Economics) and by two officers trained in art editing and general editing respectively. Ancillary staff print, collate and bind material.

Each subject curriculum specialist assumes the major responsibility for design, development and implementation of new/revised curriculum guidelines in his/her subject area. Specialists are guided by the educational and curricular goals that have been formulated through the cooperative efforts of all curriculum specialists and other officials of the Ministry who are involved in the management of instruction. Each curriculum specialist heads a subject panel consisting of teachers, employers, community agencies, parents, non-governmental organizations and subject specialists. The function of this subject panel is to provide guidance with regard to content selection for the particular subject and to review, critique and validate any material produced at

the development stage. The curriculum specialist also heads the team of curriculum writers that consists mainly of practicing teachers and, possibly, a lecturer from the division of teacher education.

In principle, curriculum reform in St. Lucia is supposed to be a highly participatory process. However, due to a number of factors and limitations, the center-periphery approach to curriculum reform remains dominant and most of the decision-making power resides with the curriculum specialist. This may best be understood in terms of the responsibilities and tasks of Curriculum Specialists at each of the inter-related stages of the curriculum cycle as outlined below.

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Responsibilities of curriculum specialists:

- To identify and validate needs of students and society.
- To determine the extent to which existing curricula meet those needs.
- To establish priorities for curricular improvement.

Related Tasks:

- Review and synthesize research concerned with current theories, thought, findings and trends in education and subject area(s)
- Solicit views of learners with regard to their own perceptions of their needs.
- Solicit views of other stakeholders including teachers, employers, community agencies, parents, youth, church, non-governmental organizations, subject specialists and other specialists in the field of education and social experts who can provide professional opinions on human needs
- Analyze the findings of evaluation exercises pertaining to curricular inputs, processes and outcomes
- Identify gaps and redundancies in existing curricula in relation to needs identified

- Classify needs (important, desirable, critical, etc.) according to the urgency with which they need to be and can be addressed through curricular improvement

2 CURRICULUM DESIGN

Responsibility of curriculum specialists:

- To conceptualize the framework for effecting the curriculum process.

Related Tasks:

- Work with other curriculum specialists and other units involved in the management of instruction to formulate curricular philosophy, mission and goals
- Recommend and seek approval for a curriculum process, i.e., standard operating procedures regarding participation (i.e., constituency, roles and functions of participants), decision-making, and quality control at all stages of the curriculum cycle
- Determine type and contents of curriculum document(s)

3. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Responsibility of curriculum specialists:

- To develop curriculum guidelines and teachers' guides.

Related Tasks:

- Formulate goals and objectives

- Establish pedagogical foundation and formulate instructional guidelines
- Develop Scope and Sequence (organization of breadth and depth of content for each class level)
- Formulate grade level expectations (standards, specific learner outcomes, etc.)
- Design appropriate activities
- Establish guidelines for appropriate assessment and evaluation (statements, samples and illustrations)
- Establish guidelines for review and critique of each of the above

3.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SUPPORT MATERIALS

Responsibilities of curriculum specialists:

- To recommend and/or identify appropriate support materials for the curriculum.
- To assist teachers in the development of materials that facilitate implementation of the curriculum.

Related Tasks:

- Provide criteria for the design of new materials
- Identify and recommend existing materials which will support the curriculum
- Participate in quality control activities in the development of curriculum materials
- Conduct material development workshops at district, school and national levels

4 CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibility of curriculum specialists:

- To guide and support the implementation process with strong emphasis on learner- centred classrooms.

Related Tasks:

- Conduct curriculum orientation workshops and seminars
- Pilot-test Curricula and materials
- Support teachers in the classroom
 - Help teachers plan units/lessons using the curriculum guides.
 - Help teachers use materials effectively
 - Monitor the teacher in action in the classroom and provide feedback that would enhance delivery
 - Help promote learner-centred classrooms
 - Examine scheme and record books during monitoring.
- Establish district-based subject committees
- Conduct training
 - for principals as instructional leaders
 - to promote learner-centred classrooms
 - for subject committee members as facilitators to help support the training of other teachers
 - during summer vacation to provide teachers with an opportunity to get extra training in each subject and share best practice regarding :
 - * *Instructional strategies*
 - * *Assessment in the curriculum*
 - * *Knowledge and skills*

5 CURRICULUM EVALUATION

Responsibility:

To assess curriculum inputs, processes and outcomes in order to make recommendations with regard to the continued use and/or improvement of curricular programmes and materials.

