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YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

Rawatee-Maharaj-Sharma

Science curricula at all levels of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago stress the importance of sustainable development and, particularly, the role of environmental conservation as a fundamental factor in achieving sustainability. This article discusses the findings of a study of the views of 14- and 15-year-olds on the importance of environmental conservation. The findings reveal that there was general disapproval among young people for human economic activities that threatened the environment. Interviews with students, however, indicated a discernible lack of willingness among students to raise awareness among the general public on issues related to environmental conservation. In general, though, students showed a positive attitude towards the need to conserve the environment.

Introduction and Literature Review

One of the main internationally supported products of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), popularly known as the Earth Summit, was Agenda 21, a comprehensive programme of action needed throughout the world to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development for the 21st century (UNCED, 1992a). The concept of sustainable development aims to reconcile the two objectives of achieving economic development to secure higher standards of living, and protecting and enhancing the environment. The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987). Principle 4 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992b) states that: "in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it."

The protection of the environment is therefore a precondition for, and an integral part of, sustainable development. Thus, a sound

understanding of environmental conservation is essential for the sustainable use of renewable natural resources. Action plan documents produced by the United Kingdom (1994) highlight the importance of making decisions based on the best possible scientific information, and of increasing people's awareness of the part that their personal choices can play in conserving the environment to achieve sustainable development.

With this high degree of global attention focused on environmental conservation and with environmental preservation practices included in all national curriculum documents in Trinidad and Tobago, it is an appropriate time to assess young people's views about the position they hold in relation to environmental conservation, given that one of the central aims of the new secondary science curriculum is to "promote the preservation and protection of the environment" (Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

The national science curriculum of Trinidad and Tobago clearly states that students should be taught about the conservation of homes of animals; about pollution and its effect on the environment; and about conservation of ecosystems, including practices and behaviours necessary for conservation of the environment to ensure the survival of living organisms in their respective ecosystems (MOE, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

Recent international studies have indicated that despite increased media coverage and increased emphasis on classroom instruction, young people still fail to consider environmental conservation as a high-priority lifestyle issue (Greaves, Stanisstreet, Boyes, & Williams, 1993; Schelhas & Pfeffer, 2007; Stanisstreet, Spofforth, & Williams, 1993). It is primarily this burning concern that motivated this research.

In a 1996 study conducted by Morris and Schagen, a survey of roughly 1,000 15-year-old students revealed that only 34% regarded environmental conservation as a "very serious" issue. More recent works by Parker et al. (2007) and Anthony (2007) suggest that young people generally display poor attitudes to environmental conservation and preservation, and, further, that there are differing positions on the issue among individuals from different social classes in society. Hazen and Harris (2007) found that attitudes/views on conservation seem to be territorially dependent. In other words, communities that depend directly on the environment for their livelihood (farmers and fishermen) are more aware of the need to conserve it for future generations. Communities that do not depend directly on the environment for their livelihood are more carefree when it comes to environmental issues. This finding is also

supported by Sunderland, Ehringhaus, and Campbell (2007), who suggest that individuals whose livelihoods do not involve a "close relationship" with the environment tend to be less concerned about adopting environmental conservation practices. In addition, Witherspoon (1994) and Harris (2005) both highlight the existence of what is referred to as a person's emotional or "romantic" relationship with the environment, which they suggest is very common among individuals who are fond of the outdoors, like hikers, deep sea divers, and mountain climbers. Witherspoon (1994) further claims that the emotional relationship which such individuals have with the environment has a significant impact on their perceptions and views of the need to conserve the environment.

For the large number of individuals in Trinidad and Tobago who do not have either a territorially dependent connection or an emotional (romantic) relationship with the environment, it is difficult to determine their position when it comes to issues related to conservation of the environment. Some researchers advocate that the school is a microcosm of society and that, in a very real sense, attitudes and behaviours cultivated in the school are reflected in the society at large (Cannon, 2002).

In light of this, therefore, this study attempts to probe, in general, individuals' views on issues related to conserving the environment, focusing specifically on young people, to reveal where they mentally "draw the line" on environmental conservation. In this work, environmental conservation is viewed as a fundamental component of sustainable development, and an attempt is made to explore whether young people regard environmental degradation as a justifiable consequence of some human/economic activities.

Although there is much information in the print and electronic media about environmental conservation practices, schools still have a key role to play in influencing environmental awareness and action among young people (Morris & Schagen, 1996). For the majority of young people, there is very little formal opportunity for discussion of environmental issues outside a school setting, so it is likely that views held at this level will remain unchanged during adulthood. It is important, therefore, that classroom learning experiences are used meaningfully to shape the views of young people within the school context.

