



JAMAICA EXPERIENCE



**MINISTRY
OF
EDUCATION**

Every Child Can Learn, Every Child Must Learn

TITLE OF THE EXPERIENCE: Literacy Programme

Country: Jamaica

Institution: Ministry of Education

Type of Institution: Public

Other institutions involved: Private Sector and International Development Partners

Key persons involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation: Mrs Grace McLean (Chief Education Officer), Ms Jean Hastings (Director of Education System Transformation Programme) in collaboration with different Divisions and Units within the Ministry of Education.

Date: 2009 to present

Related Principle: 1 - Promote high-quality, pertinent and timely education

Context

In 2004, a Task Force on Educational Reform was commissioned to assess the efficacy of the education system and to develop an action plan for sectoral improvement. The Task Force identified illiteracy as the major contributor to systemic inefficiency. In its assessment of the curriculum teaching and learning support, the following was highlighted by the Report:

"...By far the most serious problem is students' reading abilities. Deficient reading starts in the lower primary grades and continues to build, year-on-year. Poor reading abilities are concentrated among boys. By the time students reach grade 6, 30 percent of students read below their grade level. By Grade 9 a huge divide has occurred – large numbers of students, especially boys, cannot read or write, while some are functionally illiterate. Because of their reading deficiency, they cannot learn the content of various subjects..."

Source: Task Force on Educational Reform, page 46

The situation engendered renewed focus on literacy and this became one of the main emphases of the Education System Transformation Programme (ESTP), the vehicle through which the Ministry of Education is being transformed. The various initiatives that

existed within the Ministry were pulled together, a system to ensure accountability (Schools Accountability Matrix, SAM) at all levels of the system was developed and literacy specialists were deployed to provide support to the poor performing schools especially. The Programme involves teachers, principals, education officers, parents and political representatives at the local level, the latter being kept abreast of the performance of the schools in their constituencies. The programme is also supported by the private sector through the provision of specially enhanced learning environments in some schools, particularly those performing below the required standard.

The main goal of this programme is the achievement of universal literacy at the grade 4 level, by 2015.

Objectives

The Literacy Programme is underpinned by the Competence-Based Transition Policy that is designed to ensure that students from primary level are adequately prepared to access the secondary level curriculum. This is demonstrated through the achievement of mastery in literacy at the grade 4 level. The main objectives of the Policy are as follow:

- Achieve universal literacy by 2015;
- Secure national commitment to literacy as the foundation for education, training and national development;
- Ensure that all new entrants to the secondary level are certified as literate;
- Ensure the early identification of children with special needs (challenged, gifted and talented) and target resources appropriately;
- Re-brand *literacy* as a critical outcome of the Ministry's core services;
- Position the Grade Four Literacy Test as a critical focal point of the primary level; and
- Secure parents' involvement in the education of their children, beginning at the earliest levels of the system.

Relevance

Literacy enhances personal and national development which in turn impacts regional development. The level of literacy of a people impacts the quality of the labour force and therefore, productivity and competitiveness. A large number of young people leave the education system without the requisite qualification to enter the world of work or to acquire further education. Being literate at the primary level will enable them to better access secondary level education and acquire the skills and competencies to make positive contributions to the society.

Over time, efforts have been made to strengthen the Literacy Programme in order to improve the quality of delivery of education in the area of literacy. Several strategies have been developed under the programme, spanning the early childhood and primary levels. At the early childhood level, **Literacy ABC** is a national literacy strategy aimed at ensuring literacy and numeracy by fostering language growth and development through a variety of print, audio and audio-visual educational materials including information and communication technologies.

At the primary level, the **Revised Primary Curriculum (RPC)** guides instruction and makes provision for what is termed "windows," in its delivery, for the teaching of language arts and mathematics. There are nine literacy standards and benchmarks at this level and they are aligned with the curriculum standard which addresses the "development of communication, literacy, aesthetics, numeracy and information technology skills..." Each literacy standard is further defined by a set of developmentally appropriate

benchmarks which provide a basis for assessing what students should know and be able to do as they progress from one stage to the next.

