PROBLEMS OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION - THE CASE OF SPANISH IN THE JUNIOR SECONDARY SYSTEM

Jeanette Morris

Introduction

The Junior Secondary Schools are relatively new institutions within the educational system of Trinidad and Tobago. They represent an innovation in that they were established to provide all children up to age 14+ with a broad, general, secondary education; the curriculum was devised with this goal in mind. The Spanish curriculum with which this investigation is concerned has as its aim, knowledge of the language, culture and way of life of the Spanish speaking peoples of the neighbouring states so as to facilitate communication. The public perception is however, that the three-year programme in the Junior Secondary School is not meeting these goals. Students leave without being able to communicate in the target language even at the level of basic survival skills. Those who go on to further study at the Senior Secondary or Senior Comprehensive Schools are found wanting in the basic knowledge on which the two-year programme leading to the CXC Basic or General Proficiency Examination is based. This may be partly due to the discrepancy between the intended outcomes of the Junior Secondary curriculum and the actual outcomes. If the curriculum goals set for the Junior Secondary Schools are not being achieved a closer examination of these goals and the suggested instructional strategies, as well as of the implementation process in the classroom may shed light on some obstacles to effective implementation.

Review of Literature

The problem of effective implementation is raised wherever curriculum innovation fails to obtain the desired result. Implementation can be defined as "the actual use of a new practice ... This differs from planned use or intended use ..." (Fullan and Pompret (1977) cited in Loucks and Lieberman (1983)). This difference between actual use and intended use determines whether effective implementation has taken place. The concern about effective implementation springs from the realization that many potentially valuable curriculum innovations fail to make any impact on the teaching-learning process in the classroom. Research has focused on trying to determine the conditions necessary for successful implementation by describing case studies of efforts to introduce change at the level of schools. Several key components criti-
cal to implementation have been identified. Loucks and Lieberman (1983) identify three (3) key concepts — developmentalism, participation and support. Patterson and Czajkowski (1979) suggest that the most frequently neglected components of implementation are — "planning for implementation, applying change strategies, and conducting staff development". (p 204). These concepts are very similar and deal with the role of teachers and the school as an organization, within the implementation process.

Perhaps the most important aspect of planning for implementation is taking account of the context in which the change is to occur — the school setting. Sarason (1971) describes the school as "highly structured and differentiated" and argues that the teaching of any particular discipline is partly determined by the structure of the school, independent of any intrinsic characteristic of the discipline itself. Consequently any attempt to effect change in the curriculum without concomitant change in the institution probably runs the risk of failure (p 35-36). This institutional change can be purely organizational, for example, dealing with scheduling, or can be affective, i.e. requiring changes in the relationships operating within the school setting. These changes may not be clearly spelt out, but if there are no changes in the ways teachers and pupils relate to each other for example, they may not obtain the benefits of the curriculum innovation, and will not be able "to enjoy, persist in and productively utilize intellectual and interpersonal experience". (p 48)

Another component of planning for implementation which is crucial is the involvement of those who will eventually implement the curriculum — the teachers. Loucks and Lieberman (1983) called this aspect — participation. Very often the impetus for curriculum change comes from outside the schools. It may come from the universities which are dissatisfied with the knowledge and skills which their undergraduates have on entry and wish them to be better prepared. Change may come from the staff of colleges of education, or from the supervisory personnel or curriculum division of the education authority. Rarely does it come from teachers, parents or children. Research suggests however, that when teachers are involved at the level of decision-making about the implementation process, there is a greater chance of success. (Louis (1980) cited in Loucks and Lieberman (1983)). Without teacher involvement at this level, teachers tend to react to outsiders' proposals as idealistic, and to view them as inappropriate or divorced from the realities of the classroom. The curriculum developers on the other hand view the teachers as backward and as "obstacles to, rather than facilitators of progress". (Sarason, 1971, 38). They fail to consider them as experts in their own arena with valuable inputs into
the total implementation process.

The teachers' role as the agent of change is implicit in all efforts to bring about curriculum change in the classroom. Yet by not involving teachers except at the final stage, the conditions are being created for the change process to be unsuccessful. Teachers are asked to unlearn habits of long standing and learn new roles, sometimes even new content areas. The fact that they are rarely involved in the curriculum development process from the initial stages means that they are not familiar with the theory and concepts that they now have to learn and may lack the necessary commitment to the change process, and the curriculum which is being imposed from outside. This does not mean that teachers cannot develop a commitment to an innovation which is handed down to them, but such a commitment cannot be taken for granted and steps should be taken to ensure that such a commitment develops.