Related Tasks:

- Design and/or identify appropriate tools and strategies to collect data concerning:
 - the adequacy, value and relevance of curricular inputs:
 - * Curriculum guides
 - * Textbooks
 - * Equipment
 - * Other curriculum support materials
 - * Training
 - * Supervision and Coaching
 - the level of implementation and its adequacy for achieving curricular intentions:
 - * Use of curriculum documents and materials
 - * Teaching strategies
 - * Learning activities
 - * Methods of assessment
 - * Time on task
 - * Patterns of interaction
 - * Classroom management
 - * Schemes of work and lesson planning
 - the effectiveness of the curriculum in helping students achieve desired outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour).

In respect of the curriculum process outlined above, curriculum specialists are supposed to work/collaborate with the teacher training institution and District Education Officers on issues related to pre- and in-service training as well as the monitoring of curriculum implementation.

PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

The Education Act, 1999, provides the legal framework for the administration of the education system in St. Lucia. The Act empowers the Minister to establish a national curriculum for public and assisted schools which seeks to (a) promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of students and of society; and (b) prepare students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Curriculum reform is further informed by the philosophy clearly outlined in the Education Development Plan (EDP), which represents the overall strategic direction for the development of education in St. Lucia until the year 2005 and beyond:

The intended aim of the plan is to create a learning society that places value on learning so that the outcome will be learners who are able to express themselves verbally and are functionally literate; numerate and computer competent; skilled in science, technology and its application; committed to the values of civilized living; physically fit and participating in sport; citizens who exercise greater individual independence and judgement combined with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals; citizens who exercise integrity, sound moral judgements and spiritual strength, national pride and civic responsibilities. (p.3)

In respect of the foregoing, the following constitute the major facets of recent curriculum reform in St.Lucia:

- Presentation of curriculum guidelines in a more open form with respect to its capacity to include new knowledge and its flexibility for negotiation by the teacher to meet the needs of groups of students as well as individual students
- Change from “Science” to “Science and Technology” as a curriculum area
- Family Life and Health Education at infant as well as primary and secondary level
- strong emphasis on creating learners rather than the transmission of specific knowledge
- emphasis on integration as a major approach to curriculum implementation to promote meaningfulness and connectedness in learning
- strong emphasis on learner centredness
- use of authentic assessment strategies
- emphasis on process as well as product
- increased emphasis on development of skills of social participation
- use of available technology in teaching and learning

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL: LIVING TOGETHER, DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL COHESION

Curricular reforms that correspond to the themes “Citizenship Education”; “Education for Social Cohesion” and Cultural Diversity” are encompassed mainly within the Social Studies and Family Life and Health curricula.

Health and Family Life:

The themes are reflected in the Health and Family Life curriculum through 3 of the 4 strands around which the curriculum standards and guidelines for each class level are built. These strands are:

- Social, Emotional and Spiritual Well-being
- Health Welfare and Lifestyle
- Sexuality and Sexual Health

Through content organized around these strands, students develop skills and knowledge in areas such as emotional well-being, value clarification, self control, conflict resolution and mediation, sexual safety, drug abuse.

Increasing emphasis is being placed on education in those areas as a strategy for addressing the many social problems that manifest themselves in the school and in the wider society. Efforts are also being made to train regular teachers as well as specialists for the effective delivery of the Family Life and Health curriculum

Social Studies:

These themes are also reflected in some of the major goals of the Social Studies programme, viz:

- prepare each student to be a responsible and participating citizen in a democratic society
- help students to acquire an understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage, of other cultures and of human achievement
- help students acquire and use knowledge to make personal decisions and decisions about their social and physical environment
- help students develop attitudes, values and habits that are consistent with the values of a democratic and humane society

In order to help students achieve the foregoing, the primary level Social Studies programme engages students in the study of issues such as:

- Development of national identity and national pride
- Preservation of cultural heritage
- The importance of governance
- Relationship between Rights and Responsibilities
- Rights of citizens and other persons in St.Lucia
- Duties and responsibilities of St.Lucians
- Interdependence of people and countries of the region and the World

- Regional Cooperation
- Importance of equal treatment for all persons regardless of race, gender, language and cultural background
- Democratic versus non-democratic behaviour
- The Rights and Responsibilities of children

In addition to study of those themes, the Social Studies primary level programme places a high premium on teaching approaches that involve students in evaluating the feasibility and validity of their ideas and conclusions so that their behaviour and responses can be guided by reasoning. The Social Studies programme for each level identifies specific Social Skills benchmarks for the level. Through this means, students progressively develop skills needed for living in a democracy, such as co-operative learning, dialogue, group action, discussion, tolerance of dissent, arriving at consensus and majority decisions. There is also a social action dimension of the Social Studies programme through which students are required to engage in cooperative class, school or community improvement projects.

