

Implementation of the Reformed Curriculum in Rural and Remote Schools of PNG

Bernadette Aihi, Lecturer, Divine Word University

Introduction

Firstly I would like to thank the CRIP, organizers and sponsors for organizing this conference.

Our KEYNOTE SPEAKERS have already outlined the main theme of the conference Sustainable Curriculum Development that covers the process of development and implementation of the reform curriculum. I am here to share my findings on the constraints faced by the remote primary schools in Papua New Guinea in the implementation of the reform curriculum as well as the language issues and the access and participation aspects of the conference.

Since having the curriculum materials on site makes a difference to the actual implementation of the reformed curriculum, I would like to say a few words about the delivery of the reformed curriculum materials. At the time when I visited the schools in the Saidor and Ambunti districts they had received the upper primary materials only and not the lower primary ones.

Teacher preparation for implementation of the reform curriculum, at this point in time, is weak (Paraide, 2002). The teachers had little or no idea of how to enhance the elementary graduates' learning in lower primary. Most teachers thought that the children were not disciplined simply because they were more confident, active, outgoing and eager to learn.

Although most primary schools had already received their upper primary curriculum materials, they have not implemented the reformed curriculum. They were still waiting to be in-serviced on how to implement the reformed curriculum. Some of the teachers from Saidor schools had been in-serviced on the implementation of the reformed curriculum but they were not confident in implementing it themselves.

The teachers in the Ambunti district were in-serviced on how to program the new curriculum. Two of the schools that I visited had already implemented the 6-8 reformed curriculums. One of the schools (Mersei primary school) started at the start of the year while the other (Avatip primary school) started implementing at the start of second term. Another school St. Joseph's Ambunti will start implementing at the start of third term. They believe that in-service on programming only was done. They wanted to be in-serviced on the assessment part before being fully confident to implement the reformed curriculum. They have one-hour school in-service once a week in preparation for implementation at the start of third term. Paraide (2002) also pointed out that some grade 3 teachers, who had done the bridging course, were having difficulties in implementing

the reform curriculum at the school level. They need feedback on how they are going after the workshops, and follow-up workshops to strengthen their teaching skills.

Another issue concerning in-services or workshop is that often the wrong personnel are selected and sent to workshops. This is been emphasized by Paraide (2002) where the 'bridging course' workshops, were prepared for the lower primary teachers but instead, Provinces selected teachers and other officers who were not the target group to attend these workshops.

One of the factors that are likely to affect the implementation is the way the schools are structured. Some of the primary schools have grades 1 to 8 classes and do not have feeder elementary schools but instead take on grade 7 pupils from feeder community school schools. There is strong evidence that collaborative cultures make a difference in both teacher and student learning (Fullan, 1999). Research from Fullan and Smith (1999), shows that schools that only restructure (change the curriculum, add new roles, reorganize) make no difference in teaching and learning. However, schools that reculture, as well as restructure do make a difference if they, (a) focus on student learning, (b) link knowledge of student learning to changes in instructional practices and (c) work together to assess teachers as well as school leadership to make improvement.

Yoko (2001) stated that fundamental problems affected the overall implementation process. A lack of communication, collaboration and co-ordination appeared to inhibit relationships between decision-makers, policy makers and teacher educators in the implementation of the Matane Report. Autonomy of educational institutions and differing priorities were impediments to the implementation process, as well as conceptualization difficulties and lack of funding. In general, some principles consistent with the philosophical goals appeared to be reinforced at the practice level at the University of Goroka, but in an unplanned, uninformed, unconscious and uncoordinated manner, largely through the hidden curriculum. Consequently, there was a significant lack of congruence between educational philosophy, policy and practice.

Waters (1997) stated that despite financial constraints, concerns over aspects of teacher training, lack of printed materials and curriculum guides, and the pace with which the reform is being implemented, there are good prospects for the future. If implemented properly the elementary reform does have the capacity to deliver a more culturally relevant education to a greater percentage of the school-age population than the old system. The reformed system sees the cultural and linguistic heritage that students bring to school as something to be valued and built upon. Community ways of knowing and doing can be used as a bridge to further learning, including the learning of language and knowledge system. Intergenerational ties within the community are strengthened rather than severed. The strengths of the current reform are that for the first time in PNG's history the commitment of grassroots communities, non-government organizations, politicians and international funding agencies are pulling in the same direction towards the same goal.

