

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN TONGA: Then and Now

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development has often been labelled the 'latest bandwagon' in education. Tonga, like so many countries in the Pacific and in many parts of the world, has established a Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) and charged it with the responsibility of developing and renewing school curricula. It would be naive and entirely too simplistic to attribute its establishment merely to a desire to get on the curriculum bandwagon, although it could not be denied that this did stimulate thinking about it and probably precipitated its inception. The establishment of a CDU, within the Ministry of Education, however, is the culmination of a decade of critical appraisal of the purposes and functions of education and the summation of the reconsideration of its role in development in Tonga; its existence bears witness to the tacit acknowledgement, by educators and concerned public alike, of the need for renewal and reorientation in Tongan education.

This article will look briefly at some of the explanations for the new educational policies; then it will go on to consider some of the resultant commitments of the CDU and their attendant problems.

BACKGROUND

There are a multiplicity of reasons for the recent changes in educational policies and for the demand for curriculum renewal in Tongan education at this point in time; they range from recommendations floated by international organisations such as UNDP/UNESCO in international conferences to internal pressures from the teachers and the schools themselves. It is beyond the scope of a short article, such as this, to deal at any length with all of them. However, two of these will be discussed briefly because they, more than any other, have determined the scope and the direction of the new curricula.

(1) The Need to Develop More Realistic and Relevant Curricula

The Country Paper, on the theme "Managing Education Innovation, Imple-

mentation, Consolidation" delivered at the Sixth Commonwealth Conference in Jamaica in 1974, in its analysis of Tongan education, noted that:

"As the problems unfold the heart of the matter is, all too evidently, the quality of education to which the younger generation has been exposed. The values and ideals and examples given by schools over the years have derived from the content of a western education and have often been very different from traditional Tongan ideals and values. Thus, imperceptibly perhaps but inexorably, conflict has accumulated between the ideas learnt at school and those imparted to the children at home.... The implications of this conflict are of fundamental importance in the consideration of educational aims and the shaping of the education system".¹

Although this Paper conceded that a good level of academic attainment had been maintained, it pointed out that at the same time there had been the familiar excess of concentration on preparation for competitive exams and almost total disregard for the true meaning education.

"There has been until now, little concept of an educational aim that is relevant to the community in which the school leavers are destined to earn their livelihood and wave after wave of school leavers have been leaving school indifferently prepared for the life they will lead."²

A new kind of education was evidently called for: it would be an education that would truly reflect the ideals and values of Tongan society; an education that would offer a meaningful preparation of young people for the life they would be expected to lead in the community; and an education designed to develop in young people realistic attitudes to life, commensurate with the Tongan socio-economic context.

(2) The Need to Prepare for and Supply the Manpower Requirements of the Country's Developing Economy

At the same time, however, that the new educational thinking acknowledges the fact that agriculture is, and will continue to be, the mainstay of the country's economy for the foreseeable future and that the new curricula would, therefore, seek to redirect young people in their attitudes to, and understanding of, their environment and community, it also recognises that Tonga is inevitably moving towards an increasingly technologically-based society. The new policy advocates a system of education which is not only relevant and realistic but also up to date and whose objective would be to provide "a sound basis of education whether young people choose to be, in later life, administrators, doctors, teachers, nurses, farmers, or craftsmen."³

This implies the development of a new curriculum that would not be vocationally oriented but would be knowledge-based, in the sense that the emphasis in all areas would be on understanding concepts rather than on learning and memorising facts; on developing general cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills rather than on task-specific skills. Such a curriculum, it was argued, would cater for the needs of all young people: it would provide both the foundation for the further acquisition of academic knowledge and the framework for the later development of vocational skills. Above all, it would lessen and, perhaps in the long run, could eliminate the conflict that hitherto existed between the values introduced by the schools and those perpetuated by society at large. Indeed, such a curriculum, it was hoped, would bring about the desired integration of the school and the community.

