# THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING

# A NEW CURRICULUM FOR

# LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION

# IN GUATEMALA

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## Abstract

The intention of this article is to present the way in which a proposal was put forward for a national basic curriculum for the lower level of secondary education in Guatemala, within a general curricular reform of the education system. In this process, the International Bureau of Education and UNESCO's national office in the country provided technical advice. The article examines the socio-cultural and educational context, some conceptual foundations for the curricular reform, the construction of the curriculum for lower secondary education, some features of the proposed curriculum and the outlook for the future. The process of

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curriculum construction included a diagnosis, drawing up a strategy for reforming the first cycle of secondary education and preparation of the proposed curriculum. Likewise, the authors present the steps that must be taken in order for the national basic curriculum to be adopted, subject, amongst other factors, to the availability of funding.

## Introduction

An Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace was signed in Guatemala in 1996 following negotiations between the Government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) that had begun in the mid-1980s. The Peace Agreements, especially the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1995) and the Agreement on Socio-Economic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (1996), laid the foundations for educational reform. Ten years after the signing of the Peace Agreement, a new national curriculum was introduced in Guatemala for pre-school and primary education. In 2007, consultations are taking place concerning the proposal for a core national curriculum for lower secondary education (*ciclo básico del nivel medio*).

The aim of this article is to outline the process of developing this curriculum proposal as a new experience. In the case of Guatemala, UNESCO, through the International Bureau of Education and its office in the country, has provided assistance and technical support. This support has been used to optimise the human and financial resources for the training of Central American technicians in the theoretical and methodological aspects of the pedagogy of integration made available by UNESCO, the Educational and Cultural Council of Central America (CECC) and the Ministries of Education of the Central American countries. This article is divided into five sections: (a) socio-cultural and educational context; (b) basic conceptual aspects of curriculum change; (c) developing a curriculum for lower secondary education; (d) some characteristics of the proposed core national curriculum and (e) looking ahead. The section on the process of curriculum development includes a diagnosis, formulation of a strategy of change for lower secondary education and preparation of a curriculum proposal. The final section outlines the steps that remain to be taken once the core national curriculum has been approved, subject, amongst other factors, to the availability of funding.

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## Socio-cultural and educational context

Guatemala is a Central American country covering an area of 108,889 km$^2$ with a population of over 11.2 million people. This population is made up of 25 linguistic communities: 22 of which are Mayan, plus Xinka, Garífuna and Spanish-speaking. The core areas of the Maya-speaking communities, i.e. the territories within which the use of their language predominates, are located chiefly in the western, central and northern parts of the country. The Mayan population, which is of pre-Hispanic Central American origin, accounts for over 40% of the country's total population. The Xinka language, which is of pre-Hispanic origin and is thought to belong to the Yuto-Aztec family, is currently being studied with a view to its preservation. In 2002 approximately 1,300 persons reported that they spoke the language, which is geographically located in the Department of Santa Rosa, on the southern coast of Guatemala. The number of persons who identify themselves as Xinka is however greater than that. Garífuna, a language of Afro-Caribbean origin that was introduced on the Atlantic coast of Guatemala at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is spoken in the Department of Izabal. Although in 2002 over 3,500 persons said that they spoke Garífuna, the ethnic community concerned is more numerous than that. Castilian or Spanish, as the official language, is spoken throughout the national territory. Nevertheless, the Spanish-speaking population associated with the Ladino culture is located predominately in the southern, eastern and northern parts of the country. In 2002, 6.6 million inhabitants reported having non-indigenous ethnic origins (eleventh National Population Census 2002 in UNDP, 2005; Asturias de Barrios, 2004, pp. 20–21; Mazariegos & Jiménez, 2005) (Figure 1).

In the 1960s, an internal armed conflict began which was to last over 30 years. Negotiations were started between the Government of Guatemala and the URNG in the middle of the 1980s and culminated in 1996 with the signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace. The various agreements signed in the 1990s laid the foundations for a new national agenda for development, recognised the rights of indigenous peoples and established commitments to build a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual country. As a result of this new policy, the mono-lingual and mono-cultural State is to give way to a multi-cultural, multilingual State favouring inter-ethnic relations on an equal footing (Asturias de Barrios, 2004, p. 16; Mérida, 2003).

