

UPGRADING THE SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Factors which precipitated the changes

When the government of Prime Minister Pius Wingti took over the reins of power in Papua New Guinea in July, 1992, one of the cornerstones of the new government's agenda was the reform of the educational system. In particular, it was widely felt that the existing educational system provided too limited access for Papua New Guinean children, and that even those who entered the system found the curriculum of little relevance to their lives and often dropped out of the system.

In order to increase access to education, the entire structure of the educational system was changed. The following diagram illustrates the old system and the new system.

Old System

Community School	Provincial High School	National High School	Tertiary
Grades 1-6	Grades 7-10	Grades 11-12	

New System

Vernacular Pre-school	Primary School	Secondary School	Tertiary
K, 1, 2	Grades 3-8	Grades 9-12	

Under the old system, there were only four National High Schools teaching grades 11 and 12. The role of these institutions was primarily to provide students for the two universities, the Goroka Teachers' College, and other tertiary institutions. Under the new system, all high schools will eventually be upgraded to 9-12 status. By the year 1997, roughly 25 provincial high schools will have been 'topped-up'.

The implications for teacher education are enormous. Large numbers of teachers must be found to teach grades 11 and 12. At present, Goroka Teachers' College (now renamed UPNG - Goroka Campus) graduates fewer than 100 secondary teachers per year with a 3-year Diploma in Secondary Teaching, prepared only to teach to grade 10 level. In order to adapt to the new system, Goroka will have to significantly increase its output of teachers, and to offer education to the B.Ed. level.

Planning the Bachelor of Education Course

Under the present system, Goroka is reputed to be doing a very fine job of producing secondary teachers for the grade 7-10 system. This reputation is based on reports of high school principals and inspectors. Emphasis at Goroka has traditionally been on teaching skills and the fostering of a highly professional attitude.

In order to educate grade 11 and 12 teachers, however, a shift in emphasis towards more content instruction will be necessary.

Departments at Goroka Campus are currently writing the course descriptions for the new programmes. They are grappling with the issues of just what content will be necessary to prepare future teachers for grades 11 and 12 teaching.

This task is particularly difficult in areas such as Home Economics, Commerce, and Practical Skills, which are not at present taught in grades 11 and 12. It is not known what topics in these disciplines will be included in the 11 and 12 syllabi, or indeed whether they will be taught at all at those upper secondary levels.

In addition, teaching at grades 11 and 12 will require further specialisation. At present, for example, teachers study two equivalent teaching subjects, such as Science and Expressive Arts. Grade 11 and 12 teachers will be forced to specialise within their principal disciplines, in say, Physics or Chemistry, or in Music or the Visual arts. For this reason, the new curriculum at Goroka will require a student to choose one major and one minor subject.

On the other hand, those planning the new Goroka programme believe that future teachers should be as broadly educated as possible. The philosophical bases for this belief need not be reiterated in this discussion. But even under practical considerations, the vast teacher shortage in Papua New Guinea forces many secondary teachers to step in to teach subjects of which they have little or no knowledge. In particular, most schools are experiencing shortages of Home Economics or Practical Skills teachers, and so existing English or Social Science teachers are being asked to teach these subjects. Thus, it is felt that future teachers should have at least some introduction to one or more subjects outside their major and minor subjects.

The reader will observe that the curriculum planned for Goroka Campus is attempting to be all things to all people - providing the pedagogical basis of sound teaching methods, increasing the content knowledge of future teachers, and offering additional subjects for broadly educated individuals. Attempting to cram all these objectives into a 4-year B.Ed. programme is certain to draw criticism from all fronts - from the University academics, who feel that education courses and electives detract from content offerings, as well as from educationalists who feel that any reduction in methods courses may detract from future teachers' classroom skills. The inclusion of optional or elective subjects in other disciplines is considered by many purists as frivolous.

Relevant Skills

After increased access, the second thrust of the Wingti government's reforms is in the direction of more relevant education. It is felt by many that the present emphasis on the academic 'core subjects' of English, mathematics, science and social science, leave those children who do not continue for tertiary studies badly prepared for return to village life. Indeed, there is a widespread opinion that the crushing of many children's high expectations of tertiary education and a government office job, is leading to frustration with mal-adaptation of village life and consequently to crime and dysfunctional behaviour.

In fact, the 1991 Department of Education Sector Review has turned the tables, stressing that the traditional 'core subjects' should be considered as subsidiary to the principal objectives of "the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills relevant to community development." (p.5)

In order to implement the above objectives, Goroka Campus has proposed a structure which includes (in addition to a School of Education) a School/Faculty of Arts and Sciences (i.e. the 'core subjects'), and a School/Faculty of Applied Studies (i.e. the 'non-core subjects'), which should give equal emphasis to the two areas.

Furthermore, the proposed new regulations for student enrolment require that in the first year of study, a student must study three principal subjects, one of which must be a non-core subject. In the second year, the student will choose two of the initial three as his/her teaching subjects, and in the third year will choose one of those two subjects as major, the other as minor.

A Credit-Point System

Planners of the new system at Goroka Campus opted for a credit-point system.

This was done to regulate the relative amount of study in the major subject, the minor subject, in educational studies, etc. For example, in order to complete a major in a subject, a student must pass a total of 36 credits in content courses in the major subject, while a minor comprises 28 credits. In order to graduate, a student will be required to pass a fixed number of education course credits (28), as well as certain specialised courses in information technology, instructional technology, community research skills, library skills, and an individual project. A credit point is defined as either one contact hour of lecture time per week, or two contact hours of practical/tutorial time. For example, a course with one hour of lecture time plus two hours of tutorial time per week will carry 2 credit points.

The on-going planning exercise has provided many meaningful discussions as to the philosophy and objectives of education in Papua New Guinea. Conflicting ideologies such as academic vs. practical, elitist vs. populist, content vs. pedagogy, will ensure that the final result represents a compromise which will not completely satisfy any of the camps. However, it will represent an amalgamation of contributions from the best minds from all sectors of PNG society. This healthy discussion in a wide forum should give Teacher Education in Papua New Guinea the upgrading it needs to meet the challenges of the new system of education in the country.