THE NEW CURRICULUM

The current changes in Tongan school curricula came into effect with the official adoption in July 1970 of the Second Development Plan. As stated previously, the Tongan education system was weighed up and was found wanting. The Tongan Government second five-year socio-economic development plan launched Phase I of a two-pronged strategy designed to reorientate and improve education, to develop new curricula and to re-educate and re-train the entire teaching establishment in its philosophy and techniques.

Phase I : 1970-1975⁴

Primary Level

The two areas that were identified at this level for immediate attention were New Mathematics and English-as-a-Second-Language. New Mathematics was given priority because it is so essential a part of coping with daily living, English because it is essentially a part of a good general education. As can be deduced from earlier remarks, certain new elements had to be incorporated into the designs of the new programmes. The content of education so far had been Western-derived and therefore the examples as well as the ethos were drawn from that society. The core of the new programmes, it was felt, must be obtained from that of the Tongan people and their culture. The previous curricula were directive, centrally-imposed and borrowed from outside. If the new programmes were to be authentic and were truly to reflect the values and ideals of the Tongan people, it was argued, they should be developed specifically for Tongan pupils by Tongans. To get rid of the old mechanical process of rote learning in the old

curricula, the new programmes must substitute new concepts and cognitive skills.

The English Programme

No new materials were developed. Instead, the Tate Oral English Course and the SPC Reading Course were adopted for use in the primary schools. It was felt that these programmes, designed as they were for use by Pacific pupils learning English as a Second Language, would also serve Tonga's needs well. The main efforts therefore were directed at training the teachers in how to use these programmes. To facilitate and accelerate the re-training programmes, five teacher centres designed as workshops were constructed in 1971. Five teams of two specialists each were created and these were responsible for the in-service training. By the end of Phase I thirty courses had been conducted, each one being attended by 15-20 teachers and nearly all the teachers in Tongatapu and Vava'u had been trained in the use of the English Language programme.

The New Mathematics Programme

The real innovation in this period was in the development of this programme. An environmental method has been used in all facets of training and teachers have been instructed in the use of local materials. The new programme anticipated the move towards metrication and has been fully metricated since the beginning. The Tongan language is the medium for this programme, that is, all the materials are totally in Tongan and the pupils receive their instruction in Tongan.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect is the attempt to involve teachers in all stages of the curriculum development process. (See Table 1).

Democratising the curriculum development process clearly indicates a high degree of co-ordination. The New Mathematics programme therefore in this phase did not achieve a comparable rate of progress with the English programme. It also had to develop Teachers' Manuals and Pupils' Workbooks. However, at the end of Phase I, a syllabus had been completed, the Teachers' Manuals were being tried and the Pupils' Workbooks were being drafted.

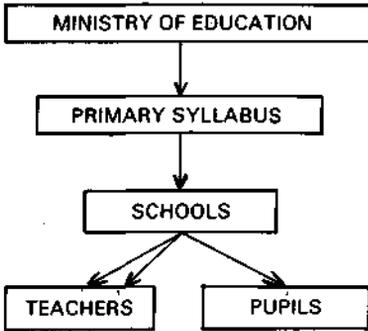
Secondary Level

At this level, Tonga pooled its resources with the other countries in the Pacific. Secondary schools in Tonga therefore participated in the Regional Secondary Development Project conducted by the UNDP/UNESCO Unit. The main objective, as most readers are aware, was to provide a basic four-year