Method

Students from three (1 urban, 1 suburban, and 1 semi-rural) co-educational secondary schools in north Trinidad took part in the study. A

questionnaire was administered to the students at the end of the Form 2 curriculum year. The questionnaire was piloted with 61 students, and subsequent discussion and scrutiny of the answers indicated that all the students had completed the questionnaire without difficulty. All students in the pilot showed an adequate understanding of the terms used in the questions and of what the questions asked. The final version of the questionnaire was completed by 401 students (205 girls and 196 boys).

Environmental conservation can be an emotive issue, and conscious steps were taken to avoid responses that might result from peer pressure or peer collaboration. To ensure that the students' answers best reflected their own views, students were asked not to confer, and the questionnaire was administered during normal class time under the supervision of their class teachers. Students were assured that it was not a test and that only the researcher would see their individual responses. They were asked to think carefully about each statement and to indicate their response by ticking the appropriate boxes. The Likert type questionnaire (Oppenheim, 1986), which was based on the findings of Agrawal (2005) and Brandon (1998), was in two parts:

- In Section I, students were given three options:
  Yes (Y), No (N), Uncertain (U)
- In Section II, students were given five options:
  Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)

In the first section (Appendix A), students were presented with a list of human activities that are known contributors to environmental degradation (Brandon, 1998) but which are also fundamental to economic growth or to human quality of life. Students were asked whether these activities are acceptable even if they threaten the environment.

The second section (Appendix B) asked students to note the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about conserving certain aspects of the environment. The responses were coded on a five-point scale (strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1). A high score thus indicated a positive attitude and an average of 3 represented a neutral attitude. Scores were averaged to obtain an overall attitude rating among the respondents (Oppenheim, 1986).

Once this phase of the data collection was complete, 15 of the respondents (9 girls and 6 boys) were randomly selected and invited for an interview two weeks later. The aim here was to verify questionnaire responses with verbal responses by cross-checking. The interviews lasted

about 3 minutes each and the questions asked were identical to those in Appendix B. If respondents attempted to expand on any given response during the interviews, opportunity was provided for such elaboration and these were captured in the researcher's notes.

Findings

Responses to the questions about the importance of environmental conservation in relation to economic and other human activities are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who rejected each activity as an unacceptable threat to the environment. The data showed that, generally, more girls than boys rejected each activity. Most students, girls and boys, viewed environmental degradation as an unacceptable consequence of industry, road building, and housing, in decreasing order. Although more girls (40%) rejected the relative importance of intensive farming, 28% of boys found this to be unacceptable and an almost equal number of boys (27%) accepted it. Subsequent interviews revealed strongly polarized views between boys and girls on the importance of intensive farming. One boy reflected the views of his peers, saying that "*farming is important because we need to be able to feed ourselves … we may end up with a lovely environment, but no food to eat if we do not use the land for intensive farming.…*" In any event, however, there was a fair amount of uncertainty among girls and boys alike over the importance of intensive farming (43% girls, 44% boys).

With regard to industrial activities, both girls and boys seemed to agree that such activities were not justified if they threatened the environment; only 9% of the boys were of the view that industrial activities were justified. The degree of uncertainty among the students surveyed was small (18% girls, 17% boys), perhaps suggesting that students of both genders generally did not agree that industrial activities were justified if they resulted in threatening levels of environmental degradation.

Building roads and houses were almost equally rejected activities among the students. More girls (76% and 64%) than boys (50% and 55%) rejected road building and house building, respectively, as activities that were sufficiently justifiable to excuse environmental degradation. Twenty-five percent of all the students surveyed expressed uncertainty that building roads was a justified activity even if it negatively compromised the environment, while 31% were uncertain about building houses.

For activities that were considered recreational, 3% of the girls felt that these were *OK*, while 70% of the girls indicated that, despite apparent benefits, the pursuit of recreational activities was not worth compromising the environment. Among the boys, 22% felt that recreational activities were justifiable while 64% of them believed that it was not. Twenty-seven percent of the girls and 14% of the boys (totalling 21% of the sample) were uncertain as to whether recreational activities were acceptable even if they threatened the environment. Table 1 and Figure 1 summarize the findings.