One of the ways of developing such a commitment is by providing the support that teachers need. The need for material support is obvious - equipment, materials, proper scheduling, adequate rooms etc. What is not so obvious is the importance of the human support. The school administration, particularly the principal can provide this by giving encouragement as well as allowing sufficient time for teachers to plan and work with their peers to create new materials. Peer support is also important particularly in resolving problems that may arise. Support can also come from other sources external to the school, for example, ministry personnel, the university faculty, teachers' colleges, etc.

Hand in hand with material and moral support should go staff development if teachers are to successfully implement any new curriculum. Teachers need to be helped in two (2) ways. Firstly, they have to be reeducated to develop the behaviours, skills and competencies needed for implementation. Secondly, they need to develop the attitudes which will help them face the challenge of change. The second task is more difficult, yet crucial if curriculum implementation is to be successful. Loucks and Pratt (1979) have shown that teachers when faced with change go through seven (7) stages in their attitude to the new situation. The first stages are self-oriented - the teacher's concern is both informational and personal, for example "I would like to know more about it", or "how will it affect me". As they begin to participate their concerns become more management-oriented and deal with matters like schedules, materials and time. When these problems are solved, they can then direct their concerns to the impact the change is having on their students. They begin to worry about the consequences, about collaboration with other teachers or changes in the programme based on their
classroom experiences. If these stages are borne in mind, then developmental support can be provided for teachers which is appropriate for the level of their concern. Initial support could emphasize the informational aspect, allaying teachers' fears, later workshops could address management techniques, adaptation of materials, etc.

While the obstacles to implementation already identified focus on the individual's role in the change process, the system in which these changes are occurring, also exerts an influence on the change. Different systems may use different strategies to initiate the implementation process. Three (3) strategies are identified by Patterson and Czajkowski (1979). A strategy of "reason" may be pursued where logic is used to convince implementers that the proposed change is a beneficial one. Other systems, particularly highly centralized ones where the authority for decision-making rests with one central body, for example, a ministry of education, use "power" strategies. The decision to adopt a particular curriculum is handed down and the school and teachers have little choice. Another strategy is that of "influence", where the conditions for change are made so appealing that implementers may choose to adopt the innovation because of the attractive conditions rather than the intrinsic value of the innovation.

This overview of problems, identified by research, into the implementation process, provides a background for an examination of the particular problems in the implementation process in Junior Secondary Schools in Trinidad and Tobago. In examining these, ways of improving the implementation process will be considered, so that the actual outcomes may correspond more closely to the intended outcomes.

Design

Three (3) Junior Secondary Schools were chosen, representing North, Central and South. The schools were:

1. Diego Martin Junior Secondary
2. Chaguanas Junior Secondary
3. San Fernando East Junior Secondary

Classroom observations were carried out during a six (6) month period, October 1985 to March 1986. Five (5) classes were observed at Chaguanas, four (4) at San Fernando and five (5) at Diego Martin. One teacher's classes were observed at each school. The three (3) teachers, two (2) males and one (1) female, were all university graduates and were pursuing an
in-service Diploma in Education course at the University. Although these students are 'trainees', they are also full practicing teachers and recognized as such prior to and during the training period. Many of them have been teaching for as long as ten years prior to entering the programme. The teachers at Diego Martin and Chaguanas worked on the afternoon shift, while the teacher from San Fernando taught on the morning shift. The three (3) teachers were interviewed by the researcher at the end of the observation period. Data were also gathered from an inspection of the curriculum materials, the Vamos Amigos series, Books 1-3, published by Longman Caribbean. The textbooks, teacher's guides, workbooks and cassettes provided information about the objectives, aims, instructional strategies and general use of the materials suggested by the curriculum developers.

Discussion and Findings

Before entering into any discussion of the data, some general information about the school setting must be given if the context in which the observations were carried out is to be understood. Each Junior Secondary School, except for four schools at Scarborough, El Dorado, Rio Claro and Barrackpore operate on a double shift system. The morning shift starts at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 12:15 p.m. The afternoon shift starts at 12:30 p.m. and ends at 5:15 p.m. There are six (6) forty-five (45) minute periods with one break of twenty (20) minutes at the end of the first three (3) periods. Teachers have their assigned rooms and the students move from class to class. This is accompanied by a loss of five (5) or even (10) minutes of class time and a high level of noise at the changeover from one period to another. Spanish is allotted three (3) periods per week. Because of the shift system the teacher's day is usually tightly packed, so that there are very few periods free. Most days a teacher may have to teach non-stop throughout the entire session.

