
Teacher education activities by the Caribbean Examinations Council

Background

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was established 'to conduct such examinations as it may think appropriate and award certificates and diplomas on the results of examinations so conducted'. It was also the generally accepted view, well articulated by Mr William Demas in his address at the inaugural meeting of the Council in 1973, that:

'The establishment of the Council should not be seen as just a change of examining bodies but as part of a conscious effort on the part of regional Governments to restructure, redirect, and remodel the school systems of the Caribbean with a view to relating them to the environment, the problems and needs of our societies'.

The Council, in order to discharge that mandate, had first to take into account the symbiotic relationship between the assessment and reporting of students' examination work based on its published syllabuses and the national curricula delivered to students in the classroom. Teachers, the Council recognised, would likely feel threatened by the new system of examination which involved fundamental changes to the educational philosophy and to their classroom practices. It was therefore obligatory (and prudent) that the Council put into effect strategies to sensitise teachers to the new philosophy which would involve them in a significant way in assessing students' performance through the School-Based Assessment (SBA) component, as well as provide practical hands-on training in making the linkage between the teaching of the syllabus and the assessment of SBA.

Teacher training components in secondary school curriculum development projects

In 1979 the Council entered into agreement with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to undertake a regional project concerned with secondary school curriculum development. Included in that project were specific objectives in respect of teacher orientation, as well as the production and/or procurement of a variety of teacher-learning materials and reference materials. The latter, the evaluators of the project noted, were useful not only in the classroom setting but also in the improvement of the instructional capacities of the teachers. The success of the project was due to a large extent to the efforts of teachers who assembled in a series of workshops at the regional, sub-regional and territorial levels to make full use of the opportunity provided to expand their knowledge of the subject matter and the delivery of the content through appropriate teaching techniques, and actually participate in the development of the teacher-learning materials for use in the classrooms. Between 1979 and 1983, the evaluators of the project reported that approximately 4,500 secondary school teachers and other educational personnel were trained in the 264 workshops conducted in subject development and in psychometric techniques. Survey data indicated that the teachers demonstrated improved competence in the selection and use of teacher and student material, and in test development and construction.

The overall impact of the project on teachers, was judged to be 'varied and considerable' with the following successes noted:

- 'an increased number of teachers became familiar with CXC syllabuses, their content, and methods of teaching related to the specific subject fields;

- many teachers gained the invaluable experience of developing and writing curriculum materials;
- large numbers of teachers showed evidence in their classroom of the use of new and varied teaching methods and strategies;
- many teachers utilised improved and varied SBA techniques. Almost 800 received training to achieve this goal in psychometric workshops;
- through participation in workshops teachers had the opportunity to meet and talk with colleagues from other territories and schools in an important exchange of professional experience and knowledge;
- although many teachers have not had the opportunity to participate in workshops, the values gained by those who did participate have been extended to their colleagues through both formal and informal means of communication and sharing.'

The CXC/USAID Project was followed up in November 1985 with a CIDA/ACCC/CXC Project which was intended specifically to support CXC in strengthening the delivery of technical, vocational and science education in the region and in so doing strengthen CXC itself as a regional examining body. The activities directly concerned with teacher-orientation and training under this project were:

- the modularisation of ten technical/vocational and science subjects, and the distribution of the modules to the CXC participating territories for use by the teachers; and
- workshop training of teachers/educators in the principles of module development and use of modules.

Over the life of the project, modules were developed for the CXC syllabuses in agricultural science, biology, building technology, chemistry, electrical engineering technology, integrated science, mechanical engineering technology, office procedures, physics and technical drawing. Nearly 4,000 sets of modules were produced, printed and distributed to schools, teacher training institutions, technical and community colleges, the Universities of the West Indies and Guyana and ministries in the participating territories served by the Council.

The major objective of the module writers' workshops was to provide extensive training for science and technical/vocational subject specialists in the development of a modu-

larised curriculum. More specifically it was intended that after being trained these module writers would be able to conduct local workshops which would orient teachers to the CXC syllabuses, to use the modules developed and the techniques within them. This objective was achieved to a significant extent, with many persons in certain territories who received the training continuing to share the knowledge/expertise with colleagues at the local level. Admittedly, this activity has not been sustained at the levels anticipated when the project was conceived, for reasons which are mainly related to the problems of funding, organisation and professional commitment which have affected ministries/departments in varying degrees across the region.

