

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

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Country Report – Bahamas

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I BACKGROUND

The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation of over seven hundred (700) islands and cays with some twenty-two (22) of these islands inhabited by an estimated 300,000 people. New Providence, on which the capital Nassau is located, is home to more than sixty-five percent (65%) of the national population. The remainder of the population is spread among the second city, Freeport and the rural areas of the country called the Family Islands.

The Bahamas, therefore, has the challenging task of providing the same level and quality of education to a sizable school population scattered over wide and often sparsely populated areas. The education system consists of three progressive stages (primary, secondary and tertiary). Although independent institutions provide education opportunities at each stage, the Bahamas Government is the main provider of education at the primary and secondary level. At tertiary level, the Government-operated Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute (BTVI) and the College of The Bahamas (COB) are complemented by several local independent colleges and satellite campuses of American Universities.

Since the achievement of Majority Rule in 1967 (Independence came in 1973), The Bahamas has developed specific policies to ensure that education is provided for the masses. Among the many initiatives, were the establishment of a Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education, the Bahamianization of the curriculum and a renewed emphasis on the professional development of Bahamian teachers.

Deliberate steps were taken by the Government to identify the needs of the national system of education and to develop policies and programs to ensure that schools were providing quality education for students. National Assessment was introduced at four levels of schooling – Grades 3, 6 (1986), 9 (1960s) and 12 (1993). Intervention programs were implemented for “at risk” students and the primary and secondary curricula were expanded to address the needs of approximately sixty-five thousand (65,000) students in our one hundred and sixty-four (164) schools. Since the curriculum is considered the blue print for the education system, the primary curriculum aimed to develop literacy and numeracy skills, to inculcate social skills, to foster a sense of cultural identity and to develop positive attitudes toward self, learning and country. The secondary curriculum with its academic, technical and vocational dimensions reflects the diverse backgrounds, talents and aptitudes of students and prepares them for further education and/or the world of work.

II ORGANIZATIONS/MECHANISMS INVOLVED IN THE CURRICULUM REVISION PROCESS

A Task Force commissioned by the Government in March 1993 to review the status of education in the Bahamas recommended much needed education reform. Areas receiving specific focus were Early Childhood Education, Literacy, Technical & Vocational Studies, Health and Family Life Education and core subjects including Social Studies, Civics and Spanish.

Major emphasis was placed on preparing the nation’s youth for the challenges and the opportunities of the new century. Holding to its mission of providing *“opportunities for all persons in the Bahamas to receive the education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in a technological society”*, the Government, through the Department of Education, undertook a massive curriculum revision exercise in September 1996.

The task force which represented a cross section of community leaders established broad guidelines for the Revision Process. The following recommendations were made:

The Ministry of Education, should enter into consultancy agreements with Curriculum Experts in Educational Planning, Curriculum Development Techniques, Technical/Vocational Studies, Primary Education, Literacy and Core Subject Areas.

Curriculum Officers in Subject Specific areas be appointed (where necessary) to lead the *curriculum revision* exercise and be exposed to programs designed to enhance their curriculum development skills/expertise.

Public awareness campaigns to sensitize the public to the importance of curriculum to the development of the country be mounted.

A strategic education plan be developed reflecting Government's philosophy on education and outlining national goals and objectives for a given period.

The Government, with the support of IDB, engaged the services of experienced consultants in Educational Planning (*Dr. Norrel London*), Technical & Vocational Studies (*Mr. Brian Dwyer*), General Curriculum Studies (*Dr. Linda Davis*), Mathematics (*Dr. Lois Williams*) and Science (*Dr. Napoleon Bryant*) and provided fellowships in curriculum studies for Education Officers in Literacy Development, Library Science, Modern Languages, Speech Pathology, Guidance & Counselling and Technical/Vocational Studies to initiate the first phase of the revision process.

To ensure the quality of the curriculum development process, the Ministry of Education conducted a series of seminars for senior officers, school administrators, and teachers which emphasized collaboration, research techniques and strategies for improved student learning. The following approaches to curriculum reform were advanced:

1. Establishing a Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC) comprising representatives from Education (all levels), church, and civic organizations, corporate society (business and

industry), and the wider community mandated to review or devise curriculum policies, goals and a vision for curriculum excellence. The committee conducted a needs assessment survey, determined the framework to be used, reviewed existing curriculum projects and considered the recommendations of experts and classroom teachers.

2. Establishing Subject Councils for each subject area led by the specialist officer from central office and reflecting a similar composition to that of the Curriculum Planning Committee. Using the guidelines provided by the Curriculum Planning Committee, the Subject Councils: -

- Identified goals, general objectives and a vision for their specific subject area.
- Conducted a needs assessment survey to identify priorities for curriculum and related resources
- Determined the process and the planning cycle to be used in the development of the curriculum
- Identified a standard format for curriculum
- Recommended what should be learned, when it should be taught and what teaching methods should be employed.
- Identified the curriculum piloting, implementation and evaluation process
- Organized training and staff development
- Identified/developed resources for curriculum.