The documents that serve as references for educational reform are the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous People (1995) and the Agreement on Socio-Economic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (1996). In the first of these, the government undertook to initiate a reform of the education system, with a series of declared aims, including: (a) de-centralisation and regionalisation; (b) community participation in the definition of curricula and school timetables on the basis of proposals by teachers; (c) integration of the educational concepts of indigenous peoples; (d) extension of intercultural bilingual education; (e) strengthening of national unity subject to the recognition of cultural diversity; and (f) an increased budget for education. It was also decided that, to undertake the planning of educational reform, a joint committee would be set up on which the government and the indigenous organizations would both be represented (Fonapaz-Copredeh, 1997, pp. 46–48).

FIGURE 1.    Linguistic map of Guatemala showing in half-tone the areas where Mayan, Xinka and Garífuna are spoken.
*Source:* Taken from the Linguistic Atlas of Guatemala (Author, Michael Richards; contributors: Narciso Cojti, Humberto Flores Alvarado, Aurelio Hurtado, Julia Richards, Mario Carrillo and Fred Clark). 2003 Copyright held by the Secretariat of Peace, Universidad del Valle of Guatemala, Rafael Landívar University and USAID.

In the Socio-Economic Agreement, the Government undertook a number of commitments including the following: (a) an increase in the financial resources devoted to education; (b) the adjustment of educational contents in the light of the outcome of the work of the Joint Committee on Educational Reform; (c) extended coverage including the offer of intercultural bilingual education; (d) literacy in indigenous languages; (e) development and implementation of a programme of civic education for peace; (f) effective community participation; (g) vocational training; and (h) education for women. In order to develop and implement this educational reform, the Ministry of Education set up its own advisory committee (Fonapaz-Copredeh, 1997, pp. 67–70).

In 1998, the Joint Committee on Educational Reform issued its Educational Reform Plan. This plan identifies seven policy and strategic areas for educational reform: social mobilisation, financing, curriculum change, human resources, equity, multicultural and intercultural approaches, and restructuring and modernisation. The area of curriculum change itself comprises six policies: (1) strengthening comprehensive training in democracy; (2) the culture of peace and sustainable development; (3) curriculum renewal; (4) improving the quality of education; (5) curriculum decentralisation;

(6) improving out-of-school education; and (7) development of values. The curriculum renewal policy aims to implement "an in-depth review of all parts of the curriculum with a view to incorporating aspects related to the different areas of educational reform" (Comisión Paritaria de Reforma Educativa, 1998, pp. 67–68).

Eight years after the publication of the Educational Reform Plan, the Ministry of Education has already made headway with its policy of curriculum renewal. A core national curriculum has been developed for pre-school and primary education, each with its own guidelines for further curriculum development. These guidelines follow an integrating methodology and allow teachers some freedom to interpret the curriculum. The new curriculum has been gradually implemented in pre-school and primary education. In 2005–2006, with the support of UNESCO, GTZ, the Population Fund and UNICEF, a curriculum proposal was prepared for lower secondary education (known as the "*ciclo básico*", equivalent to the seventh, eighth and ninth years in other education systems). In addition, a core national curriculum was developed for the initial training of primary schoolteachers. This curriculum was introduced in January 2007.

## Basic conceptual aspects of curriculum change

Curriculum development is seen as one of the processes of educational reform through which in-depth changes may be introduced in the teaching/learning process by the adoption and implementation of a new curricular paradigm. Aspects of this paradigm include: (a) a curriculum-based organization within the national education system responsible for levels, cycles and grades; (b) the human individual is at the heart of the paradigm in accordance with a bilingual intercultural vision; (c) there should be new strategies for curriculum design and development; and (d) principles, objectives and policies should respond to the requirements of the socio-cultural context.

The new curriculum paradigm is based on new concepts of the nation, citizenship and education:

> Guatemala is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual State, which is developing as a just, democratic, pluralistic and pacifist country. It is founded on the wealth of its natural, social, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and on the constant preservation of values favourable to coexistence and to strengthening the culture of peace, with the goal of ensuring the equitable development and the personal and collective well-being of all Guatemalan citizens.
>
> The country is established under the rule of law with the aim of promoting policies and actions intended to eradicate stereotypes and cultural practices favouring discrimination. To this effect, all legislation implying discrimination of any kind has been abrogated.
>
> Guatemala is a country where all individuals are guaranteed the full enjoyment of human rights and the exercise of freedom; pluralism is recognised and encouraged; sustainable development is pursued with an appropriate application of science and technology. The rule of equity favours the well-being of its inhabitants and education is recognised as one of the fundamental means of achieving these goals (Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 7).

The people concerned by the curriculum include: students, teachers and communities, school parents, educational advisers, school administrators, educational administrators

and decentralised technical teams. As an illustration we may consider the official definitions of the first three of these categories:

*Students:* These are positioned at the heart of the educational process. They are seen as active participants in their own education, as well as human beings who behave as such in all activities without relinquishing their identity.

*Teachers:* Their duty is to train free, responsible individuals. Their efforts are aimed at developing the highest forms of reasoning and inculcating values that are conducive to harmonious coexistence in a multicultural society.

*Communities:* These must augment their participation in the educational process, establishing a firm relationship between the school and the community with its own language, culture, needs and customs. In other words, they must bring the school closer to daily life (Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 11).

The new curriculum is developed comprehensively on the basis of: the intentions expressed in profiles of the relevant levels and framework competencies, area and grade competencies, learning sequences, teaching and learning tasks, school organization and administration, the affective climate, the classroom environment, educational resources and the various forms of evaluation and accreditation. It is designed to be flexible, perfectible, participative, comprehensive, focused on learning, organized by competencies and centred on the human person. Its components may be easier to understand if compared with the model of the curriculum applied prior to the 1980s (Table 1).

The processes of curriculum design and development are summarised in Figure 2. In 2007 the Ministry of Education is undertaking a systematic review of its approach using the ISO methodology. According to the figure, the curriculum model is defined on the basis of foundations, guidelines, structures, planning for national, regional and local levels, preparation of materials, training, contents, methodology, evaluation and other elements. The competencies include framework competencies, area competencies, component competencies and grade competencies (see Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2005a).

# Developing a curriculum for lower secondary education

The renewal of the lower secondary curriculum is part of the lower secondary education reform strategy. Conceptually speaking, the development of a curriculum for the *ciclo básico* fits within the general framework of curriculum reform of the whole education system. Details given below are of the preparation of a secondary education diagnosis, the formulation of a reform strategy for lower secondary education and the preparation of the curriculum proposal.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION DIAGNOSIS

With technical assistance provided by UNESCO (2004), UNICEF, German Education and Training–KfW (Buchet et al., 2005), the World Bank, the Population Fund and

TABLE 1. Comparison of the old and new curriculum models

| Compared aspects | Old curriculum model (prior to the 1980s) | New curriculum model |
|---|---|---|
| Type of curriculum | Passive, static, rigid | Humanising, active and flexible |
| Principle | No clear definition | To enhance personal and cultural identity, social participation and integration amongst subjects |
| Characteristics | • Authoritative and rigid<br>• Compartmentalised<br>• Out of context<br>• Centralised<br>• Teacher centred<br>• Focused on content development<br>• Aimed at achieving objectives | • Participative<br>• Flexible<br>• Comprehensive<br>• Perfectible<br>• Centred on learning<br>• Organized by competencies<br>• Centred on the individual |
| Key areas of the curriculum | None | • Multicultural and intercultural approach<br>• Gender, ethnic and social equity<br>• Inculcation of values<br>• Family life<br>• Citizenship<br>• Sustainable development<br>• Social and environmental security<br>• Vocational training<br>• Technological development |

TABLE 1.   Continued

| Compared aspects | Old curriculum model (prior to the 1980s) | New curriculum model | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Areas | Learning areas (pre-school level)<br><br>1. Acquisition of habits<br>2. Knowledge of the environment<br>3. School and social adaptation<br>4. Introduction to mathematics<br>5. Initial pre-reading and pre-writing<br>6. Aesthetic education<br>7. Sensory-motor education<br><br>Learning areas (primary level) Basic educational cycle (CEF)<br>1. Spanish and/or Mayan language<br>2. Mathematics<br>3. Social and natural environment<br>4. Aesthetics, work and leisure | Curriculum areas (pre-school level) (age 4, 5 and 6 years)<br>1. Learning skills<br>2. Communication and language<br>3. Social and natural environment<br>4. Artistic expression<br>5. Physical training | Curriculum areas (primary level) Cycle I: grades 1, 2 and 3<br>1. Communication and language L1, L2, L3<br>2. Mathematics<br>3. Social and natural environment<br>4. Artistic expression<br>5. Physical training<br>6. Civic training<br><br>Cycle II: Grades 4, 5 and 6<br>1. Communication and language L1, L2, L3<br>2. Mathematics<br>3. Social sciences<br>4. Natural sciences and technology<br>5. Artistic expression<br>6. Physical training<br>7. Civic training<br>8. Productivity and development |

TABLE 1. Continued

| Compared aspects | Old curriculum model (prior to the 1980s) | New curriculum model |
|---|---|---|
| | Complementary educational cycle (CEC) 1. Spanish and/or Mayan language 2. Mathematics 3. Scientific principles applied to society, art and production 4. Social and natural environment 5. Aesthetics, work and leisure | |
| Evaluation | Based on measurement, but with no clear scale of values. | Used throughout the learning process to be pre-emptive, formative and compensatory. Different forms, techniques and tools of evaluation are applied, as well as the practices of self-evaluation, co-evaluation and hetero-evaluation |
| Role of the children | Passive, basically receptive. They are the objects of the teaching/learning process. | They are at the heart of the educational process. They participate at all times according to their possibilities. They construct their own knowledge. |
| Role of the teacher | Transmitter of knowledge, keystone of the educational process. | Guide, facilitator, recipient of inputs and suggestions. Fosters the construction of knowledge. |
| Role of the parents | Recipients of school decisions. Little participation. | Support teachers in the task of educating. Participation in decision-making. Constant involvement in the joint solving of school problems. Link between the community and the school. |

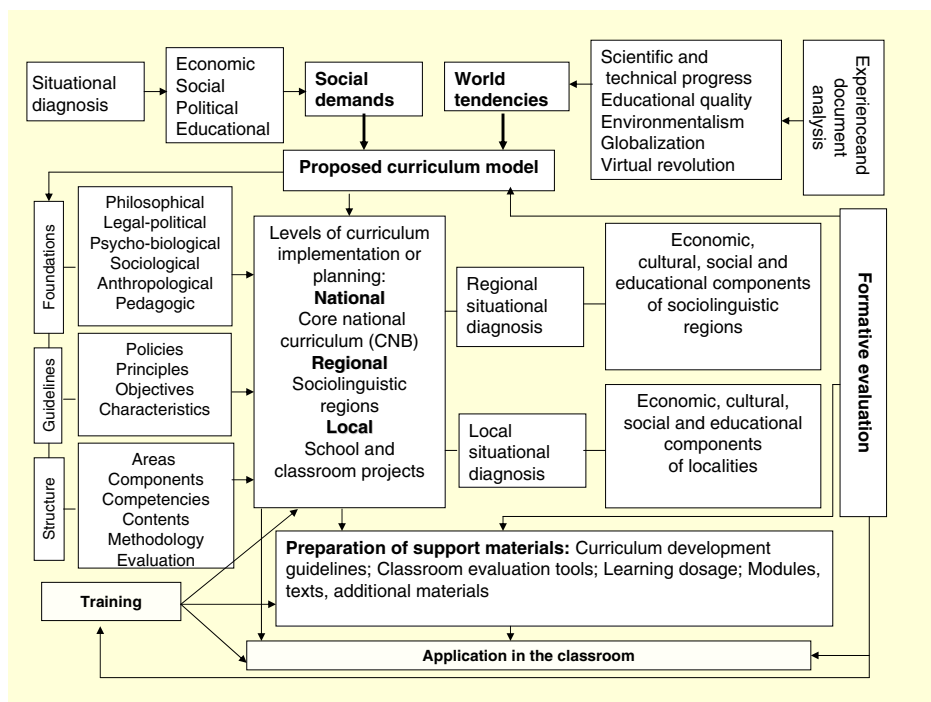*Source*: Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 16.

FIGURE 2.   The processes for curriculum design and development.
*Source:* Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2007. *Processes for curriculum design and development.* Prepared by Fernando Pineda Ocaña, Curriculum Committee. Input for review of curriculum design and development according to ISO methodology. February 2007.

other national and international sponsors, the Ministry of Education carried out a number of diagnostic studies concerning the coverage, quality and relevance of secondary level education.[1] With regard to the quality of lower secondary education, the diagnoses arrived at the following illustrative conclusions: (a) the internal inefficiency (failure and drop-out rates) of lower secondary is not as bad as in primary education; (b) the internal efficiency of primary education and lower secondary combined (which together constitute "basic education") reflect geographical disparities related to Guatemala's poverty map and to the distribution of the indigenous population; (c) poor results were obtained in census tests of the academic performance of students in the third grade of lower secondary education in mathematics (41.7% achieved standard performance) and reading (52.2%); (d) there is no common curricular framework on which to establish quality parameters amongst the existing 15 or more study plans; and (e) the lack of co-ordinated legislation has led to teachers being recruited with insufficient or unsuitable initial training (for instance, without university qualifications for secondary education teaching, or with initial training in a subject which is not the one they are teaching) and to working situations that offer no economic incentives for teachers to improve their performance (Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2006).

## FORMULATION OF A REFORM STRATEGY

On the basis of the Constitution of the Republic, the Peace Agreements, the Educational Reform Plan, the rules currently governing education, medium- and long-term educational plans and the results of diagnostic studies, a reform strategy was prepared for lower secondary education to be implemented by 2015, the year the Millennium Goals will be assessed. Technical assistance was provided by UNESCO, Partnership for Educational Revitalisation in the Americas (PREAL) and other sponsors. The strategy was published at the end of 2006 as a discussion paper. It is hoped that contributions will be received from the Joint Committee on Educational Reform and from other institutions within the educational and productive sectors.

The reform strategy currently under discussion comprises five objectives: (a) preparing young people for the practice of citizenship, for the continuation of studies in upper secondary (diversified) and/or for future employment in a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural society within a globalised world; (b) extending access subject to standards of quality, equity and relevance; (c) renovating the lower secondary curriculum within the framework of a unified curricular approach for the education system as a whole; (d) training teachers who can guide the process of change, undertake their personal and professional development and remain in secondary education; and (e) financing this reform through diversified sources, alliances between sectors and institutional co-operation. With regard to quality, the following specific strategies are proposed: (a) design and implementation of a core national curriculum for the *ciclo básico*, with adapted versions for regional and local levels; (b) evaluation and improvement of flexible teaching methods; (c) gradual consolidation of bilingual and intercultural education; (d) endowment of learning resource centres; (e) evaluation of performance on the basis of standards; (f) reinforcement of teacher training; and (g) school management for the improvement of educational quality. The latter strategy includes improving the leadership skills of school principals and community participation in raising the quality of education.

## PREPARATION OF A CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

The curriculum proposal was prepared in the following way. A group of specialists was brought together who had received academic training in the various subjects of the curriculum and who had already acquired some teaching experience with lower secondary classes. Under the co-ordination of a national curriculum expert and with the technical support of UNESCO-IBE (Opertti, 2005, 2006), each of the specialists analysed existing study plans, reviewed curriculum proposals for different subjects, incorporated one or two successful teaching/learning experiments in the particular curriculum area or sub-area and drafted a curriculum proposal for each of the three grades of the *ciclo básico*. Whilst carrying out this design work, they were provided with guidance regarding appropriate links with the core national curriculum for primary education and the content of curriculum grids, including area competencies, grade competencies, contents and performance indicators. The curriculum area and sub-area designs were then reviewed in workshops by small groups of national specialists, including Ministry of

Education staff. The versions adopted by the workshops were finally submitted to experts and consultants of UNESCO's International Bureau of Education.