Table 1. Students' Views of Acceptability of Activities That May Cause Environmental Degradation

Activity	Yes (Y) %			No (N) %			Uncertain (U) %		
	F	M	All	F	M	All	F	M	All
Intensive farming	17	27	**22**	40	28	**34**	43	44	**44**
Recreation/leisure	3	22	**13**	70	64	**67**	27	14	**21**
Building houses	2	18	**10**	64	55	**60**	34	27	**31**
Building roads	2	22	**12**	76	50	**63**	22	28	**25**
Industrial activities	0	9	**8**	82	67	**75**	18	17	**18**

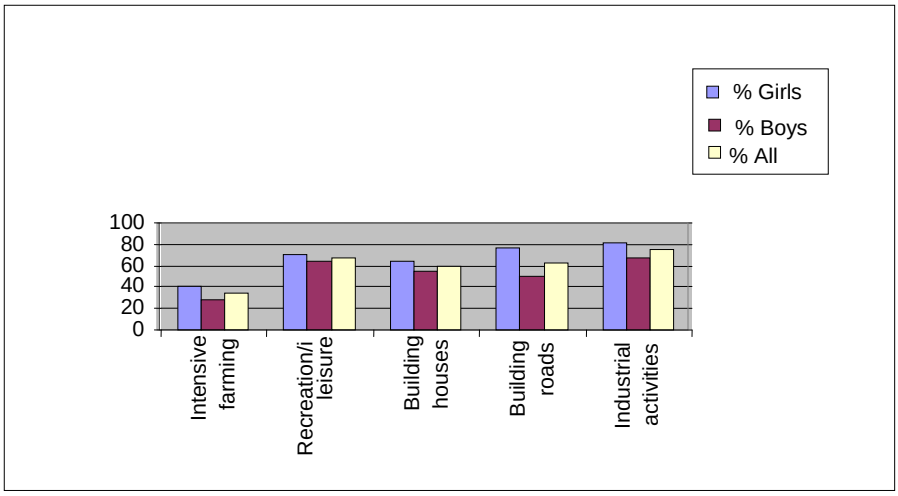

Figure 1. Percentage of students giving negative responses to the question: Do you think the following activities are OK if they threaten environmental degradation?

Average attitude scores shown in Table 2 indicate that students, overall, had positive feelings about conserving the environment. Girls consistently showed a more positive attitude towards conservation than boys. On average, however, students showed negative feelings towards starting a campaign to raise awareness among the general public about the need to conserve the environment.

Combined results (Table 2) show that the majority of students **agreed** or **strongly agreed** with adopting practices and behaviours that promoted conservation of the environment. With respect to planting trees, 85% of the girls surveyed (55% **strongly agreed**; 30% **agreed**) were of the view that this was a worthwhile practice for humans to adopt to promote environmental conservation. Interview responses such as those below, obtained from girls who shared this view, suggest that they were aware of the detrimental effect that felling of trees had on the environment and, further, that humans have a responsibility to make conscious efforts to plants trees to replace those lost due to deforestation:

Girl 1: …trees hold the soil together… to prevent erosion and landslide….

Girl 2: Those who cut them [trees] down destroy animal homes….and they must replant trees…

Girl 3: The environment looks dull without trees….trees should be planted in empty areas…

Girl 4: …beautiful trees which we plant will keep the environment nice for our children

Girl 5: …planting trees is useful to animals, people, the land…..

Girl 6: Trees produce the carbon dioxide we need…..they are very important…..

A total of 77% (27% - **SA**; 50% - **A**) of the boys surveyed also shared the view that planting trees was a necessary activity for environmental conservation. Cleaning the surroundings around the home was also another practice that students felt was important for environmental conservation. While more girls (83%) than boys (67%) either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that this was important for environmental conservation, none of the students strongly disagreed, and only 8% each of boys and girls disagreed. With regard to reduce, reuse, and recycle, 44% of the girls and 27% of the boys **strongly agreed** that this was an important practice that should be adopted to conserve the environment. In regard to public transport and carpooling, 44% of the girls and 28% of the boys

strongly agreed that this was a necessary environmental conservation practice.

Table 2. Students' Views About Adopting Practices Aimed at Promoting Environmental Conservation

Practice	SA %		A %		U %		D %		SD %	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Plant trees	55	27	30	50	8	23	7	0	0	0
Clean homes and surroundings	51	24	32	43	9	25	8	8	0	0
Reduce, reuse, and recycle	44	27	37	41	12	28	7	4	0	0
Use public transport or carpool	44	28	34	40	18	31	4	1	0	0
Stop burning garbage	40	27	37	37	20	30	3	6	0	0
Use ozone friendly products	22	23	56	37	15	36	7	4	0	0
Choose biodegradable products	21	18	46	22	24	46	9	14	0	0
Start an environmental awareness campaign	3	13	5	23	44	9	26	14	22	41

***Key*: SA** – Strongly Agree; **A** – Agree; **U** – Uncertain; **D** – Disagree; **SD** – Strongly Disagree

The students surveyed also identified desisting from burning garbage as another high priority practice that humans should adopt. The following were the findings with respect to burning of garbage:

SA – (40% girls; 27% boys)
A – (37% girls; 37% boys)

Neither using ozone friendly products nor choosing biodegradable products was selected as a **strongly agreed** practice by many of the students, but they were selected as an **agreed** practice by most of them.