Another interesting factor, which I observed in one grade five class, is the age range of students. Some students are as young as 14 while others are 18 and over.

Teaching and Learning

These schools were implementing the reformed curriculum (Grades 6- 8), for the first time this year. From my observations of the lessons that were taught, the teachers were competent and the students were eager to learn. Most of the teachers improvised where they could but few asked for more resource materials. Teachers used examples that were related to the students. Some of the teachers said that they find the reformed curriculum much better than the old curriculum. However they still wanted to be in-serviced on how to implement it. On two incidences I heard the teachers using the wrong tenses. This has nothing to do with the reform curriculum but this is the way the teachers speak and it can have an impact on the students' use of English language.

One of the headmasters of a primary school stated that although he and an inspector attended the trainer of trainers workshop on how to deliver the reformed curriculum, he is still confused so has not in-serviced his own teaching staff. Therefore when trainer of trainers workshops are held, those selected to attend must be participants who will be able to deliver the next lot of training down the line. On the other hand the trainers who are training the trainer of trainers must make sure that the participants understand what is being delivered to them so that they in turn can deliver the same message to others in their schools or districts. Two senior teachers from a primary school in Ambunti were still confused. One transferred schools as a result of frustration. These are both very experienced teachers.

Both the Crandall et al. (1982) and DESSI (Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement) study saw that planning for successful innovation had to be in place as part of a well designed dissemination strategy before implementation began, including the mechanism for monitoring the program.

Students were not just sitting in the classrooms but they were also learning outside the classrooms. One example was when the students were sent outside to clean up the stream that runs alongside the community as part of their Making a Living lesson. Some teachers and community leaders from Ambunti district spoke highly of the subject 'Making A Living'. They could see that the students will be skilled and able to live in whatever communities they come from by using the resources within their own environments. Others were a little confused and thought that they needed to buy a lot of equipment such as spades and forks, which the school cannot afford.

Another hands on lesson was, when the students measured their own class heights and then used that data to draw tables and graphs. There was evidence of pupils doing work in their exercise books, which the teacher corrected and returned to them.

From my readings of other researchers, they have talked about in school factors and out of school factors, which can inhibit or enhance teaching and learning. I will only talk

about factors, which I have observed during my school visits. One main factor that I picked up was the long distance that the students have to travel in order to go to school. Some of the students have to walk for three hours to school and three hours back each day to attend lessons. Others have to climb mountains on roads and tracks that are slippery and muddy, cross rivers that are flooding or hanging bridges in order to get to the schools. By the time the students arrive at the school they are too tired and hungry to concentrate on the lessons. Perhaps “Boarding schools” need to be considered here!!

Another factor is the desk sizes and the seating arrangement in the classrooms. Some of the desks were too small for students who were quite old. This was because the age range of students in one class could be from 14 to 19 years old.

Some schools do not have libraries or readily available water to drink. Most do not have electricity so both teachers and students have to try to do all their work while it is daylight. During the night they use kerosene lamps to do their schoolwork. Most students come from homes where they have no study places.

Other constraints to the implementation process are natural disasters such as floods and droughts. During the time when the Sepik River floods, there is no school because the classrooms are under water. The schools are also closed during the droughts. The droughts usually occur after the floods, when the floods wash the gardens away. I asked the teachers about how they make up for the time loss. They told me that after the floods and droughts seasons, they try to catch up on the lessons missed by extending their normal school time.

Language issues

The implementation of vernacular education throughout PNG is an extremely ambitious project (Waters, undated).

This is what I saw during my observation of a grade 3 class. The teacher wrote the names of some of the animals on the chalkboard then asked the students to say the names aloud as she pointed to the words. Afterwards she asked the students to say these animals' names in their own vernaculars. The students in this class spoke three different languages and the teacher only spoke one of those languages. How would she know if they were saying the right word?

