



# GUYANA

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## **Guyana Country Report** **Hon. Dr. Desrey Caesar Fox, Minister within the Ministry of Education**

### **(i) Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content**

Traditionally Inclusive Education in Guyana has been conceptualised primarily as responding to the group of students with special needs i.e. students with physical and/or mental disabilities. Education was offered to this group in special classes, special schools and in mainstream schools. Essentially the curriculum offered to these students was, and indeed is, the same as that offered to the “average/normal” student. The delivery of content might be slowed according to the teacher’s perception of the child’s ability and less content might be offered, but generally there was no change in the curriculum. It is true however that, for children with learning disabilities, the methodology might differ with greater emphasis on concrete teaching aids. There are also attempts to provide special aids for those students with sensory disabilities e.g. visually or hearing impaired students.

In the 1980’s the scope was expanded to include other groups. One group comprises students who are socially disadvantaged or in especially difficult circumstances. This group includes students who are very slow learners and others who might have had some difficulty with the law but were not institutionalised. Two special schools were set up to cater for these children, with smaller classes staffed by older more experienced teachers. A free lunch programme is also offered in both schools. Some attempt has been made in these schools to provide some alternatives to the traditional academic secondary programme and to prepare students for the world of work. However the difficulty with inclusiveness is evident even in special schools. One problem that has arisen is that teachers, in the school with slow learners, feel that children with multiple disabilities are being placed in the school and many of the teachers feel that they are unable to cope with these students.

In the same period a residential school (at the secondary level) was built, ostensibly, to cater for gifted students. In practice however it caters for students who score in the top two percentile in the Grade 6 examinations and in recent years even that criterion has been relaxed. The school does however offer a much broader programme than most secondary schools with a wide range of co-curricula activities being an integral part of the school life of the students.

### **(ii) Inclusive Education: Public Policies**

For nearly two decades successive Governments in Guyana have stated their commitment to providing equal access to quality education to all Guyanese children and young people. This commitment was articulated in both the 1990 and 1995 policy documents of the Ministry of Education.

The policy of equal access and more so of inclusiveness is more clearly stated in the Ministry of Education’s 2003-2007 Strategic Plan. In outlining the mandates of the

Ministry of Education the document states **“The Ministry of Education is dedicated to ensuring that all citizens of Guyana, regardless of age, race or creed, physical or mental disability, or socio-economic status are given the best possible opportunity to achieve their full potential through equal access to quality education as defined by the standards and norms outlined by the Ministry.**

As stated earlier, in the past students with disabilities were educated in one of three modes, namely: the ‘regular’ school system; specialised units attached to regular schools and specialised institutions. The stated policy has been, as far as possible, to mainstream students with disabilities but there was no real effort to create individual education plans with different curricula approaches. The problem has been, and continues to be, inadequate resources, financial, human and material. Cost is an important factor in special education. Meeting special education needs, and creating an inclusive system generally, often requires different curriculum approaches, differently trained teachers, lower pupil-teacher ratios, specially trained teachers and specialised equipment (for learners with disabilities), and a wealth of resource materials. It may also require adjustments to the physical facilities in schools and not only for students with physical disabilities. The result has been that in spite of our laudable policies, progress has been slow.

There have been concerted efforts to ensure access and participation of indigenous children from remote hinterland and riverain communities in the education process, but initially there was a strong emphasis on physical access. In 1998 Guyana began to pilot the Escuela Nueva approach in a small number of schools in two hinterland regions of Guyana. This approach was used initiated in Colombia and then used with significant educational gains in some other Latin American countries e.g. Guatemala.

The concept of the “New School” seeks to replace the traditional method of teacher controlled lessons with a more child-centred, interactive approach where the teacher functions as the facilitator of the learning process instead of the source of all knowledge. Some of the initiatives employed in the programme are Student Government, Multigrade teaching, Learning Corners, Use of Learning Guides, flexible promotion (not yet attempted in Guyana), Child friendly classrooms, close school and community relations (in particular parental involvement). The programme also actively promotes localisation of the curriculum.

### **iii) Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions**

Historically in Guyana’s context basic education includes early childhood education (day care, playgroups and nursery), six years of primary education and three years of secondary education. However, in today’s dynamic, highly complex and competitive environment basic education must be able to produce individuals who are functionally literate, numerate and who can be easily integrated in society. For this reason the Government of Guyana is moving in the direction by law to increase the upper age limit through which students must remain in school. Inclusive education can only be achieved if first and foremost every child is given an opportunity to attain basic education.