What is also interesting in this case is that none of students viewed either of these practices as **strongly disagreeable** practices.

Students were very articulate during the interviews about how important it was for humans, in general, to become more conscious of their activities and the impact these can have on the environment. Several recommendations were volunteered during the interviews and the passion with which the students presented these was evident to the researcher. Some of the recommendations that emerged were as follows:

Choose brown bags instead of plastic bags at the grocery store…

Reuse brown bags to put lunch and snacks…

Take turns when carpooling … so that one person alone does not feel pressured…

Read products when buying…like insecticides…only buy ozone friendly products…

Make a compost heap with biodegradable garbage… instead of throwing it in the garbage container…

Encourage friends and family to plant trees… and take care of the environment…

Keep surroundings clean… school, home… playgrounds… do not throw garbage on the ground…use bins…

What concerned the researcher, though, was that while the students knew about the need to conserve the environment and most of them generally agreed (or strongly agreed) with many of the conservation practices, they were very reluctant to make the individual personal commitment the researcher thought would naturally result. In fact, responses obtained from the latter section of the second questionnaire (Appendix B), which focused on starting an environmental awareness campaign, revealed that students were reluctant to take ownership of the responsibility to sensitize people to adopt the practices that they themselves strongly advocated. Only 3% of the girls and 13% of the boys **strongly agreed** that this was an important activity towards conserving the environment, while 5% of the girls and 23% of the boys **agreed** that it was. When probed during the interviews, students raised issues such as shyness, inexperience, lack of resources and support, and lack of time as reasons why they personally would not venture out on an environmental awareness campaign. A total of 20% **disagreed** and 32% **strongly disagreed** that an awareness campaign would be effective in promoting

environmental conservation. The following responses from the interviews capture their disagreement:

I'm too shy to tell older people they are doing wrong things…. Like burning garbage….

I will need an adult to work with me … a child like me alone cannot do a campaign …

I am not sure how to do a campaign…

I could make a poster and put it up ….but I don't want to have to speak to the people…

It is a good thing… to save the environment … but I cannot go and tell people….

…sometimes people just don't listen… even when they know they are doing a wrong thing….

Table 3 shows the combined views of boys and girls in respect to students' views on each of the environmental conservation practices.

Table 3. Students' Combined Views (Boys and Girls) on Environmental Practices

Practice	SA	A	U	D	SD
Plant trees	41	40	16	3	0
Clean homes and surroundings	38	38	17	8	0
Reduce, reuse, and recycle	36	39	20	6	0
Use public transport or carpool	36	37	25	3	0
Stop burning garbage	34	37	25	5	0
Use ozone friendly products	23	46	25	6	0
Choose biodegradable products	20	34	35	11	0
Start an environmental awareness campaign	8	14	27	20	32

***Key*: SA** – Strongly Agree; **A** – Agree; **U** – Uncertain; **D** – Disagree; **SD** – Strongly Disagree

Discussion

This study attempts to identify some of the gaps between the views on environmental conservation advocated by environmentalists and scientists and the views of secondary school students. These gaps must be minimized if our educational goal is to raise students' awareness of environmental conservation issues, particularly in the context of sustainable development.

The findings indicate that young people generally do not approve of human economic and developmental activities that threaten the environment, although fewer boys than girls hold this view. The notable exceptions to this were using ozone friendly products and starting an environmental campaign; in each case, fewer girls than boys approved these activities.

One of the most surprising findings in this work was the relatively high number of girls and boys who showed a positive attitude towards conserving the environment (up to 81% viewed planting trees as an important environmental conservation practice). This number is substantially higher than that reported in the work by Stanisstreet et al. (1993), in which only 46% of the sample expressed positive attitudes on environmental conservation issues and practices. It may be that students in this study were more focused on the concept of conservation and more aware of the impact of human activities on the environment, and therefore more critical of these activities.

According to Morris and Schagen (1996), girls are more environmentally aware and active than boys, tending to express a more "sympathetic" view about conservation. The findings here support this claim, as in all instances, except starting an environmental campaign, more girls than boys **strongly agreed** (Table 2) with adopting practices aimed at promoting environmental conservation. Except for what has been reported in this paper, the follow-up interviews did not reveal any specific reasons why students, particularly girls, did not view an environmental campaign as important as the other practices they strongly advocated. This aspect of the findings warrants further investigation.

It is interesting to note that significantly more boys than girls were undecided (Table 2), suggesting perhaps that, as indicated by Witherspoon (1994), it may have been easier for girls to adopt a position and hold onto it firmly. Additionally, it would seem that the three factors—"social values, rational perceptions and romantic world views"—identified by Witherspoon (1994) and Harris (2005) may have influenced views expressed by students in this work. Brief elaborations (captured in the researcher's notes) obtained from the nine girls

interviewed revealed that the emotional or romantic stance over environmental conservation may have been the most influential one for the girls under study. Phrases like "*breathing fresh air is healthy*" and "*…to maintain …the beauty of outdoors*" in their interview responses were interpreted in the context of Harris' (2005) work to imply this perceived romantic stance among the girls. Boys generally did not elaborate on their responses during the interviews.