The survey conducted by the evaluators at the end of the project indicated that teachers generally expressed positive feelings about the utility of the modules. The interest in obtaining the modules and using them is still currently very high. Feedback suggests that teachers perceive that the modules are closely related to the CXC syllabuses and adequately tailored to meet their needs. They provide teachers with a working tool which allows them to fulfil the objectives and aims of the CXC syllabus in classroom activities.

Other CXC teacher training activities

Workshops in SBA

In addition to the activities described above, the Council has been involved in teacher training in support of other aspects of its work, either at the request of participating territories or in response to particular needs identified by the Council, its examining committees and subject panels through research into the candidates' performance. The Council has in the past funded fully workshops at the sub-regional or national level to assist teachers with the implementation of SBA, usually when a new syllabus with this component is introduced or the component is added to an existing syllabus. More recently, the Council has been encouraged by the agreement of participating territories to co-operate in the delivery of these training sessions by providing funds to cover the local expenses.

A three year action plan for further work throughout the region on the development of the SBA and practical components of the

syllabuses was approved at the December 1994 meeting of the Council. The successful implementation of the plan will depend greatly on the willingness and ability of participating territories to share the cost of regional workshops by funding the attendance of their nationals and to put in place arrangements for the resource persons trained at the workshops to conduct workshops at the local level on an ongoing basis for colleagues in the school system. The arrangements for the programme, which is projected to begin in 1995, have been based on the following assumptions:

- 1 The Council will, within the limits of its resources, share with participating governments the cost of providing SBA support services for teachers.
- 2 The Council's contribution will include:
 - organising regional and sub-regional workshops for teachers from all participating territories
 - identifying suitable resource persons and facilitators to conduct the regional and sub-regional workshops
 - meeting the costs of travel, fees and subsistence for regional resource persons and facilitators
 - providing materials for use in the workshops.
- 3 The participating territories' contribution will include travel and subsistence for participants attending the regional or sub-regional workshops and all costs associated with subsequent workshops convened at the local level.
- 4 The participating territories will organise and conduct similar workshops under the direction of the CXC-trained local resource persons.

The objectives of the programme will be to:

- 1 plan and construct instructional kits for use by the resource persons and teachers at the national level
- 2 develop a cadre of resource persons in each territory who will organise and conduct workshops and provide assistance to teachers in the delivery of the SBA programme
- 3 enable schools and their teachers to appreciate the curriculum benefits of the SBA

4 establish, in the long term, schemes for certifying certain teachers as accredited assessors of SBA, and for moderating SBA at the local level.

SBA moderation feedback

An invaluable service provided to the teachers of subjects with SBA components since the inception of the examinations has been the moderation reports which the examiners prepare for and issue to each teacher. The conditions for SBA require the teachers' SBA to be moderated either through a process of remarking a sample of the work of each teaching group by the Council's examiners or by an external moderator visiting the school periodically to inspect and report on the quantity and quality of the assessment being undertaken.

A typical report issued to the teacher indicates the examiners' judgement of the extent to which the syllabus requirements have been met, the general trend of the standard of the assessment, the extent to which the CXC standards were achieved in the assessment conducted, and, where applicable, suggestions for improving the quality of SBA assignments set in terms of their relevance and appropriateness. Principals and teachers look forward to receiving these reports, recognising that they offer valuable insight into the standards expected by the Council, the preparedness of their candidates for the examinations, and how the teachers' own knowledge and skills in the subject might be improved.

Since the majority of the examiners who are trained to provide SBA feedback are classroom teachers themselves, they constitute an excellent resource for locally arranged workshops to help teachers to report accurately and fully on students' SBA work.

Conclusion

The Council will continue to work in collaboration with ministries and teacher training institutions in the region in initiatives to develop teaching and assessment skills required to ensure the success of the examinations at all levels.

It needs, however, to be emphasised that the teacher training role which CXC continues to play in order to ensure the success of its examinations can only be supplementary to the work of other institutions in the region mandated to provide such curriculum services.