To further boost productivity and performance, the Ministry also established a National Literacy Team which comprises Literacy Coordinators and Specialists to help build the capacity for on-going development of literacy skills. A critical responsibility of the National Literacy Team is to build capacity for on-going and sustained growth in literacy behaviours and maintain momentum and commitment for literacy endeavours. In addition, an improved system of accountability was designed and introduced to hold policy makers, administrators and implementers at each level accountable for school performance and ultimately student outcomes. This system involves the setting of literacy targets for which all levels of the system are accountable.

Implementation

The Task Force on Education Report was published in 2004 after a series of consultations across the country. A special team was then organized to guide the transformation programme which included developing strategies to improve the quality of education delivery and therefore the educational outcomes. Financial support has been provided by International Development Partners (IDPs) and the private sector has been providing much in-kind support. Training workshops were held to improve teachers' ability to equip students with the necessary literacy skills and competencies. The engagement of literacy specialists also serves to provide the teachers within the schools with needed support.

Local Members of Parliament are provided with reports on the performance of their schools so that they can support the activities that the schools are putting in place to effect improvement. The approach to schooling for improved performance in literacy, involves the entire community, including the parents.

Distribution of tasks

In order to ensure sustainability and ownership, tasks were distributed based on the roles and functions of the different stakeholders. The National Literacy Coordinator is a part of the Curriculum Team and the Regional Coordinators are linked to the six Regional Offices, along with the literacy specialists. The Assessment Unit has responsibility for the administration of the Grade 4 Literacy Test while the Planning and Development Division prepares the results for publication as well as develop the targets for the schools, based on their performance.

The Regional Offices ensure that the targets are discussed and agreed on with the principals and direct the deployment of the literacy specialists so that the worst performing schools can benefit from their support. Principals are responsible for ensuring that strategies are implemented to effect the necessary improvements based on the agreed targets. The teachers are responsible for the implementation of the strategies.

Achievements and results

The Grade Four Literacy Test is the standardized measure of literacy, administered to children in Grade 4 of all public institutions offering primary level education. The test comprises three sections: Word Recognition, Reading Comprehension and a Writing Task. Pupil performance is categorized at three levels "Mastery" Near Mastery', and Non Mastery'. Pupils in the Near Mastery and Non-Mastery categories are generally exposed to the Grade Four Literacy Intervention, after which they are tested a second time. Mastery level in the first administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test increased from 67% in 2009 to 69% in 2011.

Table 1 shows the performance of the students in the subject areas tested at Grade 6 for transitioning to the secondary level. There have been improved results particularly in the 2012 Tests.

TABLE 1: PERFORMANCE IN THE GRADE SIX ACHIEVEMENT TEST			
(AVERAGE SCORES)			
SUBJECT AREAS	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
MATHEMATICS	57	62	63
SCIENCE	60	63	64
SOCIAL STUDIES	58	58	62
LANGUAGE ARTS	58	58	60
COMMUNICATION TASKS	8	8	9
Note: All subjects are marked out of 100 with the exception of Communication Tasks which is marked of 12			

Unexpected achievements

The local political representatives are providing greater support to the institutions within their constituencies. They are desirous of obtaining information on the performance of their schools and collaborate in the development of related projects and programmes in the communities.

Experience and Sustainable Results

Yes, the experience and the results are sustainable as the programme is embedded within the education system and support is being provided by the literacy specialists in building the capacity of the teachers in the system. Additionally, the support from the local political representatives and private partners is a feature of the education landscape.

Capacity to replicate and potential for exchange

Implementation of the programme in primary level schools island-wide began in 2009. Replication of the programme elsewhere would not be difficult as the educational authorities within other countries could in similar fashion, take responsibility for implementation.

Human, operational and institutional capacities

The concept, enshrined in the policy as well as other documentation on the comprehensive literacy programme, can be readily shared. In addition, there are persons who are part of the development and implementation of the programme, who could share their experiences to the benefit of other jurisdictions.

Modalities to replicate the exchange

Information sharing, workshops and expert visits are appropriate in the replication of this experience. Workshops could be used to sensitise persons about the programme while expert visits could be done to obtain first- hand information on how the programme works.

Good practices and concrete lessons

Participation of different stakeholders in the education of our children and the importance of ensuring accountability at all levels of the system.

Experiences and subjects to learn from other RIAC members

How to ensure/guarantee the early involvement and the responsiveness of pre-service teacher training institutions to the demands of the education system and by extension the society.

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