Certain common categories of themes were evident from examining the data from all three (3) sources, and the discussion of the data will center around these. The approach adopted in teaching the target language is the first such theme. In the Introduction to Teacher's Guide 1 of the Vamos Amigos series, the authors explain that the approach is a new one which they term "the aural-oral approach". The authors claim that in this approach emphasis is placed on developing the pupil's ability to listen with understanding and to speak the language, right from the beginning". (p 1) They also hope that the teacher "will tackle with new interest the problem of teaching Spanish by means of the functional approach" (p 1). The chief aims of the course are linguistic
and cultural, proficiency in the spoken language and understand and appreciation of the target culture. The teachers were not all acquainted with the Teachers' guides; two (2) knew of their existence but only one (1) of the three (3) teachers had used it. The other two, therefore, were unaware of the aims set forth in the guide. However, they had correctly interpreted the approach as "conversational", "largely audiolingual" and "oral". Their assessment of the aims of the course focused on the linguistic aims and were described as "communication" or "oral competence". Although in their interview the teachers' own aims appeared to harmonize with those put forward by the authors, the actual classroom observation did not always bear this out. Despite aiming for proficiency in the language, classroom procedure did not allow students opportunities of using the target language for communicative purposes, for example, asking questions of the teacher. Students' use of the language was restricted to repetitions of structures modelled by the teacher and to mechanical drills. The teachers themselves failed to use the target language in a consistent manner, giving instructions however simple, in English. When asked about their own use of the target language, one teacher responded, "I try but I lapse, when I remember I try to use it". Another said that his was a conscious decision, in his own words, "Why I don't use much Spanish too, is because frankly, I want to make sure and be understood; some of them don't seem even to understand the Standard English ... so in order to be understood and to keep the discipline of the class, I try to use simple English that they can relate to". If an integral part of the first year curriculum is in fact the priority given to listening and speaking the language, the intended outcomes will not be attained if students are not using or not learning the target language sufficiently.

Much of the data dealt with the instructional strategies used in the classroom. The curriculum guide for Book I suggests the procedure to be followed: presentation of material, where the students listen to Spanish, repetition and imitation of the teacher followed by active use of the new sentence patterns. A short dialogue follows, to be listened to several times before dramatisation, and finally a game or song and the presentation of cultural information which is related to the material presented. In addition, it was suggested that initially students should be given "a clear understanding of the approach to be taken in learning a foreign language" (p 4) and should be told "how important it is to know something about the people who are the native speakers of that language" (p 5). From the interview data two (2) of the teachers had in fact spoken to the students about the approach to be used; one however felt that there was no need for this - "I never gave them any theoretical thing, I just carried on".
The classroom observations coincided fairly closely with the teachers' perceptions of their own procedure. The first two (2) steps coincided with the suggested procedure in the curriculum guide. Teachers began by presenting new material although this was not done by using the accompanying cassette. More frequently the teachers themselves provided the model for imitation and repetition. Active use of the new patterns was done by drills; although this was not a universal practice, it was favoured particularly by one of the teachers. The preferred practice was isolation of the new structure, grammatical explanations, memorization of the paradigm if applicable, and written exercises to test whether the principle or rule had been grasped. There was very little use of the dialogues, except for reading practice, practically no dramatisation, no games or songs and very little cultural information, except in the case of one of the teachers. Who seemed to stress the cultural input. There was, therefore, considerable divergence in instructional strategy from the recommended procedure. This was also seen in the emphasis given to grammatical terminology, for example, first, second and third person, demonstrative adjectives etc., and to the memorization of verb conjugations which was heavily stressed. This last aspect seemed to find favour as it was a familiar traditional practice. In the words of one teacher "Sooner or later I end up asking them to memorize (the verbs) in the systematic way we were taught it so many years ago ..."

Modification of the procedure is not the only way in which teachers adapt the materials. Two (2) teachers felt that there was too much material in a unit and tended to omit some of the material. One also modified the sequence in which new items were introduced, as he was not completely in agreement with the existing order. The teacher who followed the book closely attributed this to her initial lack of experience "When I first started the book I didn't quite know how to deal with it and I tended to follow it exactly ..." All of the teachers expressed a desire for more exercises, and found the text inadequate in this respect. This might be because of the reliance on written exercises for evaluation purposes. To counteract this perceived inadequacy one teacher introduced a supplementary text, Tests and Drills. The other teachers used a supplementary reader, The Colibri Reader although the degree of use varied. Comments were also made about the inadequacy of the cultural information in Book I although this seemed to be remedied somewhat in Book II and was well integrated in Book III. From classroom observations, the percentage of time allotted to other activities such as the teaching of culture, games and songs was minimal. By far the most time was spent on practising structures and on grammatical explanations and exercises.
Testing was done somewhat more frequently than suggested but there was general agreement on the frequency — two or three times per term. The type of tests given however varied considerably from the sample tests given. In Book I where the curriculum guide placed emphasis on the skills of listening and speaking, the tests advocated consisted of listening comprehension with multiple choice and a speaking test, the criteria for which were speedy response and good pronunciation. Later tests incorporate all four (4) skills.

