

ABSTRACT

A Study of Washback and the Classroom: The Implications for Teaching and Learning of a Study of Washback From the National Test

Wendy-Anne Plante

This study examined the possibilities of washback from an external examination, the National Test, in the subject areas of language arts and mathematics. It sought to do so from the perspectives of teachers and principals, in order to enlighten teachers on their roles in the classrooms, and to assist them in decision making with regard to washback. Beginning with a definition of the term, the paper discusses whether the National Test has precipitated a washback effect in primary schools, as well as the nature and intensity of the effect and its influence on major aspects of teaching and learning. Data were collected through a questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observation, from sample schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Among the findings were that: 1) the principals' support for the National Test as an assessment tool was a significant contributing factor to the positive practices of teachers in the teaching/learning process; 2) factors such as low student performance, and parental as well as teacher attitudes can be potentially harmful to the nature and purpose of the test; and 3) the National Test had somewhat altered teachers' instruction delivery modes and their tendency to focus on the content and skills to be taught. Additionally, the study provided suggestions for external examination-oriented teaching and areas of classroom practice to which they could be applied.

Keywords: Case studies; National tests; Primary school teachers; Primary school students; Testing; Teacher attitudes; Perceptions; Principal attitudes; Trinidad and Tobago