



**GOVERNMENT OF SAINT LUCIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, INNOVATION, GENDER RELATIONS
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Department of Education, Innovation and Gender Relations

The Education Revolution in St. Lucia:

Proposal for Incorporating Covid-19 Outcomes in the 2020-2021 National Instructional Plan



*I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting
almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to
go.*

– Langston Hughes



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This article is presented on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development and is a reflection of the ideas and feedback provided by the Curriculum and Materials Development Unit (CAMDU), the Evaluation and Assessment Unit (EEAU) and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Unit (TVET) units coming out of the COVID-19 experience, presented at the Department of Education Instructional Planning Meeting on June 18, 2020.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst that hastened changes in our education system. While it assisted us in identifying existing gaps, it produced outcomes that would do us well to sustain and build upon, in the coming months of face to face schooling. These include the use of a wide range of learning modalities and platforms, as well as the very visible caretaker support of students. Effective instructional planning for the new school year that includes these practices will depend on system-wide factors, and factors that vary based on the context and culture of each school.

An Instructional Plan that meets the needs of all stakeholders will require the participation of all those stakeholders. Data collection through surveys, interviews, focus groups and consultations will be vital in ensuring that the needs of all clients are met adequately; everyone (students, parents, teachers, education officers) should have an opportunity in one way or another to voice their experiences and expectations for the future. This will produce the level of buy-in that we have always understood to be necessary for successful implementation. The importance of these consultations cannot be overemphasized, nor can the consultations themselves be done in a perfunctory or rushed manner.

The Logistical Aspects of the Instructional Plan

The nature of the second, and greater, phase of the reopening of school will influence the nature of the planning to be undertaken in the next few weeks. Guidelines from the Ministry of Health, as well as agreed upon procedures among education stakeholders will come together to create a clear and unambiguous outline of school, come September 2020. Several questions must be answered: Will all Grades and Forms be at school every day? Will there be a difference in procedures for small schools and large schools? Which protocols are mandatory and which ones must be decided upon at a District or school level? How will the school year be structured to minimize unnecessary interruptions, while maintaining all aspects of curricular-classwork and fieldwork? How will teacher workload be organized to maximize

productivity, ensure equity and avoid burnout? How will teacher professional development be featured in this aspect of the Instructional Plan?

On a school level, decisions must be made about the content of instruction for the new school year, considering that the national plan recommended that no new material be taught from mid-March to July, 2020. How should concepts from term three be integrated into instruction for the new school year, especially those that are prerequisites for learning? Principals will no doubt have to make use of teacher reports preceding and including the period of distance learning to determine what needs to be addressed. Additionally, with the return of students who would have had varying levels of access to learning (and who would have already had their own learning needs even before this time), it is necessary to conduct an assessment of student readiness for instruction.

Moreover, the psychosocial and emotional needs of both educators and learners would need to be continually addressed during this period of time. For all involved in this teaching-learning experience, longtime routines have been disrupted and new ones adopted in their place. A program of reorientation to those routines and procedures, and a constant review of the ever-present but ever changing health protocols, would have to be included as part of the National Instructional Plan. Schools will need to consider how to incorporate important aspects such as play and creating opportunity for socialization, while maintaining health protocols.



FACTORS SUPPORTING INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

System-Wide Factors

- Determining logistics for reopening: shift systems, shortened days, online days, etc
- Determining teachers' professional needs for training for school year
- Adjusting the calendar for school year based on health protocols (decreasing non-curricular related activities)

Context Based Factors

- Using curriculum mapping to determine what needs to be covered
- Addressing content/ skills from Term Three which may be pre-requisites for new grade
- Determining individual students' readiness levels
- Addressing Special Education needs

The Place of Assessment in the Instructional Plan

This period of time has allowed us to see firsthand what works, and what arrangements must be established for regular schooling that will also address any period of disruption, whether for an individual student or system-wide. Assessment is crucial because it provides us with data for determining approaches and strategies for exploring important content and building necessary skills. It also helps us to track whether our outcomes are being reached, and evaluate how well our programs are working. Hopefully, this experience has helped us to refine our view of assessment as not simply testing, but collecting and using data to monitor our teaching and learning.

Our national assessment strategies are in the process of being revised for the key stages at the Primary level, while at the exit stage the CPEA will replace one time testing. What is clear is that a definite National Assessment Plan that outlines what assessment looks like at the national, district and school level for both Primary and Secondary schools must be developed. Input by teachers, parents and students would make this a Plan that is owned by all in the education system. This aspect of change must be led by the Education Evaluation and Assessment Unit, and supported by instructional and curriculum units of the Department of Education.