This perceived stance was revealed more explicitly from the responses given by girls (to the issues raised in Appendix B), for example, while more boys than girls felt that intensive farming is more acceptable as a threat to the environment than building houses or roads (Table 1), more girls than boys felt that planting trees is more beneficial to the environment than using public transportation or using biodegradable products (Table 2). In the absence of empirical data to validate this apparently more positive attitude displayed by the girls in this study towards environmental conservation, this "romantic" attitude remains a perception. In addition, other issues need to be considered before it can be definitively stated that girls display a more positive attitude towards the environment.

Morris and Schagen (1996) advocate that the development of positive attitudes among students can only be fostered through meaningful opportunities to interact with the environment and to explore the implications of human economic activities on the environment. They suggest that such attitudes can only be cultivated/developed over a period of time through structured and well-planned activities inside and outside the classroom, complemented by focused, follow-up initiatives.

In the local context, it may be possible to foster increased awareness among students (primary and secondary) by deliberately initiating brief discussions and decision-making exercises with them about conservation issues. Morris and Schagen (1996), as well as Hazen and Harris (2007), suggest that such initiatives, if properly implemented, could spark real interest and prove to be invaluable in developing young people's thinking about the complex relationship between environmental conservation and sustainable development.

So what are young people's views on conserving the environment? Generally speaking, young people seem to be aware of the significance of the environment in their lives and there is a strong indication that they regard environmental conservation as a key requirement for sustainable development. They appreciate the need to adopt conservation practices and, while those who participated in this study expressed some reluctance to take action to sensitize the larger public, they seem to agree

that discussions on environmental issues in classrooms will have meaningful impact on others like themselves.

We still have a long way to go if we are to encourage and manage such discussions in our classrooms, but it is the firm view of the researcher that efforts to promote a thrust in this direction must be diligently pursued to encourage not only students, but also communities at large, to make informed decisions and choices about wider issues linked to sustainable development.

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Appendix A

Section I

Environmental conservation is often in conflict with economic development and other human activities.
Do you think the following activities are OK even if they result in threatening levels of environmental degradation? Indicate Yes, No or Uncertain by placing a
'Y' for Yes, an
'N' for No and a
'U' for Uncertain,
next to each statement.

Intensive farming
Recreation and/or leisure activities
Building houses
Building roads
Industrial activities

Appendix B

Section II

We (humans) should:

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
Plant trees to beautify the environment					
Clean the areas around or homes (such as yards and drains) to maintain a clean environment					
Reduce waste by reusing and recycling as much as possible					
Use public transport and carpools to reduce pollution of the environment					
Stop the practice of disposing garbage by burning					
Use only ozone friendly product					
Choose biodegradable products over non-biodegradable products					
Start a campaign to raise awareness among the general public about the need to conserve the environment					

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"CONTEXT" – THE MAGIC OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

This paper examines the issue of "context" in foreign language teaching. It focuses on nine teachers at the secondary school level in Trinidad and Tobago who were students in a one-year in-service professional development programme. The teachers are all graduates with a B.A. in either Spanish or French, or both, and have varied degrees of experience as teachers. Teachers entered the programme with limited understandings of context and its role in teaching, and with little or no experience of using it in their foreign language lessons. During their encounter with the context issue during the year-long professional development programme, they were able to make a link between the theories of effective teaching and learning and the use of context in lessons. They were also able to overcome the challenges of lack of creativity, finding suitable support material, and motivating their students. By the end of the programme, teachers were not yet using context spontaneously but found that planning lessons with appropriate contexts was time-consuming. The findings of this study are especially relevant for teacher educators who promote communicative language teaching.

Introduction

For over a century, teaching methods relevant to foreign languages have been tried and tested, resulting in compounded learning and insights that have added value to the current status of theory and practice today. Foreign language educators have benefited from understandings of how behaviouristic and cognitive schools of psychology have impacted upon approaches to the study of linguistics, and have adjusted their methods and strategies accordingly, in the interest of best practice, with a view to facilitating optimal attitudes and performance in their classrooms.

Whether foreign language teachers are those with initial training and many years of experience, or are trained novice teachers, or are practising without training for any length of time, we can safely surmise that classroom practice is crafted to varying degrees by a composite of experimentation, experiential knowledge, self-directed research, instinct,

published materials (textbooks, audiovisual), and Internet sources. In short, teachers search to find solutions to the problems in their classrooms and are eager to try something that may work.

