

Educational Reform in Tobago

Raymond S. Hackett

November 29, 2004 was an historic day in the annals of Tobago's history, as for the first time in the history of education in Trinidad and Tobago, stakeholders in an educational district assembled to thrash out what they individually and collectively viewed as critical to teacher development, curriculum choices, and institutional strengthening at the early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. Ably guided by consultants Dr. Gwendoline Williams and Mrs. Karen Bart-Alexander, participants examined, modified, and sanctioned an action plan for educational reform in Tobago. This event and the mini conferences that preceded it were extremely successful, with interest at a remarkably high level.

Educational reform, however, is not only about drafting action plans. It also involves organisational renewal and restructuring, changing organisational culture, and identifying appropriate and adequate staffing.

In this regard, educational reform in Tobago cannot proceed without radical restructuring of the Education Division. I refer specifically to the key posts that will be needed for implementing the action plan. This includes creating the following four strategic functional units in the division: Advisory and Supervisory Services; Operational Services; Policy, Resource, and Strategy Services; and Special Needs Services.

Along with the need for reviewing civil service regulations and other standing orders, restructuring should also focus on re-conceptualising the following categories of personnel in the division:

An administrator with extensive experience and insight into the system, as well as postgraduate training in educational administration (at least an M.A. or M.Phil.) or equivalent credentials should head the division. The responsibilities of the post should include:

- Liasing with the Secretary for Education with respect to all educational policies formulated by the Tobago House of Assembly
- Articulating the vision for the division
- Establishing the means by which schools and the community can be involved in the sharing of goals for the division
- Providing a process by which these goals or priorities can be affirmed and the means to attain them established
- Working to ensure that expectations are accompanied by the resources needed to achieve them
- Assuring that outcomes assessments are conducted periodically
- Providing sustained support for the attainment of educational goals and for the efforts of staff

- Providing leadership in support of the division's goals (a) within the agenda of the Tobago Division of Education, (b) in individual schools, (c) at public meetings, (d) in the media, and (e) to the public at large
- Establishing with members of the division, schools, groups, and individuals within the society, a positive climate in which attention and energies can be focussed on education and on the needs of children.

The Deputy Administrator should have postgraduate training in Education (M.A. or M.Ed.) as well as considerable experience and insight into the system. The responsibilities of this position should involve:

- Assisting the administrator
- Undertaking special assignments as delegated by the administrator from time to time
- Providing the necessary link between the administrator and the heads of the functional units.

Each functional unit should be headed by one of the four Senior School Supervisor (SS) 3s who should have wide experience in his/her area of specialization as well as postgraduate training (M.Ed.) and a diploma in educational administration or equivalent credentials. Senior SS 3s should generally be responsible for:

- Providing leadership within their functional units
- Implementing the division's policy for their functional units
- Establishing and maintaining ongoing cooperation and collaboration between the different functional sub-units within their functional units as well as with other functional units within the division
- Monitoring and evaluating their unit's total programmes and engaging personnel in making appropriate changes towards ensuring that schools deliver quality education.

Two Junior SS 3s should serve as the link between secondary schools and the division. They should be responsible and accountable for all operations at all secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, while six SS 2s (four for primary schools and two for preschools) should serve in a similar capacity with respect to primary schools and preschools. Each SS 2 should have at least two SS 1s as assistants. While SS 1s should report to their respective SS 2s, SS 2s are expected to report to their Junior SS 3s.

Curriculum Officers for the respective curriculum areas should head teams of facilitators. These curriculum teams should ensure quality in the delivery of curriculum, assist in the development of the curriculum and remediation, and act as mediators and resource personnel to schools. While Curriculum Officers are expected to have postgraduate training (M.Ed.), facilitators must have at least a postgraduate diploma or equivalent credentials to operate at the secondary school level, while those who are assigned to primary schools should have at least a B.Ed. degree.

Sub-units will be critical to the operation of the different functional units in the division. These sub-units should embrace human resource management, planning and development, measurement and evaluation, professional development and quality assurance, continuing education, guidance and counselling, technical and vocational education, youth and community, catering, library, medical, property management and maintenance, and school transportation services related to the delivery of education.

Directors, with at least a first degree in their respective areas of specialisation, should serve as de facto heads of respective sub-units. While they should be required to report to the Senior SS 3 who has responsibility for the functional unit under which the sub-unit falls, they should be fully accountable for the operations of their individual sub-units.

Support Specialists (all professionals) attached to sub-units in the division should ensure that the division's programmes are monitored, serviced, and evaluated; and that the clients of the school benefit from the programmes provided by the division.

Auxiliary workers will also be needed—clerical staff, and skilled and non-skilled workers of the various sub-units. They should serve three main functions: 1) meeting basic operational needs of schools, 2) meeting certain needs of their respective functional units of the division, and 3) supporting the work of support specialists in the various sub-units.

Finally, it should be noted that to effectively achieve the goals of the division, strong leadership is vital in the schools. Through this type of transformational leadership, vice-principals, pastoral deans, and heads of department are expected to share the same vision for the school as the principal and attract teachers and other stakeholders to the reform movement.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine