

School Administration

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Recently, I read somewhere that at the heart of a well-functioning organisation is a professional administrator. On the surface, this might appear to be true if the assumption is that a professional administrator is one who ensures that all the stakeholders in the organisation are treated fairly and openly, and that favouritism, bias, discrimination, and other unfair practices are minimal, if not totally absent. Administrators in all sectors of society are judged by the relevant stakeholders and, whether we like it or not, it is the majority view of the stakeholders involved that creates the public perception of the administrator with respect to traits such as personality, attitude, competence, and style. Principals, vice principals, deans, and heads of departments are all administrators at different levels of the education system, and among those who “judge” them are teachers, parents, and students.

Within recent times, increased emphasis has been placed on teacher education and teacher education programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, as exemplified in the establishment of a new four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme offered by the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). This is a very commendable and impressive initiative, which is intended to ensure that there are well-trained, professional teachers in our nation’s schools and classrooms to discharge the responsibility of educating our children. However, one cannot help but wonder about the impact of the older and/or traditional, untrained or minimally trained administrators [principals, vice principals, and heads of departments] on the entire initiative. How possible really is it for a newly trained teacher—one who is excited about trying new pedagogy and innovative teaching/learning strategies in the classroom—to work under an administrator who is fixed in the traditional paradigm?

Given, too, the fragility of the human ego, it is quite possible that principals who are not professionally trained will feel intimidated or even threatened by the increased knowledge base of their subordinates. In fact, teachers have complained of their efforts being rejected and even ridiculed by some principals who clearly fail to see the immense benefits of teaching/learning strategies such as role play, drama, and song, for the learning potential of students.

Today, there are several primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago that are led by principals and vice principals with only minimal professional training. Therefore, while the focus on training teachers is a noble one, the inherent problems of the resulting situation in which trained teachers are supervised by untrained administrators might defeat its nobility. Simply put, if principals are not supportive and do not encourage their trained teachers to practise their acquired skills and

techniques and to share these with their colleagues, many teachers would choose to “abandon the effort” rather than to “persist in vain.”

The School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine has been, over the years, attempting to institute programmes and short courses geared not only for teachers but also to target the administrators—specifically those administrators who may have moved up through the ranks, but who may be without the necessary professional training. The rationale, of course, is that pedagogically trained administrators may be less resistive facilitators when it comes to supporting and encouraging their teachers to make the necessary paradigm shifts. In addition, it is to be expected that institutions with properly trained leaders at the helm would be proactive and responsive to the needs of students in dynamic and creative ways.

It is important to remember that parents are significant stakeholders in the education enterprise. They will no doubt have cause to visit their children’s schools on occasion and to interact with teachers and principals. Principals have to ensure that they do not interact with parents in a manner that might be interpreted as being confrontational, disrespectful, and unprofessional. Professional training is intended to provide the tools to equip school administrators to deal with issues that require discussion, negotiation, and meaningful resolutions, and which are in the best interest of all concerned.

Management experts say that training is supposed to broaden minds and expand intellect, and that well-trained administrators realise that decision making and charting the way forward in any institution ought not to be the prerogative of the administrator alone but, rather, the collective responsibility of all those in the institution. Our administrators need to see themselves less as the boss and more as team players. This new image will no doubt require a conscious attitudinal shift and a new openness on the part of administrators if the paradigm shift is to become a reality.

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