In the light of the recommendations of consultants in the pedagogy of integration sponsored by IBE-UNESCO, the identification of grade competencies was carried out in curriculum areas or sub-areas, where necessary. At the same time, a review was undertaken of the way that the intercultural approach had been approached. Apart from ensuring that the intercultural aspect is incorporated into the contents of all curriculum areas and sub-areas, it is hoped that it will also be reflected in the formulation of grade competencies, especially for the purpose of mobilising the learning resources of different cultures.

For 2007, the following activities are planned as part of the reform strategy for lower secondary education: (a) an internal review of the curriculum proposal with the Ministry's Curriculum Committee and with the technical support of UNESCO; (b) an analysis of the contributions made by an intercultural bilingual proposal (ACEM, 2005) to the core national curriculum; (c) consultation with young people, parents, mothers, leaders and other stakeholders regarding broad aspects of the proposal; (d) consultations regarding curriculum grids by curriculum areas/sub-areas with teachers and school principals in different departments of the country; (e) preparation of guidelines for curriculum development; and (f) approval of the core national curriculum for lower secondary education (Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2006). The new curriculum will be implemented once the processes of curriculum planning and finalisation and the training of teachers have been completed.

## Some characteristics of the proposed core national curriculum

### GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES

Within the framework of curriculum changes introduced for different educational levels (see Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2005a, b), this proposal for curriculum renewal aims to fulfil the following basic objectives:

- To offer continuity of education for students coming from upper primary school;
- To maintain conceptual and methodological continuity with the structure of the curriculum by competencies already adopted for primary education;
- To offer the degree of specialisation and detail required for a level of studies that is pursuing more refined cognitive strategies and the appropriate handling of information related to different areas of human creativity and knowledge;
- To lay a firm foundation for the continuation of studies in upper secondary school (*ciclo diversificado*).

In order to redefine the general characteristics of the lower secondary level, the following principles, taken from the *Reform strategy for lower secondary education* (Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2006), were applied:

- Linkage of the lower secondary curriculum with those of primary education and upper secondary;
- Equity in the supply of and access to quality education;
- Education for life based on a multicultural society, inclusive of citizenship;
- Quality education, based on evaluation standards and culture;
- Cultural relevance and diversity;
- Promotion of bilingualism (indigenous language[2] + Spanish, Spanish + English[3]) and gradually – as feasible – multilingualism (e.g. linguistic competency in three languages);
- Information technology and communication as tools for learning;
- Participation of the educational community and various actors and sectors of society.

## AREAS OF THE CORE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR UPPER PRIMARY EDUCATION

In the core national curriculum for primary education, the areas shown in Table 2 are planned for upper primary classes, which run from the fourth to the sixth grades.

## STUDY COURSES FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Table 3 lists the curriculum areas and sub-areas of courses selected for the three grades of the *ciclo básico*, which will be submitted to the processes of review and consultation outlined above.

TABLE 2.  Curriculum areas for upper primary education.

|     | Areas | Minimum hours per week |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Communication and Language L-1 (mother tongue) | 4 |
| 2. | Communication and Language L-2 (second language) | 2 |
| 3. | Communication and Language L-2 (third language – English or other) | 2 |
| 4. | Mathematics | 5 |
| 5. | Natural sciences and technology | 3 |
| 6. | Social sciences | 3 |
| 7. | Artistic expression | 1 |
| 8. | Physical training | 1 |
| 9. | Productivity and development | 1 |
| 10. | Civic training | 1 |

TABLE 3.  Areas and sub-areas of the lower secondary curriculum.

