

Implementation of Curriculum Reforms in Urban Madang schools: Challenges for Teachers Leading Change

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Introduction

Madang was among leading provinces that accepted the challenges to adopt the Curriculum Reform Implementation agenda and enlisted as partners in the Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP) of the Department of Education in 1993. It has since been a partner to date.

The province has 311 elementary 194 primary 2 secondary 6 high schools and 5 vocational serving over Children 109 primary schools have incorporated grades seven and eight grades under their management.

Madang primary school teachers became partners, leaders and implementers of the introduced curriculum reform in 2000. Their contributions include curriculum assistance in drafting and trialing subject modules including personal development and social science for upper primary grades.

Project support

The Province has received significant support from the National Department of Education (NDOE) through CRIP. The regional CRIP office for Madang, East Sepik and Sandaun provinces is located in Madang. Provincial access to CRIP information, communication and advisory support for rural and urban schools is satisfactory.

Financial assistance from CRIP for head teachers and teachers in-service is highly evident in the last eighteen months. General school and training of trainers workshops are funded by CRIP in partnership with other sponsors including in-kind sponsorship by communities.

Curriculum awareness

Whilst factors above are impacting on curriculum change generally, the level of awareness about the curriculum requires further attention, including refined provincial planning, support and materials distributions to schools especially those in rural constituencies. Most schools received the new syllabuses with some resources in late 2003 and early 2004.

The 2004 awareness programs began in March. A team of inspectors, in partnership with the CRIP Advisor, conducted the first upper primary outcome based curriculum workshop throughout the province. Topics included: background to education reform in PNG; introduction to outcome based education; curriculum overviews; comparative analysis of the old and new syllabuses; introduction to in-service options for curriculum

implementation; study of curriculum contents for each grades and levels in the primary sector; syllabus development strategies of CDD; rationale for curriculum changes; links between structural and curriculum reforms and between the national planning documents such the national curriculum statements and the syllabus.

Head teachers were encouraged to carry out awareness with teachers, board of management members, parents and communities. Primary school inspectors were advised to conduct similar awareness about the new curriculum in respective inspectorates. Most schools in the middle Ramu and Saidor have had some school in-services and are implementing the curriculum reform in their areas.

Despite the above progress, feedback from school officers suggest a desire for higher and varied level of curriculum awareness activities. High level of headmaster/teacher consultations with the CRIP advisor and inspectors (about professional and relevant implementation strategies) suggest that current awareness activities are inadequate, and that further attention to raising teacher awareness and education about the new curriculum is paramount.

In-service Plan

Teacher in-service to raise curriculum awareness and address implementation processes is a primary strategy for the province. The basic plan is to organize teachers into cluster groups for curriculum interactions, peer education and training. Cluster groups consists of teachers in upper primary or elementary sectors. There is plan for members of the group to participate in a week of training of trainers and trained assessors programs.

Some planned activities have begun. The CRIP Advisor and primary school inspectors have organized and implemented the provincial in-service training of teachers in the province. Ninety five percent (95%) of teachers were in-serviced in individual units of work, planning and programming. This has sparked interest in teachers. Many are looking forward to and implement the curriculum reform. Individual schools through their own initiatives are conducting weekly in-service with colleagues to improve their understanding of the new curriculum.

In-service facilitators have emerged in many schools in Madang. They are willing to assist colleagues in understanding the curriculum in their schools. Some of them have experience as curriculum unit writers, others as trained assessors. Others have participated in train-the-trainers workshops at Provincial levels. Still others are self inspired learners. They all provide valuable contributions in schools throughout the province.

Curriculum Implementation

The 2005 is the implementation year for the upper primary reformed curriculum. Eighty five percent (85%) of the schools are implementing the upper primary curriculum. Seventy eight percent (78%) are using the generalist approach.

Schools are utilizing several implementation approaches to teach the new curriculum: (1) an incremental approach; (2) the “all-up” approach and (3) the traditional high school subject specialization approach.

The incremental approach allows schools to introduce the new curricular in grade six (6) and follow through with the same cohort in the following year for grade seven (7) and the year after with grade eight (8).

The “all-up” approach schools are those who launch the grades six, seven and eight curriculum in a particular year and “run” with the new project.

The traditional approach schools are those whose teachers adhere to the traditional subject specialization philosophy for their implementation of the curricular.

Community support

An underlying principal requirement of the reformed curriculum is community involvement. School boards of management, parents and citizens have participated in a series of meetings about the new curriculum. Community awareness about the use of community knowledge, customs, traditions, and community practices as significant learning resources for the new syllabus and related outcomes are discussed during the meetings.

Future challenges

Whilst much has been done to move the curriculum forward, challenges are evident for implementers at the school level. A survey was conducted among head teachers, teachers and upper primary school students in the Madang urban inspectorate identified the following challenges:

- Teachers needs for planning and programming of the curriculum outcome into teaching strategies;
- Low level of teacher reading comprehension;
- Lack of resource materials to support learning under the new curriculum;
- Inadequate professional development of teachers through in-service;
- Conservative attitudes displayed by some school leaders, teachers and head teachers;
- Fear of students not performing well in the grade eight examinations;
- Lack of school libraries and resource centres for teacher research;
- Generalist teaching requirements.

Planning and Programming

Teachers are expressing a need to upgrade their knowledge about planning, programming and assessment procedures relating to the introduced curricula. Observations of teachers workbooks confirms absences of the same in a number of schools. Of the fourteen observed schools, there is either an absence, or evidence of poor and incomplete planning and programming schedules by teachers in seven of them. Of the total number (78) of

teachers teaching upper primary grades in Madang urban inspectorate 35 % of teachers workbooks demonstrate poor understanding of planning and programming activities.