This particular teacher said that she had difficulty with this grade 3 class compared to the last year's grade three class. Why? Well last year's grade 3 class was the first batch of students from the elementary school. They are from the local area and speak the same language. This year's grade 3 students come from three different language groups as I mentioned earlier. Therefore it depends on what language of instruction is being used in the elementary school and what language does the teacher speak. There is a language barrier here. Therefore the students do not understand what is being taught to them.

Although it was assumed by parents, teachers and the general public that children who have had three years of education in English would do better in school than those who did their elementary education in another language, Paraide (2002) suggested that there was

no marked difference. The children were found to have the same strengths and weaknesses. Many children who did their elementary education in English are weak in sounding letters and words. It is of great concern that children who did their elementary education in English cannot yet read basic English text.

A concern I picked up from the elementary schools along the Sepik River is that, they are using their vernacular as the language of instruction in Elementary Prep. However they switch to using Pidgin as the language of instruction when they get to Elementary 1 and Elementary 2. This concern needs to be addressed by the Elementary coordinators at the district level.

A grade 5 teacher stated that although the students are eager to learn, they are very slow in learning English. They can only complete about 5 sentences in a 30minutes lesson. These students did not attend elementary schools. In the lesson that I observed, I noticed that some of the students were completely lost, not knowing or understanding what the exercise was all about. The lesson was on picking out words that were different (not belonging) from the others. These students do not understand these English words. There is an obvious language barrier.

In most cases the teachers used Tok Pisin to further explain when the students did not understand what was being said in English. However from my observations the students were still confused. Incorrect pronunciation of words by teachers also leads the students to incorrectly pronounce certain words. For example “hungry” would be pronounced as “angry” and “angry” would be pronounced as “hungry”. “H’s are sounded where there is no “h” and where there is a “h” it is not sounded due to their accents in their vernaculars.

Access and Participation

Communities living in the remotest parts of Papua New Guinea are still not having access to education and it is more significant for the girls. There are a few schools there but they are short of teachers. You can only go to these schools by foot or plane or helicopter. Teachers who are posted to these schools sometimes resume several weeks after the start of the school year. Some teachers go into town in search of their pays and may not return until after a couple of days or even up to a week. Therefore the children may enroll and go to school but when they find out that they do not have a teacher they give up and go home.

Some children have to walk for more than 3 hours to school. One of these schools was a boarding school during the colonial days. This catered for those who are walking long distances to school now.

Where there is access you may still find children not participating for various reasons. In some of the communities the parents do not allow the girls to go back to school once they start menstruating. “It is time for them to get married.” In some areas the communities are made up of more males than females. Therefore as soon as a girl is born she is

marked to a man for her to marry when she grows up. By the time the girl is 11 or 12 she is married off to this man that she has been marked for.

In Ambunti district, out of the sixteen community schools only one is in operation, fifteen are closed due to teachers not being available. There are thirteen primary schools there and they are all in operation. However some of them are very short of teachers. Mersei primary school for example has grades 3-8 classes with about 436 students enrolled but has only two teachers. At this point in time the two teachers are concentrating on the upper primary level with the lower primary having no lessons.

Some of the teachers as well as community members from Ambunti said that there was teacher shortage because the teachers are expected to pay their own fares to the schools to teach. There were no funds at the district level to meet the cost of transporting teachers to schools.

Conclusion

In concluding I leave you with Shirley Freed's Review of Literature, which reads. In considering implementation, the researchers at the Institute made several assumptions (Hall and Hord, 1987, pp. 8-10). First, 'change is a process, not an event.' Second, 'understanding the point of view of the participant in the change process is critical.' Because change cannot take place unless teachers change, the focus of implementation should be on the human component. Third, 'it is possible to anticipate much that will occur during a change process.' The change facilitator can be thus prepared for some of the occurrences during the change process. Fourth, 'innovations come in all sizes and shapes.' The term innovation may refer to product or process. Fifth, innovation and implementation are two sides of the change process coin.' While there are specific steps in the development of an innovation, there are also corresponding steps in implementation, and successful change takes both into consideration. Sixth, 'to change something, someone has to change first

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