

Community Involvement in Curriculum Development: Papua New Guinea's Unique Cultural Calendar

How can early childhood educators genuinely link parents to curriculum development? Papua New Guinea (PNG) has found a unique way. In Papua New Guinea's elementary education program, teachers, parents, and community members work together to make a Cultural Calendar which is then used as a basis for organising children's learning.

The Cultural Calendar

Teachers begin by working with their communities to write down the different events, weather patterns, and seasons that occur throughout the year. Recording these things is an important activity because Papua New Guinean communities do not have a tradition of recording their thoughts and activities in written form. Instead, they have a very strong oral way of keeping their traditions and customs alive.

A Cultural Calendar is a visual record of community activities. These activities are based on the seasons and natural changes in the environment. A typical Cultural Calendar records seasons and weather patterns; agricultural, hunting, and fishing activities; sporting activities; religious events and feasting. Unlike the Western twelve month calendar, the Cultural Calendar has neither a 12 month year nor a typical 28 day month; some months are

longer and can have as many as 150 days; shorter months have 60 days.

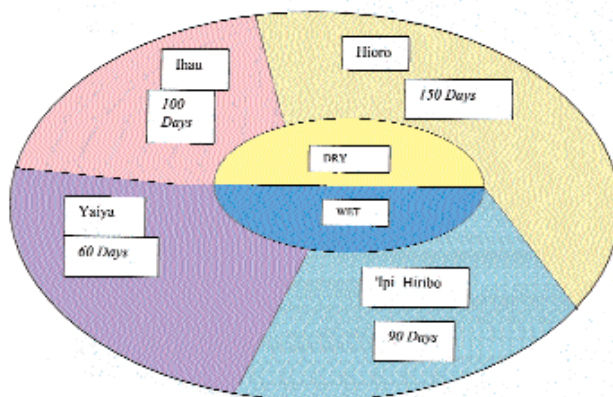


Figure 1: The typical four month calendar year of the Kairuku group of people in Central Province, Papua New Guinea, where community activities throughout the year are dictated by the DRY and WET seasons.

Putting the Cultural Calendar and the School Calendar Together

Teachers, parents, and the curriculum committee work together to fit the activities and seasons from the Cultural Calendar into the School Calendar. Some activities and events are seasonal and therefore can only be taught at

by Andrew Ikupu and Anne Glover



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certain times of the year. Others are ongoing and can be taught throughout the year.

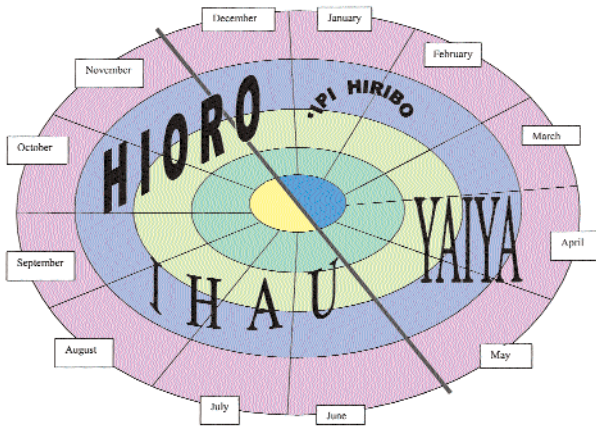


Figure 2: The integration of the Cultural Calendar with the School Calendar.

- 1: Cultural, Religious, and Sporting Activities
- 2: Agricultural, Fishing, and Hunting Activities
- 3: Natural Changes in the Environment
- 4: Wind Direction
- 5: Dry / Wet Seasons

Organising Children’s Learning Experiences Through Themes

From the combined Cultural Calendar and School Calendar, the teachers and the curriculum committee identify major themes. Teaching activities are then drawn from these themes. Using a community theme approach to teaching young children means that the children’s learning is not separated from their everyday lives. There is learning continuity for children, parents, and teachers.

Themes From the Kairuku Cultural Calendar

Dry Season	Wet Season
Hunting	Water
Very Hot	Rain
Bush Fire	Flood
Animals	Planting
Bride Price Payment	Making Sago

Figure 3: Examples of themes selected from the Cultural Calendar.

Using Themes to Plan and Prepare Lessons

The elementary teacher and the curriculum committee use the themes to make sure that children’s learning activities

are based on events they experience in their daily life. For example, during the wet season when it rains daily and water is the theme, many lessons will be developed around rain and water. Children will be given opportunities to see, feel, taste, hear, and smell water and describe the sensations. They will talk and write stories about water. They will mime water-based activities such as fishing and will measure water. They will listen to and act out stories about water — some of these stories will be told by village elders and some will come from the Bible. They will learn how water can be very beautiful and yet can also be very dangerous. They will join in water-based community events such as building reed traps to catch fish.

The themes approach to organising children’s learning provides scope for direct experience learning, and for parents and village elders to be involved in lesson delivery. Using themes also provides for continuous learning as theme-based activities can extend from several lessons in one day to many lessons over a long period.

Explore the Idea: The idea of empowering parents and teachers to identify, then transmit cultural information to the next generation is intriguing. Is there identifiable cultural information specific to your school community that deserves to be shared with children? Consider exploring this topic with teachers and parents. This is a perfect example of a question that allows teachers and parents to co-construct their own knowledge as they explore an idea.

Create Your Own Cultural Calendar: Share this article with your parent advisory group to explore if this approach might offer possibilities for your school. Convene a small group of parent and teacher volunteers to discuss the article and then, if they feel it is appropriate, to generate a cultural calendar that is unique and specific for your school. Enlist additional assistance of parents who suggest particular cultural events.

Who Knows?: Find out who holds the rich cultural knowledge in your school community. Once your cultural calendar is created, look for sources of knowledge about the topic in teachers, parents, and the community. Find out who knows the culture and explore how they can share their knowledge with the children, teachers, and parents in the school.

Teachers by Kay Albrecht

How to Use Beginnings Workshop to Train

Beginnings Workshop