3. Appointing Curriculum Writers, selected for their knowledge of the subject, communication skills, familiarity with a range of learning strategies, with the specific responsibility of producing curriculum support resources.

4. Allowing for the organization of Instructional planning teams at school levels to develop units of study based on the curriculum, to localize the curriculum whenever possible and to develop and share learning materials to support the curriculum.

5. Ensuring that timelines for each curriculum guide are prepared using the four stages:

(Planning → Production → Piloting → Implementation)

RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE

Curriculum Planning Committees

(Senior Officers, Curriculum Experts, Representatives from Business and Industry, Church & Civic Community, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions)

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Subject Specific Councils

(Central Office Level)

Curriculum / Evaluation Officers

Teachers, Representatives from cross-section of the Community

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Curriculum Writers

(Master/Senior Teachers)

Sound knowledge of Subject and pedagogical skills

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Instructional Planning Team

(School Level)

(School Administrators, Team Leaders, Subject Specialists/ Classroom teachers)

III PHILOSOPHY / PRINCIPLES OF CURRICULUM DESIGN WHICH INFORMED CURRICULUM REFORM PROCESS.

Education is considered to be the principal vehicle for enhancing the quality of life of the people of the Bahamas and its specific focus is to prepare

“youth to become active citizens who will become a caring and compassionate people, and who, as life long learners will continue to improve the quality of life for themselves and others”.

(Draft Strategic Plan, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports 2000)

The philosophy which undergirds the education policies, promotes, among others, the following:

- i) A belief that all people should have the right to an education which fosters a sense of self-worth and an improved quality of life that will enable them to be fulfilled at all stages of their lives;
- ii) A conviction that educators, parents, students, young adults and the wider community must share with the government the responsibility for the success of the educational enterprise;
- iii) A belief in the value of the differing gifts and aptitudes of individuals, and in the importance of these differences in an inter-dependent society;
- iv) An appreciation of the significance and value of the rich diversity of The Bahamas and its people, and of the responsibility of the educational process to reflect and respond to that diversity with tolerance and understanding;
- v) An appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of The Bahamas;
- vi) A recognition of the obligation of all citizens to contribute positively to their society, and of their right to enjoy its benefits;

In keeping with this philosophy and after careful review of existing curriculum design models, the Curriculum Committee agreed to adopt a blended rather than top down, linear approach to curriculum reform.

The curriculum design sequence would begin with identifying the needs of the learner and society, specifying the general learning outcomes/expectations, acknowledging that knowledge is dynamic, designing learning activities with a focus on instructional strategies/methods that match learning styles, and determining the effectiveness of the planned learning activities.

Curriculum Development Process

Needs analyses/surveys

Curriculum

Formation

Implementation / monitoring/

of Curriculum committees

Ongoing evaluation

Feedback used to

Framework for

amend curriculum

curriculum established

Curriculum guide

Training in Curriculum

piloted

Development process

Programs / activities

Goals/Objectives defined

Learning modalities identified

New content areas were added to both the primary and high school curricula. At the primary level, the curriculum has been expanded to include Spanish, Computer Studies, and Health and Family Life Education and at the high school level, offerings now include Civics, Computer Technology, Health and Family Life Education, Auto Mechanics and Plumbing.

The curriculum process explored paradigm shifts in teaching/learning methodologies. In order to cater to the many learning styles identified in the classroom, a student-centred approach was recommended for delivery of instruction. Practices such as co-operative/collaborative learning, modeling, direct teaching (mini lessons), teachable moments, individualized instruction, thematic approaches, cross curricular/ integrating instruction, field trips, role play, artistic expressions, discussions and games were incorporated into the instructional program.

IV CURRICULAR AREAS WHICH FOCUS ON THE THEMES

Quality Education for All: Living together, Democracy and Social Cohesion

The theme which is embedded in the Government's philosophy of education is given emphasis at both primary and secondary levels in subjects such as Social Studies, Health and Family Life Education, Religious Education, Physical Education, and Spanish.

The Social Studies Curriculum, which has been set out in text form with accompanying Teacher's Manual, attempts to instill in students from the early grades

“a spirit of nationalism, the concepts of tolerance, group formation, partnership and respect and the principles of both a healthy democratic system and an endearment of appreciation of difference”.

Included in the goals outlined for Social Studies are:-

- *empowering young citizens with knowledge and understanding of their own country*
- *promoting the democratic process*
- *fostering concern for environmental conservation*
- *encouraging regional co-operation*
- *inculcating values, self esteem and tolerance*

The content focus for achieving these goals ranged from identifying different communities, at home and abroad, examining our main industry (Service/Tourism) and meeting visitors from

around the world to an appreciation of self -- belonging to a family, a community, a country -- and then to an understanding of the democratic process – (links with the region and the world, parliament, Local Government and Administration in the Family Islands, and the process of citizenship).