Even if a teacher were teaching to the test, it is hardly likely that any foreign language teacher today would not have been exposed, even without knowing it, to a communicative approach to language teaching. Many modern textbooks and other learning materials do attempt to reflect this approach in their content, and in their learning and assessment strategies. However, it is not uncommon for teachers to use learning materials in ways that do not promote the intention of the authors. That is, learning materials are not teacher-proof. In addition, it is a common occurrence that foreign language teachers may purport to be using one approach or the other when, in fact, their teaching methods indicate otherwise.

Literature Review

Deep understandings of methods is a goal that may be best achieved by continuous professional development in varying forms. With regard to the communicative approach to foreign language teaching, teachers seem generally convinced by its emphasis on "the importance of self-esteem, of students cooperatively learning together, of developing individual strategies for success, and above all of focusing on the *communicative* process in language learning" (Brown, 1987, p. 12). Additionally, and according to Brown also, a great challenge for teachers is to move beyond the traditional approach that focused on form and knowledge about the language divorced from meaningful communication in the language, to genuine and spontaneous use of the language.

Teachers need to understand that because many students do not relate to what they are being taught and therefore do not understand it, education for them is merely a drill and response (Gardner, 1991). It is an established psychological notion that in order to be engaged in real learning the learner must be able to connect new knowledge with prior understandings. This is a foundational concept of the theory of constructivism that underlines the importance of context, which enables the learner to make the connection between the environment of the classroom and the real world (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Dewey's (1956) words ring true for the relevance of such connectivity to the learning process:

> From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in school comes from his inability to utilize the experience he gets outside while

> on the other hand he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school – its isolation from life. (p. 46)

A century after Dewey's words, theorists are still grappling with the challenge of making learning relevant for students in the classroom. Thus the rise of contextual teaching and learning (CTL). Johnson (2002) describes this as "a system of instruction based on the philosophy that students learn when they see meaning in academic material, and they see meaning in schoolwork when they can connect new information with prior knowledge and their own experience" (p. vii). She further explains that the 20th century scientific worldview of the significance of relatedness among the parts of the world has demanded that educators rethink how they teach. The relationship between content and context becomes crucial in determining meaning, in that context gives meaning to content. The more students are able to make connections the more meaning they will derive from the content, thus retaining it and, at the same time, developing a new sense of appreciation for what is learnt. New attitudes to learning are formed, facilitating openness to acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

It is through the types of tasks assigned that students discover meaning in what they learn. Whilst this can be seen to be a philosophical approach to teaching and learning, it is also confirmed by neuroscience that the brain continuously tries to connect new information with existing knowledge and skills. Perhaps this may explain the transference phenomenon in foreign language acquisition, where a learner applies a construct from the native language to the new language, a technique that will not always lead to successful communication. Johnson (2002) suggests that because the brain constantly seeks meaning and retains the meaningful, teaching should engage students in a quest for meaning, enabling the students to grasp the personal significance of what they are learning.

Contextual teaching and learning also adopts the principle that the five senses have a role to play in learning. This is reminiscent of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Since our senses are interdependent, the provision of stimuli for all is important in a learning situation where, as teachers, our goal is that information is stored not just in short-term memory, but also in long-term memory. The incorporation of context in teaching facilitates the efficient functioning of the brain by acknowledging the spheres of our realities that make us human and, more importantly, forces us to recognize our students as humans with their individual contexts and needs.

Teaching in context is undeniably associated with the pedagogical approach known as authentic learning. Though foreign language learning at the adolescent level may not involve situations or tasks as complex as those used in the classic authentic learning approach, the reliance on real-world scenarios or contexts is common to both approaches. Such a reliance makes it possible to motivate learners intrinsically (Mehlinger, 1995) by sustaining their interest through meaningful tasks, engaging them in exploration and inquiry, fostering interdisciplinary learning, sharing with communities within and without the school environment the products of students' work, making learning student-driven, and promoting discourse among students and between students and other communities (Mims, 2003). In the foreign language classroom, authentic learning can be downsized to simulated contexts, perhaps requiring a "willing suspension of disbelief," where students are transported to a world that is not only plausible, but likely. According to Mims:

> educational researchers have found that students involved in authentic learning are motivated to persevere despite initial disorientation or frustration, as long as the exercise simulates what really counts – the social structure and culture that gives the discipline its meaning and relevance. (p. 4)

This approach recognizes that new information must be linked in some way to the learner's "schema," so that if there is encouragement to own the new material in a personal way, the unfamiliar will be easier to assimilate

In ascertaining the role of relevance and meaning in foreign language learning, it becomes necessary to determine how to integrate them into instructional planning. Tileston (2004) suggests that students will pay attention and learn better if the instructional plan takes into account the *anticipation of meaning.* This sets the tone for a lesson or a topic and dissipates the potential panic that a learner may initially experience at the start of a lesson. Some lesson formats refer to this as the "Set Induction." Organization of information to be presented in a lesson is another factor relevant to context in a lesson or a topic. Realistic flow of information constitutes an element of realistic context, therefore plausible organizers have to be factored into foreign language lessons for successful simulation to occur.