TABLE I

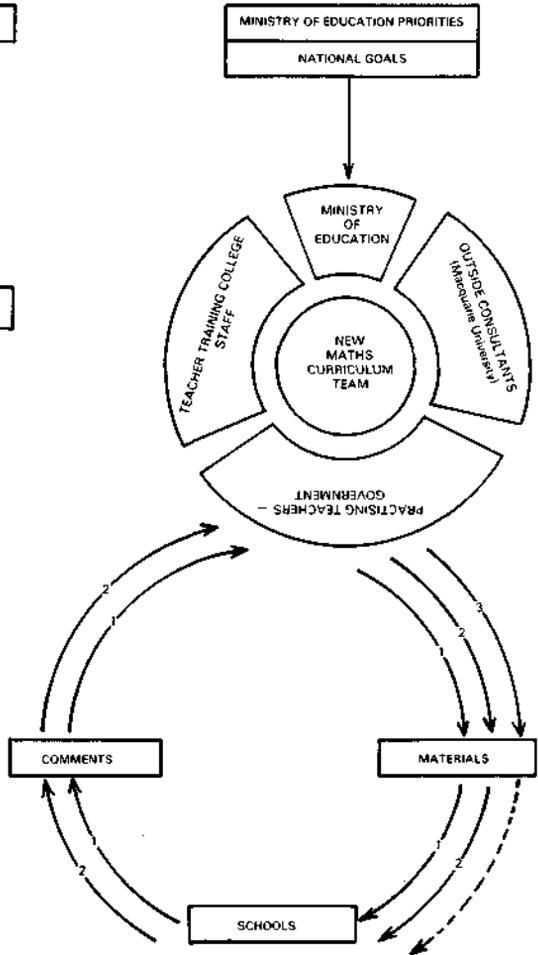
The following figures demonstrate the innovative nature of the new strategy:

The Old



A Prescriptive Non-Teacher Participatory Model

The New



- 1 First Trial
- 2 Second Trial
- 3 Third Trial : ad infinitum

A Cyclic Teacher – Participatory Model

course in the whole curriculum that would meet the needs of most school leavers for whom a four-year course or a local leaving certificate would be terminal, but which would also form the basis on which intended courses in Forms 5 and 6 could be built.

Phase II : 1976-1980^s

The Third Development Plan brought with it not only changes in priorities and emphases but also recognition of the need for the establishment of a separate division within the Ministry to be responsible for curricula co-ordination and the healthy continuation of the innovative curriculum development process at both the secondary and the primary levels. A Curriculum Development Unit, with a Senior Education Officer in charge, was set up and with this official seal of approval, curriculum development could be said to have come of age in Tonga.

Primary Level

Environmental Science is being given the top priority in the second phase. Environmental concepts and methods have, of course, been incorporated in both the New Mathematics and the English programmes, but the new Environmental Science programme is designed to include not only scientific knowledge of the environment but also cultural studies in song, dance, lore and traditional skills. For these latter activities, it is acknowledged, the village people may well be, and indeed have proved to be, the most appropriate teachers.

The New Mathematics and the English programmes, although they have ceased to receive top priority treatment, are still being developed. The Maths programme has been revised and it is now entering its second trial period; the English programme has been reviewed and it emerged that the programme is deficient in written exercises and reading activities. The main task now is the development of suitable supplementary materials to augment the oral course.

Both the English and the Environmental Science programmes have followed the basic structure and organisation adopted by the maths programme, that is, every attempt is made at every stage to involve the teachers who will be responsible for the implementation of the programmes. It was realised quite early on that Tonga as yet lacks professional staff who have the expertise to develop curriculum materials which, while suitable for Tongan pupils in Tonga, will also keep abreast of international educational trends and research findings. Consultants from abroad were sought and their functions have been twofold: to provide the expertise that Tonga as yet lacks and to

assist in the training of Tongan counterparts in those professional skills that will enable them to continue the development process once the experts leave.

Secondary Level

When the UNDP/UNESCO Secondary School Curriculum Project was terminated, there were quite a number of programmes left in unsatisfactory stages: the English programme stopped at Form 2; the third and fourth forms Social Science materials were unacceptable to some Pacific countries; many units in Basic Science for the third and fourth forms had never been trialled; the Maths course omitted a number of important topics. However, the project could be considered successful in that it contributed substantially towards an improved educative process and in the sense that it offered a more meaningful education than had been the case previously. The project also assisted quite significantly in the identification and training of key people in curriculum development in many subject areas.

The collaboration of Pacific countries in the UNDP project was shortlived but at least the training done by the project gave many countries, of which Tonga is one, confidence in their teachers' abilities to develop their own curricula tailored to their own needs.

The termination of the UNDP project threw Tonga back on its own resources. The CDU was thus established to continue from where the UNDP project had left off.