Some major elements of this Assessment Plan will require a shift in our approach to feedback and reporting, from numbers and letters in the traditional Report Book, to more qualitative and descriptive feedback regarding key areas for students. This type of feedback to both students and parents makes them active rather than passive partners in the teaching- learning process.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING

Determining what students already know:

- Comprehensive assessments
- Checklists
- Conversations
- Parent feedback

Determining student progress:

- Tests
- Checklists
- Performance
- CPEA Formative Assessment approach

Evaluating the effectiveness of our instruction:

- Cumulative performances
- Qualitative feedback

The Heart of the Instructional Plan- Strategies and Approaches for Sustaining Outcomes

Previous national level professional development in Constructivism has been invaluable in shining a spotlight on the importance of the methods that we employ for instruction more so than what we teach. The distributed learning approach that became the norm for the third term has proven to be ideal, as it incorporated all elements supporting teaching and learning- online learning, the use of television and radio, printed educational packs, and collaboration as students engaged in experiential learning opportunities.

Therefore, in addition to outlining the content to be taught to students, the National Instructional Plan should *emphasize* the approaches and strategies that are to be used in the classroom, such as blended learning, the flipped classroom approach, and integration, such as through Project Based Learning. The aims should be to nurture independent learning for students, and to strengthen the home school connection. This can be accomplished through the presentation of course outlines that include objectives and expected assessment tasks and criteria to students ahead of their learning; this can be facilitated through teachers' usual advanced Term Planning. The support of caregivers can be maintained through the development of a Home

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Distributed Learning- learning that occurs (is distributed) across place (face to face, distance, online platforms, field), time (synchronous, asynchronous) and experiences (independent, collaborative, project-based).

Blended Learning- learning that occurs both through online and offline means.

Flipped Classroom- learning, especially of content, that occurs out of the classroom, so that classroom time is spent reacting to and applying the content in practical experiences.

Integration – learning that allows students to make connections between and among concepts in a subject, but also across subject areas.

Digital Literacy – knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for learning, working and living in an environment where technologies are used for communication and content sharing.

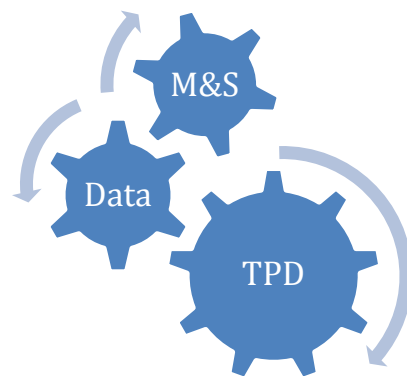
Support Plan that outlines to caregivers the activities at home that can support classroom learning.

The Digital Literacy Curriculum, originally developed for the Lower Secondary School, would be useful in equipping students with the skills to navigate the blended learning environment. Infusing elements such as the use of word processing, presentation, spreadsheet and web browsing software, and internet safety into instruction across the curriculum will ensure that outcome.

The above approaches and strategies will not only help students to develop learning skills and attitudes, but will also reduce the present separation of what we term “curricular” and “extra-curricular”, making all activities part of the complete development of the student.

Support Mechanisms for the National Instructional Plan

Teacher professional development, data collection, and monitoring and support are three tools for ensuring the effective implementation of the Instructional Plan. What is more, each tool is necessary for the proper functioning of the others.



The recent OECS Teacher Professional Development Model provides an excellent basis for designing the National Professional Development Plan. It places the educator at the Professional Development controls, and the use of data as the starting point for personal, school, district and national professional development. For instance, an educator, based on reflection on his or her instructional processes, will make use of

peer reviewed journals and articles, online webinars, and discussions with peers to improve his or her use of the flipped classroom approach. That educator may opt for one of three sessions offered at the school, this one focused on using blended learning in the Science classroom; the sessions would have been designed based on a survey of the needs of teachers for incorporating technology resources in the classroom. As the educator accesses professional development opportunities at the District and national levels, by the end of any school year, he or she would have improved instruction and learning in the classroom and at the school.

Data collection will help the Department of Education to also determine what resources are needed by teachers, students and caregivers for supporting teaching and learning. As the Department reaches out to the corporate community for support of educational outcomes, this data will be used as the basis for arrangements for ensuring that all have access to devices and internet service, for instance. As teachers, school administrators and Education Officers monitor and support students and schools, their qualitative and quantitative data help the Department to evaluate the effectiveness of the Instructional plan, and to make adjustments to aspects of the Plan as needed. In order for timely decisions to be made, these data must be immediately and readily available; this calls for updates or adjustments to present EMIS at schools, and the standardization of recording and monitoring tools used by teachers, administrators and officers.

Making the Instructional Plan a Reality

On paper, the Instructional Plan is certainly workable. However, it requires immediate action to move it from concept to reality. Data collection through system wide surveys, and adequate consultations with teachers, parents and students at the District level are actionable steps ahead of the 2020-2021 school year. These consultations should be carefully structured so that relevant information is collected that would make the Plan meaningful on a national, District and school level.