

## **Schools as Partners in Teacher Education**

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The role of schools in the preparation of teachers, both at the pre-service and in-service stages, is a critical dimension of the teacher education process. There is a shifting pattern of interdependence between the institutions of teacher education and the sites of work—the schools. If the work of schools reflect highly skilled and informed professional practice, then the teacher education institution will find ready support for the new ideas and theories that teacher trainees will be expected to display and use in the workplace.

In fact, if schools have highly developed professional cultures and active learning communities of teachers, then the preparation of teachers can be based in the schools rather than the teachers' colleges. For this to work, there must be confidence in the ability of the staff and leadership of a school to arrange for the preparation of a teacher in a comprehensive fashion. Such arrangements would require special approval and quality standards for ensuring integrity in this process of teacher preparation.

In schools driven by the desire to achieve high pass rates, newly qualified teachers may be told by their peers, and even by principals, that the ideas they bring from their initial teacher preparation are not applicable or suitable to the daily task of teaching. Newly qualified teachers left to their own devices in genuinely difficult circumstances may simply submit to survival strategies that get the job done.

It is important, therefore, that schools become familiar with the ideas and theories espoused by the institutions of teacher education. If there is agreement on what teachers need to learn in initial teacher education, then we have to determine what challenges this poses for those who will monitor their continued development in the workplace. Continuous discourse is required between the lecturers at the teacher education institutions and the leaders in the schools to deal with the difficulties of transferring theory into practice.

School principals and heads of departments need to identify any difficulties with the process of monitoring and support. Concerns with regard to relevance should be attended to openly. Both the lecturers from the institutions of teacher education and the instructional leaders of schools must meet and discuss teacher education matters common to both.

This means that there must be the development of a capability for professional development at the level of the school. Individual schools must have their own programmes of professional development, with arrangements to facilitate the development of individual teachers at the different stages of their development and career path.

At present, schools in Trinidad and Tobago do not have strong professional cultures. Many Heads of Department do not feel competent to assist others in the delivery of instruction. However, the Ministry of Education has made some attempt to prepare

Heads. Our teachers are not used to the idea of being observed in classrooms, and principals are preoccupied with every other matter but the instructional life of the school.

Two of the reforms in teacher education being considered for the primary level are the introduction of pre-service teacher education and the replacement of the two-year diploma by a three-year degree programme. During the degree programme, teachers would be required to do some practice teaching in schools, and at the end of the programme might be required to do a one-year internship. In both instances they would have to be properly supervised by staff from schools, with support from staff of the teacher education institutions. Previously, student teachers who came to the two teachers' colleges already had three years of teaching experience in the classroom. To implement pre-service teacher education, however, requires the selection of schools with suitable professional climates and the preparation of professionally trained mentors to supervise teacher trainees and newly qualified teachers.

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