The original submission for the establishment of a CDU identified the following priority areas:⁶

1. Industrial Arts (Forms 1-4)
2. Home Economics (Forms 1-4)
3. Social Science (Forms 3-4 and revision of Forms 1-2 and Higher Leaving Geography and History)
4. English (Forms 3-4 and revision of Forms 1-2)
5. Agricultural Science (Forms 1-4)
6. Basic Commerce (Forms 1-4)
7. Tongan (Forms 1-4)
8. Expressive Arts (Forms 1-4)

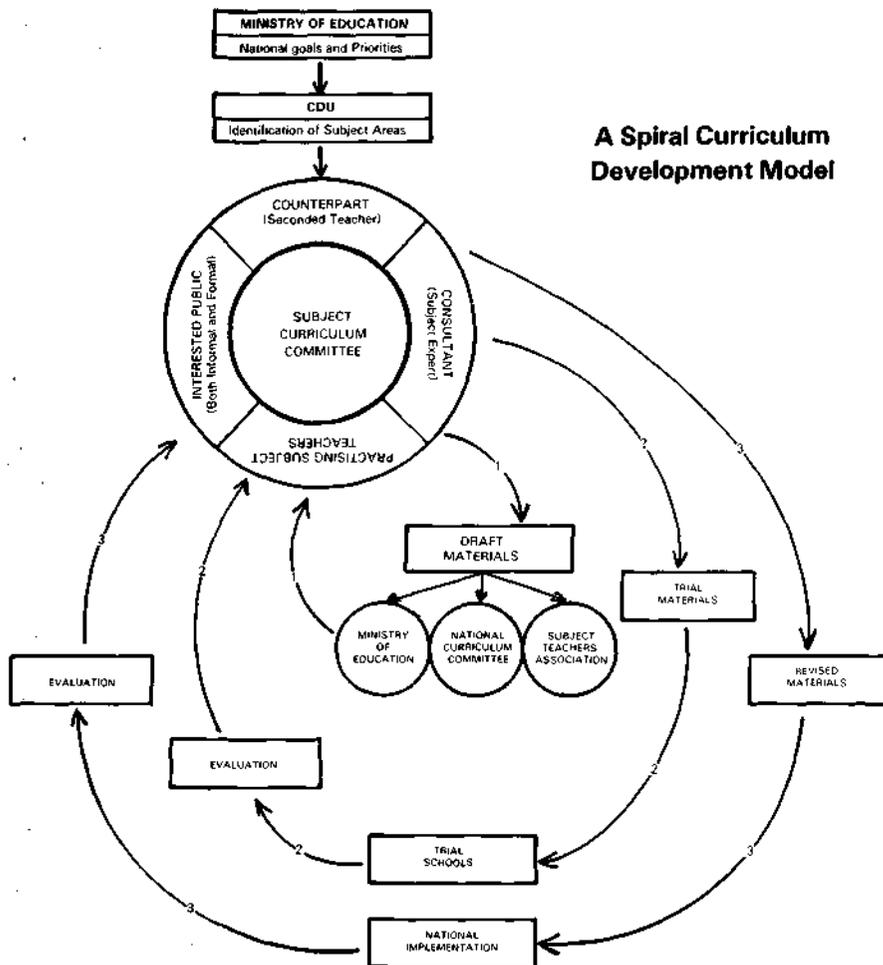
and confirmed the curriculum development structure to be used in all areas.

The pilot programme is being developed through the Tonga Curriculum Development Project in association with the USP Institute of Education and funded through IOE by the New Zealand Government.

As Table 2 shows, the project is firmly Tonga – based with a National Curriculum Committee working in close co-operation with subject committees, IOE consultants and the Ministry of Education. In each subject area, consultants work with Tongan counterparts seconded to the CDU and with subject teachers and principals. The model which is evolving has a number of unique features, as mentioned above, and could be adopted for other countries in the region.