There is observed and teacher-response evidence of teacher's need to understand and appreciate the introduced cumulative and skilled based assessment process as outlined in the national assessment and curriculum policy (2003: 5-7) sections five (5) and six (6). Teachers need to be skilled in and their professional knowledge upgraded to complement the traditional "end of term" exam approach with the formative assessment of demonstrated skills and outcomes based behavior specified in each subject syllabus.

Teachers' understanding about the percentage of assessment weightings distribution amongst specified outcomes—demonstrated skills, and behavior throughout the term--requires upgrading. There is evidence of absence of individual school's assessment policies and procedures to guide teachers.

Level of teachers' comprehension

Some teacher's general-reading ability and comprehension is a challenge. The traditional syllabuses up to the eighties, adopted a prescriptive approach to teaching in schools. Detailed teachers guides and lessons plans were drafted for quick teacher-reference and instant use in classes. Demands on the teachers reading skills for lesson preparation were low. There was little motivation for additional reading and research prior to lesson presentations.

The new upper primary curriculum requires the teacher to be a learner as well and learning innovator. Teachers are expected to adopt a self-study approach to learning and understanding of the syllabus and curriculum guidelines and to design and construct, in partnership with the communities, relevant knowledge, skills and learning experiences appropriate to the local context. This is a challenge especially for matured teachers whose services spans over forty years. The following "tok pisin" quotation from some of the teachers summarizes this situation: "*Ol yangpela! I go lang han blong yupela!! Yupela yet nau! Taim blong mi blong go malolo*". Others would exclaim "*Aiyo-o-o! Het blong mipela i paol*".

Availability of resources

Availability of teachers guides, syllabus and appropriate materials in schools is either non existent or inadequate. Materials delivery agents contracted to ship resources on a "door to door" (?) policy assignments failed to meet their contractual obligations. Reliable eye witnesses established that curriculum materials for designated schools were delivered to "halfway points" destinations and assumed to have arrived at the school. For example, materials destined for inland Komindor primary school were delivered to Megiar primary school and assumed to have reached Komindor. Some schools experience inadequate supply of curriculum materials for students. Investigations into these situations revealed that misleading statistical information on staff appointments and student class enrolments may have contributed to the short supply of resources.

Professional development for teachers

Teachers have expressed opinion that curriculum workshops and teacher in-services funded by CRIP and administered by the advisor are helpful but inadequate. Expressed views, point to the need for shared professional development responsibilities for primary schools teachers, by CRIP, the National Department of Education (NDOE) and its training agencies. Where trainings are provided in teachers colleges, care must be taken to ensure that the presented units of knowledge resemble curriculum contents in the revised curriculum and practical needs of teachers. School practitioners are cautioning that the sustainability of the project may be at stake when donor assistance is exhausted, unless the majority of current practitioner's professional knowledge is upgraded.

Teacher attitudes

Teacher's attitudes toward revised curriculum project reflect two approaches. Many teachers in Madang have expressed a positive attitude towards the goals and rationale of the new curriculum especially the wider school community involvement and student participation in their own learning process. Samples of teachers comments about the reform include: *"We observe that students can now confidently carry out research projects and discuss results of their findings.... There is evidence of student initiative and creativity in presented work..."*

Others are less supportive and display a "withdrawal" type attitude and behavior toward the cause. Such attitudes seem evident from the "over forty" years of service groups discussed above

Examination phobia

Some teacher's lack of cooperation with the new curriculum is motivated by the fear that their students will not perform well in the grade eight exams. They aspire towards a higher performance of their students in the traditional grade eight exams, in the hope that a higher number will perform well in the exams and progress to secondary schools. They will, therefore, not adopt the revised curriculum until the grade eight exams have been redesigned to examine outcome-based knowledge, skills and attitudes. This approach is encouraged by the some school leaders.

Library resources

Majority of Madang urban schools have a space called "school libraries". However, these spaces are poorly stocked with necessary books and resource materials for teachers and students. The demand by the new curricula highlights the need to adequately provide additional research materials for school libraries. These needs are highlighted by the following teacher's comments: *If the school library is equipped with the materials I need, my lessons will be well prepared and taught well."*

A student added: *"A good library will help me find good information to write my assignments."* Others commented: *There is more group activity work, we need a good library to get more information so that we can get good marks."*

Generalist teaching

Teachers are of the opinion that the generalist teaching requirements of the curriculum reform especially for skills, attitudes and behaviors associated with “Making a Living” subject places high demand on teacher’s knowledge and skills of the strands and sub-strand teaching relationships.

Summary

Curriculum implementation activities and challenges outlined in this paper are based on the authors’ observation of individual teachers’ behavior in schools, individual and group interviews with teachers and head teachers of schools in urban Madang. Generalizations drawn in this presentation are limited to teachers and schools in urban Madang. Further research may helpful in determining if similar challenges are experienced by teachers in rural Madang schools and other provinces.

Curriculum implementation activities are progressing in Madang urban schools. Schools are adopting and learning about the new curriculum. Financial and teacher in-service support provided by the CRIP is available to schools in the area. Some positive outcomes including improved participation by children in their own learning are evident.

Some challenges have been identified during the implementation process. They include: teachers needs for planning and programming of the curriculum outcome as part of their teaching strategies; low level of teacher reading comprehension leading to slow acceptance of curriculum changes by some teachers; lack of resource materials to support learning under the new curriculum; inadequate professional development of teachers through in-service; conservative attitudes displayed by some school leaders, and teachers; teachers’ fear of students not performing well in the grade eight examinations; need for school libraries and resource centres to support staff and student learning and generalist teaching demand on teachers preparation time. Some attention will be required to address these challenges if further progress in the curriculum reform is expected in the future.

References

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