Some teachers believe that creating context in a lesson mainly serves the purpose of maintaining interest or motivating students. However, instructional planning requires that teachers provide avenues for storing information to be held in long-term memory. Presenting the information

in context, simulating a purpose for finding patterns, discussing information in simulated roles, and adding purpose to movement can all augment the memory capacity of learners. One example provided by Tileston (2004) is the use of reflection through journal writing. A further step is to create an imagined purpose for this journal writing. Generally, all proposals on instructional planning outline guidelines and suggestions for the guided practice phase of a lesson. Omaggio Hadley (2000) skilfully iterates useful contexts for such activities in the foreign language classroom, while Todhunter's study (2007) of instructional conversations in a high school class notes the usefulness of students' personal experiences in creating situations "where these types of conversations occur most naturally, and offer the greatest opportunities for teachers to establish instructional conversation as a regular discursive practice of the classroom" (p. 616). She concluded that topics which were based on students' experiences evoked the most student participation, and that covering the curriculum at the expense of spontaneous interaction is a hindrance to the development of communicative competence.

Johnson (2002, p. 3) also identifies types of activities conducive to contextual teaching and learning and, consequently, communicative competence: formulating projects, identifying interesting problems, making choices, accepting responsibilities, searching out information, reaching conclusions, actively choosing, ordering, organizing, touching, planning, investigating, questioning, and making decisions. She justifies such activities by explaining that they connect academic content to the context of life's situations, thereby enabling the discovery of meaning. Such planning calls for creativity and undauntedness on the part of the teacher, bearing in mind that the students would likely feed off the teacher's behaviour and attitude.

Like for any other subject, the aim of the foreign language lesson is that students arrive at the stage of automaticity—where students perform a task with a satisfactory level of proficiency and competence. So that the assessment phase of a lesson should also require that students perform a task in the relevant context. Implemenatation of a lesson plan is a major area of teacher professional development that requires investigation and examination. As occurs within the context of this research, there are occasions when a chasm exists between the theoretical component of professional development and the practical output of teachers in training. It is significant to note that Bärenfänger and Tschirner (2008), in their examination of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), indicate that in its intention to situate and

coordinate the efforts of language professionals who reflect on their current practice, the CEFR is actually engaging in quality management. While most educational authorities plan for teacher supervision through their school management policies, it is safe to assume that quality management on the ground, as far as teaching practice goes, is far from adequate. As such, this study, situated in Trinidad and Tobago, examines one key concept in the practice of teaching by presenting and analysing the experiences and expressions of secondary school in-service student teachers of foreign languages (French and Spanish) with regard to the issue of context in foreign language teaching.

Immediate Research Context

The study examines the declared understandings and practice of nine in-service foreign language teachers at the secondary school level (ages 11-19) in Trinidad and Tobago, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 23 years. The professional development in which they were engaged is a one-year, part-time post-graduate diploma programme in education (Dip.Ed.), with specialization in Foreign Language education. None of the teachers had engaged in prior professional development. The content focuses on theory and practice, and includes clinical supervision of the teachers' practice in their classrooms, including peer observation and critique by colleagues on the Dip.Ed. programme. While the diploma is not a systemic requirement for teaching in their context, it is a requirement for promotion to middle management positions such as Department Head or Dean, or senior administrative positions such as Vice-Principal or Principal. It is generally acknowledged that many of the teachers enrol in the programme in order to qualify for such positions as opposed to a genuine desire for professional development. Despite their initial intentions, though, a recent poll indicated that the student teachers do enjoy the programme and feel that they benefit from it.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to ascertain teachers' declared understanding of the role of context and how to implement it in their lessons, as well as to determine whether their understandings are reflected in their practice. The outcomes would indicate potential areas of focus for improving the professional development of foreign language teachers not only on the Dip.Ed. Programme, but on a national scale.

Methodology

The research is a case study comprising a purposive sample of nine teachers. The quantitative approach is used mainly to provide a clear picture of frequency of occurences of the phenomenon under investigation, whereas the qualitative approach provides the intuitive and humanized details, providing a more complete composite. Maxwell (1996) indicates that each research paradigm has the potential to address different questions and purposes. It is the qualitative analysis of the data that brings the teachers' experiences to life and leads to a better understanding of their perspectives and understandings, as expressed by them. The quantitative analysis provides a closer understanding of the extent of the phenomena.