Inclusive education in the context of this paper would be looked at as the provision of basic education to all sections of the Guyanese society regardless of geographic locations, religion, ethnicity, social status and economic positions. Inclusive education is ensuring in a qualitative way that equal opportunities and equal access are given to every Guyanese towards the acquisition of an education. Critical to this is the design of a curriculum that would address the multi faceted needs of the varied students in a timely, efficient and convenient way. Convenient because our educational system must be able to reach even the unreached and most vulnerable and economically depressed sections of our community. The curriculum therefore must be responsive, time bound, flexible and unique to the student requirement. To understand how challenging this is for Guyana one must be aware of Guyana's particular condition. Guyana is a multicultural society with a geographic space of 83,000 square miles, and hinterland areas, some only accessible by aircraft or long hours of trekking.

The curriculum therefore has to focus on the following target groups:

- Hinterland and deep Riverain Students
- Children with special needs
- Vulnerable students
- Drop outs

In Guyana there are ten administrative regions, four of which fall within the interior and are mostly populated by the indigenous people. Historically, as a result of the lack of infrastructure and qualified manpower personnel these areas suffered tremendously in terms of the delivery of basic education, Today, there is significant improvement in infrastructure and every attempt is made to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of this target group. Particular attention is paid to the interest of this group and all other groups in the crafting of the curriculum. Attention is paid to the integration of the Amerindian Community into curriculum coverage thus simplifying the complexity of the curriculum and making it more user friendly. The curriculum is also simplified to ensure that the teachers do not encounter difficulties in its delivery. Teacher training is intensified via distance education to make certain that teachers have the capacity to implement the curriculum. The mathematics programmes for the first three grades of primary school have an integrated approach to learning and are mainly delivered via distance education so all students of these levels can benefit in the same way from these programmes. Each school in the interior is equipped with a radio and CD player to access these programmes. DVD's with model lessons in Mathematics and English to begin with are developed and sent to schools.

### Special Needs Education

Special needs education in Guyana targets groups with severe learning disabilities, slow learners, learners with emotional problems and gifted learners. As far as possible all these target groups are integrated into regular classrooms. Teachers are trained to use varied methods to meet the learning needs of these students. For example, teachers are trained on how to develop enhancement activities for the gifted and remedial activities for the slow learners. Severe cases of learning disabilities are enrolled in special schools where the curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of these children.

### Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups include children living under poor economic conditions, and those who encounter a number of social problems, such as, child abuse, drug abuse and those who suffer from HIV/Aids. Guyana has endorsed the delivery of life-skills based Health and Family Life Education from Grades 1-9 as a core subject. The curriculum coverage allows for all of the issues of concerns to be addressed. Furthermore, since a life -skills approach is taken, the focus is on the development of skills to enable students to make decisions about the issues of concerns in a manner that would enable them to lead healthy lives. The curriculum engages pupils in practical problem solving situations to stimulate critical and analytical thinking, thus aiding them in decision making.

### Drop-Outs

A critical challenge remains the drop out rate at the Secondary Schools. One of the reasons forwarded for this is the inability of the students to cope with the curriculum. To ensure that these students are given a fair chance various initiatives are undertaken to equip them with basic education skills, reintegrate them into the educational system and provide opportunities for a second chance to continue formal education. One such initiative is the introduction of the Basic Competency Certificate Programme whereby those students who are more skills oriented are given an opportunity to pursue this programme after the third form of Secondary School so they would be motivated to stay in schools. Another initiative is engaging drop-outs in the productive sector as a registered group in a formal way so as to realign them into the education system. These youths are given a stipend and assigned to registered agencies whilst a condensed curriculum is delivered and made compulsory to all participants in this programme. On the successful completion of this programme a Competency Certificate is issued that would allow these students to re-enter the formal education system at the level of the Guyana Technical Institute/Carnegie School of Home Economics after which they can continue on to University Education. A third initiative is the introduction of the Skills For Life Programme whereby school drop outs and even young adults are given an opportunity to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills in addition to a skill for life such as for example, needlework. These are typical example whereby inclusion, transition, integration and flexibility in the way the curriculum is delivered aids life long learning and continuity.

### Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools

In Guyana, most students complete Primary education and proceed to Secondary education. This involves a shift in location. However, in order to promote inclusivity, most students are placed in their regions as near as possible to their homes so that the cost to travel to schools is reduced. This makes schooling more accessible. Every attempt is made to ensure that schools of comparable grades in all the regions have the same resources. There is continuity of the curriculum in the core subjects. However, transition from Primary to Secondary schools is not always smooth. Most teachers at the secondary schools feel that students should come there equipped with knowledge and skills in the core subject areas and if they don't, it was not their responsibility. Unlike the sharing of information about the students in the transition from Nursery to Primary this is absent from the primary to the secondary, thus the chance to

communicate the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities is lost. Student reports do not follow students from Primary to Secondary so Secondary teachers cannot readily fill the gap.