TABLE 2

A Spiral Curriculum Development Model



Four programmes are now under development: Social Science, Industrial Arts, Home Economics and Agricultural Science. The Social Science programme is trialling the Form 4 and nationally implementing the Form 3 materials; Industrial Arts is trialling the Form 2 and implementing the Form 1 materials; Home Economics is trialling the Form 2 and implementing the Form 1 materials; Agricultural Science, begun only in January of this year, has completed outlines for a Forms 1-4 syllabus and is beginning to develop the Form 1 draft materials.

SOME BASIC PROBLEMS

The problems that Tonga is encountering in its efforts to renew and develop its school curricula are not new or unique. They are probably inherent in the innovative process in education. However, a brief discussion of some of them might serve as a reminder to all of us that proposed changes, despite any claims to rationality and necessity, are never universally acceptable.

(1) Adoption versus Acceptance

There is almost always a discrepancy between what is planned and what is implemented. What schools agree to accept in any curriculum and what they, in fact, adopt can be two quite different things.

In Tonga there are several ways of tackling this problem:

the teachers are involved so that the programmes are in reality *their* programmes and therefore there should not be any sense of imposition;

regular in-service courses are built into each programme to provide the teachers with both pedagogical and knowledge skills; and

wherever possible the necessary supporting resources are provided.

These efforts, however, are not proving sufficient.

(2) Teacher Commitment

Any real innovation in education demands of the teacher new skills, new knowledge and changed attitudes. It de-skills the teacher and undermines his professional identity. This is especially true in subjects which adopt integrated approaches and in Tonga this is true of the Industrial Arts and Social Science programmes. In Industrial Arts, a traditional Woodwork teacher suddenly finds that he has to acquire skills in working with metals, and has to learn mechanics and a host of other technical skills. In Social Science, the Geography teacher now finds that he has to understand funda-

mental concepts from other social science disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, and Politics. Again, teacher involvement and in-service training alleviate the problems to a certain extent but cannot eliminate them entirely. It is recognised, of course, that unless the teachers understand the rationale behind the programmes and are committed to their effective implementation, they will never be adopted in the spirit in which they were first conceived.

(3) Formal Recognition

The adoption of any particular programme is very much dependent on its formal recognition. The questions that are inevitably asked are:

Will it be examined?

Will it lead to any formal qualification?

Is it academically respectable?

Will it be recognised outside of one's own country?

Despite the call for realism and relevance in curriculum development, there is a danger that such curricula may be used only by the less able pupils. This would only further accentuate the rift between the education of the elite and the education of the mass. There is already evidence of this in Tonga: some schools offer Social Science to the 'B' and 'C' streams only. The 'A' stream continue with Geography and History because Social Science is not offered at School Certificate level. Industrial Arts and Home Economics are similarly accepted for implementation in vocationally-oriented schools and as alternatives to academic subjects for the less able pupils in the so-called academic high schools.

(4) Availability of Resources: Human and Hardware

Unless resources are available in sufficient quantity and quality, no programme, however perfect in design, can hope to succeed. All the programmes in Tonga have been funded by aid from overseas — from Australia and New Zealand — but this source of finance and expertise will not continue indefinitely, nor is it desirable, but in Tonga's present economic situation the prospects for the continuation of all the programmes are dim indeed.

(5) Relevancy versus Progress

The present demand for realistic educational programmes may result in the creation of an insular society. The challenge to curriculum developers is in maintaining a balance between the demand for relevancy and the need to keep abreast with world educational developments. The role of the

consultant is to ensure the latter whilst that of the teachers is to ensure the former.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the curriculum development process is an endless spiral and this is how it should be. Every programme, regardless of how brilliantly conceived, planned and executed, should be dynamic: it should continually adjust and change in an effort to achieve equilibrium with its context and with educational research findings.

The materials that have been developed so far by our teachers are far from perfect but Stenhouse's comments on the subject of curriculum development have encouraged us to believe that we are at least on the right track:

"Another way of looking at the situation is to continue to regard curriculum as a policy, but to take the Popperian view of policies, asserting that policies evolve and improve continuously and progressively by the study of their shortcomings and their gradual elimination. On such a view the concepts of success and failure become irrelevant. A curriculum without shortcomings has no prospect of improvement and has therefore been insufficiently ambitious."⁷

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