The themes and issues identified above are repeated in the Grades 8 to 10 Social Studies programme that is currently being developed. The curriculum for this level employs an issue-centred approach, being organized around important societal and global problems and questions, with reflective teaching methodologies being recommended as the major approach to implementation. Some of the themes and issues being recommended for study at this level include:

1. World Population Growth and Resource Availability
2. Human Rights
3. Diversity and Nationalism
4. Global Interdependence
5. Food and Hunger
6. Cultural transmission
7. Global Movement of Peoples
8. Peace and Security

9. Pollution
10. Crime and Delinquency
11. Civics

Efforts are also being made to provide teachers in training with relevant education. For example, the thirty university graduates now participating in the in-service “Secondary Teacher Training Programme” are all required to do the Social Issues course that now focuses on Human Rights and the Rights of the Child.

Problems

While the intention exists to make curriculum reform a highly participatory process, a number of factors impede such a democratic initiative in education. At the design and development level, the participation of the wider public is limited by the fact that the curriculum reform has not consciously been made part of the public agenda and structures and systems have not been devised to facilitate the involvement of parents and other concerned parties. No concerted effort has been made to actively involve students in making decisions about what is important for them to learn.

The participation of teachers at the design and development stage is also limited. The need to involve teachers in the design and development of curricula exists in tension with the need for teachers and schools to use school time in the instruction of students. In addition, the absence of teachers from the school for curriculum writing or any purpose presents a management nightmare for schools as there is no provision for supply or substitute teachers. The limited involvement of teachers at this stage of the process impacts negatively on curriculum implementation as, in such cases, teachers often see curriculum reform as being thrust upon them by top and middle management of the Ministry of Education.

National examinations such as the Common Entrance and the Minimum Standards Examinations also constitute a constraining force as far as curriculum reform is

concerned. The current format of the examination allows for only limited assessment of the knowledge product and no assessment of process. Since most national examinations are high stake, there is a tendency for teachers to take their cue regarding what and how to teach from the examination. As a result, much that is identified as desirable in education is ignored or given scanty treatment in the actual curriculum. Social action projects and the development of democratic behaviours are just two examples of what is deemed educationally desirable but is ignored. It is encouraging to note that a reconceptualization of national examinations is now taking place and recommendations have been made for more authentic and valid assessments that can give a more comprehensive picture of students' learning.

The history of teachers' role in the curriculum process in St.Lucia also constitutes a barrier to reform. Previous curricula (intended for a largely untrained teaching force) tended to be very prescriptive, outlining behavioural objectives, actual content to be taught and giving the teacher step-by-step instructions for teaching particular lessons. A revised curriculum outline that requires teachers to engage in curriculum development at school and class level provides a challenge (sometimes undesirable) for teachers and schools that are accustomed to highly prescriptive curricula. One consequence of this is that, despite some level of training for use of new curriculum guidelines, teachers use these together with the old guides so that, in essence, they are teaching in the way that they have always taught. The paucity of suitable teaching and learning material available to schools and students exacerbates this situation.

Some of these problems could be addressed through the provision of on-site support for teachers in curriculum planning and delivery. Unfortunately, there are only 8 district education officers and one curriculum specialist per subject (who have a multiplicity of responsibilities) to provide such support. Because of the lack of teacher support, issues such as catering to individual differences and learning styles, learner-centredness and authentic assessment remain a curriculum intention rather than a reality.

The culture of teaching in St. Lucia constitutes a huge barrier to democratic initiative in the schools and classrooms. While it is desirable for our children to learn and practice the skills associated with democracy, our schools continue to be models of undemocratic practice. Generally, there is no room for negotiation in the classroom. The teacher is often the sole determiner of what is taught, what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable, what behaviour merits punishment and when, and even simple things such as when students talk. Related to this are the strategies employed in values education where teachers impose their own values as the right values and children often do not get opportunities for examining and questioning their own values and that of the teacher. Such rigid control is often sought by teachers who fear that relinquishing some degree of control and autonomy in learning to students will result in indiscipline and provide an unwanted challenge to the authority of the teacher. With respect to this, many teachers do not see the need to educate children about their rights as, in the view of those teachers, this can give children a basis for challenging authority and thus give rise to indiscipline and disorder.

In summary, if curriculum reform initiatives are to be successful, the necessary systems and structures have to be put in place to facilitate wider participation in decision-making about the curriculum and to provide the support for teachers in terms of teacher education, on-site assistance and appropriate teaching and learning material. The format and scope of national and other assessments must also be adapted in order to comprehensively assess that which has been identified as desirable for our children to learn.