Secondary students are also expected to develop an awareness of the “rules” that operate within the community, demonstrate an appreciation of the role of the individual in, and a willingness to contribute to, national and international development, and evaluate and personally respond to moral issues. The themes being used to develop these concepts are Personal and Social Issues (*Making Moral Decisions, Relationships/Career Planning, Protecting the Physical and Social Development*).

Values for Productive Living (Reproductive Health/Violence Prevention, Christian Ethics, Keeping the Democratic Process Alive) and Responsible Citizenship (Family Patterns/Parenting/Budgeting, Christian Perspective on Personal and Social Issues, Bahamian – The International Citizen)

Religious Studies and Health and Family Life Education also promote the concept of living together, democracy and social cohesion.

To prepare students to respond intelligently to issues which confront them daily, Religious Studies is taught not for indoctrination but rather to allow them to “explore questions and find answers which aid in decision-making, strengthening self-esteem, academic achievement, socialization skills and values”.

The Revised Religious Studies Curriculum “*gives children an understanding about religion so as to minimize misunderstanding and therefore prejudice*”. Goals which are addressed in this curriculum include:

- Developing appropriate attitudes and beliefs of self and others;
- Understanding the dynamics of group participation; and

- Showing respect and tolerance for different denominational views within Christianity and other religions.

The content focus reflects appreciation of self, family and community, understanding of values, the importance of friendship and helping others, and cultivating the qualities of good leaders.

The Health and Family Life Education curriculum is a comprehensive life-skills based program which seeks to promote an understanding of the principles which underlie personal and social well-being. Students are given opportunities to practice:

- Building communication and co-operative skills;
- Managing attitudes and emotions;
- Resisting negative peer pressure and drug use;
- Solving problems and resolving conflicts without resorting to violence; and
- Providing service to others.

Programs offered include **Character Education, Self Esteem Promotion, Aids Education Prevention, Adolescents Reproductive Health Education Project, PACE – a comprehensive program for student mothers, and SECOND STEP – a violence prevention program.**

The teaching of Spanish, using native Spanish teachers, which was introduced at the primary level in 1997, focuses on development of oral/aural skills and an appreciation of the culture of Spanish-speaking communities. Students broaden their frame of reference beyond their own cultural and social experiences. They gain insights into different values and belief systems and as a result become more tolerant and accepting of the multi-cultural society in which we live.

Physical Education, which is mandatory at all levels encompasses, in addition to the various sports and athletic programs, activities which enable students to establish sound interpersonal relationships and display good sportsmanship and positive attitudes.

The major areas of knowledge and skills include Healthy Living (growth and development, personal safety, substance use and abuse), and active participation (physical fitness, living skills and safety). Acknowledgement and respect for individual differences are encouraged

(opportunities for all students to assume leadership roles and be equally active participants regardless of ability or gender)

In progress is a Combined Social Science Curriculum Module Program for high school students which covers topics such as Christian Values and Ethics, Environmental Management, Interpersonal Relationships, Violence Prevention, Parenting Skills, Reproductive Health, and Career Planning and Budgeting.

Also, the Religious Studies curriculum is being revised to incorporate a more thematic approach and the high school Civics program will utilize a localized text based on a Caribbean Civics Text (Jamaica: Citizenship and Government – Carlong Publishers)

CHALLENGES / ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In order to prepare for 2001 and beyond, our Curriculum reform efforts have addressed the varied learning styles and multiple intelligences of students, and embraced current theories of instruction, community involvement and social and economic relevance. District Superintendents, School Administrators, and teachers are being encouraged to localize the national curriculum to meet their specific needs.

The progress made in Curriculum Reform was due in no small measure to the re-organization of the section, the commitment of officers and teachers and the involvement of parents and community leaders in the process.

The major challenges faced by curriculum specialists in determining the design/model to be used were: a) obtaining consensus on the appropriate model (content versus outcomes, format/terminology); b) alignment of curriculum with government policies and current assessment practices; and c) availability of qualified manpower. The implementation of the curriculum was influenced to a great extent by

- i) Budgetary constraints

- ii) Training/retraining demands
- iii) Necessary supervision/monitoring
- iv) Availability of and access to curriculum support materials
- v) Sustained commitment and involvement of parents/community and curriculum committees

However, the exercise fostered increased community support for educational initiatives and allowed for constructive feedback from corporate citizens and effective participation of all education stakeholders. Educators generally demonstrated their willingness to facilitate and participate in training in *unit planning, lesson development, instructional strategies and in utilizing new approaches*. The process also promoted teamwork, consolidated partnerships and created networking opportunities with other government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the wider community. Overall, it helped to raise the consciousness level of the general public to the importance of the curriculum in determining the future of a society.

As we continue the cycle of curriculum reform, we hope to carry out ongoing revisions and analyses of feedback obtained in order to positively impact teacher and student performance. Our renewed thrust will emphasize more cross curricula teaching using a thematic/integrated approach, intensive training of teachers in Health and Family Life Education, Social and Religious Studies and Modern Language teaching, and organization of After School and Summer School Programs , and special projects designed to “*develop the all round potential of students in order to bring into being an educated, devout, dynamic, disciplined and responsible people*”.

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