

## Composite Class Teaching: Results of an Action Research Project

Schools where composite class teaching occurs are very common throughout our region. Teachers who have to deliver more than one curriculum in such schools face even greater challenges, compared to teachers who are adapting and delivering one curriculum to (often large) classes with students who are by no means a homogeneous group.

Dr Gurmit Singh and Professor David Jenkins undertook an action research project in 1994-1995 which sought answers to the following question:

*How do teachers cope in the composite class teaching situation?*

The project provided a valuable opportunity to Lautoka Teachers' College (Fiji) lecturers and to a group of teachers in rural schools near to Lautoka to be engaged in research.

Action Research is highly practical. It involves the curriculum in action and involves the classroom teacher in finding out for him- or her- self what is going on and possibly how to make improvements in classroom practice, namely in learning and teaching.

The *USP-LTC Action Research Project* thus not only provided useful ideas on ways of improving curriculum delivery in composite classrooms, but it also provided professional development, an opportunity to stand back and **reflect**, for both college staff and classroom teachers.

### Findings and Recommendations

The Summary of Findings and Recommendations is presented here. A copy of the full report may be obtained from the Institute of Education, the University of the South Pacific, P.O. Box 1168, Suva, Fiji.

### ● Findings

1. The pre-service preparation of the teachers in the study schools did not include training in multiclass teaching.
2. The "fixed" curriculum for the primary schools complicates the handling of composite classes.
3. The book by Collingwood, I. (1991), *Multiclass Teaching in Primary Schools*, is rather general and not quite applicable to Fiji classroom situations.
4. One of the classes in a composite class is always at a disadvantage especially with regard to the amount of time the teacher spends with each class.
5. The classrooms in composite classes are organised like the straight classes with both classes facing in the same direction and sharing the same blackboard.
6. The furniture available in the classroom does not allow for better classroom arrangement.
7. The teachers in the composite classes have a heavy workload (handling two sets of curricula, marking of exercise books and preparation of two sets of examination papers).
8. There has not been any regular in-service training of teachers handling composite classes.
9. The UNESCO publication, printed and distributed some three years ago, had yet to reach the teachers in the study schools. Even the headteachers showed only a hazy

recollection of the existence of this publication.

10. Because of competition for gaining good examination results, a composite class teacher tends to devote more time and effort to the examination class, thus leaving a whole class very much on its own most of the time.

## ● Recommendations

1. That urgent steps be taken to ensure that the UNESCO publication, *Multiclass Teaching* reaches all primary schools.
2. That some form of centralised or school-based in-service training be conducted on adapting ideas from this publication to make them more appropriate for the Fiji situation.
3. That the pre-service curriculum in teachers' colleges be adjusted to provide adequate emphasis on both the theory and practice of composite class teaching. It is vital that students actually experience composite class teaching as part of their practicum while training at the college.
4. That the following crucial factors that are beyond the control of classroom teachers be looked at closely by the Curriculum Development Unit:
  - ◆ curriculum for straight classes in a composite class situation,
  - ◆ rationalizing composite class timetables,
  - ◆ the primary examinations and their implications for the composite class teacher.
5. That a positive response be made to the pressing need in composite classrooms for curriculum-based learning kits to be used by the class working on its own while the

teacher "teaches" one of the composite classes. These kits should be so developed that they can be used by the children independently, and individually or in groups. Such kits, along with the prescribed materials (textbooks/ (workbooks, etc) and library resources, should compensate for the reduced instruction time imposed by the normal composite class situation.

## References

- Collingwood, I. (1991). *Multiclass Teaching in Primary Schools*. UNESCO Office for the Pacific States, Apia.
- Jenkins, D and Singh, G. (1993). *Research Proposal - Action Research in Koro Primary Schools*, Education and Psychology, SOH, USP, Suva.
- Kemmis, D. and MacTaggart, (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin University.
- UNDP/UNESCO (1988-92). *Pacific Educational Management Project*.

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