#### **iv) Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers**

As a result of Education trends curriculum has to be constantly reformed. This has been the case in Guyana. Some of the major trends that influence curriculum reform in Guyana are:

- Culturally responsive teaching
- Inclusive education
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Outcome based education
- Advances in technology
- Social and economic needs

Having looked at the trends that influence curriculum reform it is clear that curriculum change in Guyana is fostering learning environments that can promote inclusive education at both the classroom and school levels. At the school level inclusive education is practised in the following ways:

- The same criteria for acceptance into schools apply to all students regardless of religion, ethnicity, cultural, social and economic backgrounds.
- In keeping with Government's policy all students are placed as near as possible to their home environments without prejudice so they all begin with the same advantage. Attempts are made to give all schools the same resources.
- The schools would celebrate cultural activities for the various groups giving everyone a chance to appreciate another's culture while at the same time making various groups feel that their cultures have a place in our society.
- There would be School Sports at the school level, district level, regional level and the National Level. All students without prejudice would be given a chance to participate at the school level in sports and if they excel at this level will advance to other levels. The same can be said for Debates, Visual Art, and Essay Writing.
- All students would be exposed to the same curriculum at the Nursery and Primary Schools and at Forms One to Three at the Secondary School. Based on their interests and achievements on common examinations they would be placed in appropriate streams at the upper levels of the secondary school.
- To ensure that the same quality of education is delivered to all students trained qualified teachers are spread out in all the regions and attempts are made to intensify teacher training. Almost all regions have Teacher Training Centres where in-service teacher training is conducted.
- Various initiatives have been undertaken under a number of projects, for example, BEAMS to ensure improvement in students' achievement and ongoing training of teachers.
- Through the EFA-FTI project a hot meal is provided to every pupil of Primary Schools in the interior areas to motivate them to attend school and at the same time to help fulfil their nutritional requirements.

- The implementation of the Escuela Nueva approach in a small number of schools in two hinterland regions of Guyana whereby as said before a more child centred, interactive approach is utilized in the teaching/learning process.
- The school has a first line management of the Regional Democratic Council which nominates its own education committee so inputs and support are given from the grass root level.
- Strengthening of pre-vocational programmes at secondary schools so that students are better prepared to enter the workforce.
- Provide access to the use of equipment by teachers and students.
- Provide access to the use of school libraries by teachers and students.
- Introduction of new programmes in keeping with curriculum coverage and technological advances.

At the classroom level inclusive education is facilitated and activated in the following ways:

- A shift in assessment practices. Assessments are now integrated with instruction and are now serving two purposes –formative and summative At the formative level assessments are used to identify strengths and weaknesses so that teachers can plan and use strategies to improve performance. It is also used to engage students in self assessments and to help them to achieve ongoing goals.
- At the summative level assessments are used to measure students 'progress as well as their attainments There are also high stakes assessments at the primary level which are used to place students in secondary schools and which are used to certify students at the secondary level. (There is no one shot exam)There is also use of project driven and practical assessments. Emphasis is also placed on assessments that cater for diversity of our student population.
- Teaching methodologies include differentiated instructions, child-centred instructions, practical and authentic learning,integration of subject catering for different learning styles, provision of individualised and group teaching, child centred approach
- A print rich environment
- Subjects are taught which cater for the various interest of students
- Instructions in core subject areas –Mathematics, Language Arts, Science and Social Studies.
- Emphasis on the development of Numeracy and Literacy skills since it is felt that the mastery of Literacy and Numeracy can have positive impact on learning in other areas.
- Health and family life education which includes emphasis on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights and the Rights of the Child Education.
- Use of curriculum materials that are sensitive to the varying multi-cultural groups in the classroom. These initiatives are also supported by international organizations.

As stated before it is a real challenge for Guyana to achieve inclusive education but all indications are that we are on the right track. Teacher Training Institutions are well aware of their responsibilities and there is a co-ordinated approach which involve these institutions as well as the Ministry of Education to ensure that emphases are placed on areas of inclusive education. Additionally NGO's and the Regional bodies are playing their role in ensuring that

teachers develop competencies to attend to the diversified needs of our students. As a result of the emphases on inclusive education Guyana has achieved the following outcomes:

- A new assessment system which emphasizes both formative and summative assessments and which utilizes various assessment methods
- Reform of the curriculum to deal with issues in regards to Health and Family Life education which includes Human Rights Education and HIV/AIDS
- Development of an Integrated Curriculum
- Emphasis on the development of Literacy and Numeracy skills. A new methodology (Interactive Radio Instruction) for the teaching of Mathematics at the Primary Level. Emphasis on the use of the phonetic approach to the teaching of reading. To ensure that all teachers can use the phonetic approach all schools are given Phonics CD's.
- Intensified training of teachers throughout the regions through distance education
- Specialized training of teachers
- Ongoing training of teachers to build their capacity
- Reaching the unreached students through Distance Education (Broadcast to Schools,CD's)
- Universal Primary Education
- Development of a policy on HIV/AIDS Education
- Teaching of Mathematics and English through distance education
- Programmes for out of school youths