Classroom observations revealed that most of the tests given were completion items such as fill in the blank exercises. These concentrated on correct verb forms, agreement of adjectives, pronouns, etc. Very few listening tests were given and almost no oral tests. Writing was the skill most frequently tested followed by reading, which was the converse of what was intended at least for year I. Teachers also complained of their inability to cover the three (3) books in the three years, maintaining that the most that could be covered in the three years was Book 1 and Book 2. Two (2) main reasons were advanced (1) time and (2) ability level of the student attending Junior Secondary School. Time was a problem since all the teachers felt that three forty-five minute periods per week were woefully inadequate for any serious study of a language, particularly with an average class size of forty (40) students. The second reason focuses on the teachers' perceptions of the children they teach. All of the teachers revealed fairly negative expectations of their students' ability for example "I try to use simple English that they can relate to". or "To start with they hardly ask questions in Junior Secondary Schools, even in English, they never ask questions about anything, even the brighter children I've noticed hardly ask any questions". Classroom observations reinforced this view. Very often the context of the lessons was minimal and extremely elementary, particularly in Form 3 presenting little or no challenge to the students. When asked about this, the teachers invariably attributed this to the students' inability to grasp more than they were providing, but this assumption on their part was not tested.

From these observations it is clear that some teachers in the Junior Secondary Schools are not fully cognizant of the goals of the materials they are using, or of the best ways of exploiting and using these materials. While slavish adherence to procedures set out by curriculum developers is not advocated, since each teacher needs to adapt and create materials suitable for his particular situation, yet adaptation that is idiosyncratic and does not respond to coherent theory is not the ideal solution either.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The problems faced by the teachers of Spanish in the Junior Secondary Schools in successfully implementing the curriculum seem to depend on a few crucial factors. The pattern of implementation seems to be influenced firstly by the teachers' own expertise and experience. Teachers appear to place more reliance on tried and true traditional methods in the long run since they think that these work. They regard the suggestions of 'experts' with a certain degree of suspicion and prefer to trust their own judgement which is built upon practical experience. In the case of inexperienced teachers, their feelings of inadequacy may account for their failure to implement certain aspects of the curriculum for example, to use the target language for instruction. The teachers' attitude to their students, as has been noted, can also affect how the curriculum is implemented, if they perceive it as inappropriate for the level of their students they will teach what they deem suitable and no more.

Physical constraints also influence the pattern of implementation. Although cassettes are an integral part of the course, if the school does not purchase them, they cannot be used. Even if the school has them, a tape recorder may not be available. Most of the Junior Secondary Schools were built to a common plan and have open classrooms. The rooms allow noise from neighbouring classrooms to be heard making it difficult to do the listening and speaking practice that the curriculum demands. Teachers therefore resort to the written exercise to keep students occupied and quiet.

Many of the constraints are system constraints and out of the control of the teacher and even in a majority of cases, of the principal. The timetable of the Junior Secondary Schools is a common one, so that the time allotted for Spanish though inadequate is unlikely to be increased since there is not enough time for any subject due to the shortened day of the shift system. Out of the teacher's control is also the class size which is determined centrally and stands at forty throughout the Junior Secondary system. The deficiencies of the plant, already mentioned are also system-wide.

There are also psychological constraints. The teacher's own stage of development as a professional may make him reject change instead of welcoming it. He may feel a lack of support from the school administration or from other teachers who may not recognize the importance of language study for the individual in a world where technology rules the roost. The teacher may be under pressure to get good examination results and may feel that this objective conflicts with the curriculum goals he is trying to attain. These are some of the factors which may explain the non-implementation of
certain curriculum changes by teachers.

What then can be done to ensure that the conditions are favourable for successful implementation? Although the conditions will vary from one setting to another, certain general principles obtain. Since the teacher has such a crucial role to play in the implementation process, he must be equipped to do so. Continuous in-service training through workshops, summer institutes and similar activities should be provided. To facilitate dissemination of new techniques, ideas etc. as quickly as possible, one person in each school should be trained as a resource person to assist other staff members in the preparation of lessons, adaptation of materials and any other areas in which help is needed. In addition more supervisors are needed so that more regular, periodic visits to schools can be made to monitor the implementation process.

Modifications need to be made to the physical plant so that the room in which Spanish is taught can be made sound-proof to enable the students to benefit from the listening comprehension and oral activities. Scheduling also needs attention since frustration occurs when teachers are given a task which they know is doomed to failure because the time allotted for completion of the task is inadequate.

Perhaps the most important concept that indicates what needs to be done for successful implementation is the concept that change is accomplished by individuals and not by institutions. (Loucks and Pratt, 1979) Change can be legislated, but for it to be effective, individuals must play their part. Therefore, any successful implementation process will take account of the needs of the implementers and provide them with the moral, physical and logistical support necessary to see the change through.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