| Curriculum areas | Sub-areas by grade | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Mathematics | Mathematics 1 | Mathematics 2 | Mathematics 3 |
| Natural sciences | Natural sciences I | Natural sciences II | Natural sciences III |
| Social sciences and Civic training | Social sciences and Civic training I | Social sciences and Civic training II | Social sciences and Civic training III |
| Communication and language | L1: Spanish language I | L1: Spanish language II | L1: Spanish language III |
| | L1: Indigenous languages: Mayan languages I | L1: Indigenous languages: Mayan languages II | L1: Indigenous languages: Mayan languages III |
| | L2 : Spanish (or Indigenous languages) I | L2: Spanish (or Indigenous languages) II | L2: Spanish (or Indigenous languages) III |
| | Foreign language: (English I) | Foreign language: (English II) | Foreign language: (English III) |
| | Information and communication technologies I | Information and communication technologies II | Information and communication technologies III |
| Artistic expression | Music I | Music II | Music III |
| | Plastic arts I | Plastic arts II | Plastic arts III |
| | Dance and corporal expression I | Dance and corporal expression II | Dance and corporal expression III |
| | Theatre I | Theatre II | Theatre III |

TABLE 3. Continued

| Curriculum areas | Sub-areas by grade | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Productivity and development | Productivity and development I | Productivity and development II | Productivity and development III |
| Physical training | Physical training I | Physical training II | Physical training III |

*Source:* Guatemala. Ministry of Education, 2007.

Innovations include the following:

- Inclusion in the Communication and Language area of a sub-area for Mayan language as the first language for Mayan-speaking students. Given the socio-linguistic complexity of the country, the first language should be Spanish, or one of the Mayan languages or Garifuna. The second language would then be Spanish or a native language (regional dialect). The Xinka language first needs to be written down.
- Incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within the Communication and Language area.
- Addition of the Productivity and Development area and sub-areas. This curriculum area, designed with the support of GTZ/PACE, will include competencies and contents selected from subjects contained in earlier study courses, such as Industrial Arts, Household Education or Accountancy. It will also include: contents and competencies related to enterprises; information handling; quality and excellence; use of material; intellectual and relevant technology; knowledge, use and enhancement of knowledge derived from a local, regional or national context; community work and development; sustainable development and maintaining harmony with the natural environment. This area will encourage students to undertake enterprise-oriented projects related to the school environment or their personal lives and to engage in personal, school and community projects;
- The addition of civic training in the area of social sciences;
- Several of the sub-areas in Table 3, such as Artistic Expression, may be considered optional, since their availability in individual schools will depend on certain conditions and factors, such as: (a) the availability of specialised teachers; (b) the availability of specialised laboratories/workshops and teams required for teaching the sub-area; (c) the availability of the necessary time within the daily and weekly school timetable; (d) the availability of the necessary educational materials to support the teaching and learning processes; and (e) other criteria and decisions that will depend on the school's working conditions;
- For the Natural Sciences, a model is being prepared that will incorporate physics, biology, chemistry and related disciplines.
- The listing of subjects and subdivisions for each grade helps to clarify and programme the work of teachers, as well as the decisions that need to be taken at the school level.

## Looking ahead

Once the core national curriculum for lower secondary education has been approved, training will need to be provided for teachers, supervisors and technical staff from the departments of the Ministry of Education. A further training programme will be developed and initiated for serving teachers. A policy will be devised and implemented for the provision of supporting texts and materials. Funding will continue to be set aside for learning resource centres, as well as for science laboratories. The establishment of daily class and out-of-classroom timetables will depend on the possibility of adapting the general rules to the particular working conditions of individual schools. In consultation with the Ministry of Education, universities may make appropriate proposals to ensure that teacher training and degree courses (first degree and master's) meet the requirements

of the new curriculum. The scope and operability of the planned changes will depend, amongst other factors, on the amount of financing available for implementing the new curriculum.

## Notes

1.  Secondary education is divided into the *ciclo básico* (or basic cycle, corresponding to grades 7, 8 and 9) and the *ciclo diversificado* (or diversified cycle, corresponding to grades 10, 11, 12 and 13, with the final number of grades varying according to the options chosen by the students).
2.  According to the National Languages Act (Legislative Decree No. 19-2003), the Mayan, Xinka and Garífuna languages are national languages.
3.  English is already part of the core national curriculum for primary education.

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