Research Questions

1. *What are student teachers' understandings of "context" in foreign language teaching?*
2. *What changes did student teachers make or experience with regard to the use of "context" in their planning and teaching during their professional development phase?*
3. *What changes did student teachers observe in their students once they incorporated "context" in their teaching?*
4. *What challenges did student teachers face in their attempt to incorporate "context" in their lessons?*

Data Collection and Analysis

In the eighth month of the 10-month programme, the nine student teachers were asked to respond in writing to headings relevant to the four stated research questions. These reponses were analysed by isolating the main points and, where relevant, clustering them under categories. For each teacher, four lessons were observed for the purpose of their teaching practice and clinical supervision, which were a major component of the Dip.Ed. programme. Written plans for these lessons were analysed under categories that were most relevant to the use of context, and the supervisor's clinical notes taken during teaching practice were also analysed to determine pertinent elements that were or were not reflected in the written lesson plan. An analysis of the lesson plans and observations is presented in Table 1.

Examples of teachers' use of context are also extracted from their plans and practice (Table 2) as an indication of how they perceive context in foreign language teaching and learning, and in order to arrive

at an analysis of what the teachers determine to be context that is useful and appropriate.

Findings

Student Teachers' Account of Their Developing Understanding of the Issue of Using Context in FL Teaching

Student teachers' explanation of their understanding of context before they enrolled in the Dip.Ed. programme

Six out of nine student teachers indicated that they had no understanding of the concept of context in Foreign Language teaching before they enrolled in the Dip.Ed. programme, while one indicated that this approach was never used by her teachers when she was a Foreign Language student. One of the students had theoretical understanding but could not put it into practice. She did not know how to create context.

Student teachers' explanation of their understanding of context after 8 months on the Dip.Ed. programme

After eight months of theory and practice, student teachers' most common understanding of the notion of teaching langage in context was that a context can enable students to connect with new knowledge. This notion included the "*need to provide a reason for their learning*" and "*that the reason must be very relevant to the needs of the students*."

Other learnings were that the use of context adds to students' enjoyment of lessons, using context makes teaching student-centred, "*allows students to display their talents and use their imagination*," and "*helps to develop students' social and communication skills*." Among their learnings were also the ideas that context must be maintained throughout the lesson and that the planned activities must revolve around the original context introduced in the lesson. It was also felt that context enables one to "*set the tone for the lesson and thus captivate students*."

Student teachers' reports of changes that they made/experienced re using context in their planning and teaching after exposure to the issue of context while on the Dip.Ed. programme

Specific teacher behaviours and stances were reported once student teachers began to grapple with incorporating context in their lessons. Among the changes shared was that no lesson plan is now written without context. Some teachers now find out students' interests, while

others highlighted that they now have to search for relevant support material, and try to employ different forms of media to emphasize context.

In addition to this, one indicated that she now introduces the context at the beginning of each activity. Types of activities have now improved and "*the textbook is no longer the Bible*," and there is more incorporation of all the linguistic skills since relevant contexts facilitate this. One teacher makes a point of giving the students a reason for learning particular topics so that they understand the broad context of the lesson.

Teachers' reports of changes that they observed in their students once they incorporated context in their teaching

Seven teachers reported that students' interest had increased or that there was a genuine desire to learn. Interestingly, for one teacher, male students were more motivated to participate and were less disruptive. It was also reported that students enjoyed lessons more, lessons were more successful, and students grasped concepts faster. Classes were also more "*vibrant*." One novel outcome was that students were creating or suggesting their own contexts. One teacher commented that she had noticed no behavioural changes in her students.

Teachers' accounts of challenges they face in using context in their lessons

Though enthused by the strategy of teaching in context, teachers did face some challenges in their planning and implementation. For most, it was difficult to formulate contexts. For some, it was time-consuming to find support material. Linking the context to the lesson was another challenge mentioned. While multimedia was cited as a good support for teaching in context, its use was "*daunting*" for one teacher. One student reported that students were "*unwilling to accept the spoken foreign language*" by the teacher (because of the newness of the target language exposure), and for one it was "*difficult to communicate context to the class*."

One challenge recognized was that more attention has to be paid to types and sequence of activities. Another was that of maintaining a running thread (of context) throughout the lesson. An interesting concern of one teacher was the lack of context in other subjects, which her foreign language students would now find difficulty accepting.

Observed Use of Context in Lesson Plans and in the Classroom

The nine student teachers were observed 4 times over a period of 6 months. Table 1 indicates the potential avenues for incorporating context in lessons and the extent to which the nine teachers presented evidence of the elements outlined.

Table 1. Evidence of Context in Lesson Plans and Delivery of Lessons by Nine Teachers

Context Element	**Lesson No.**			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Set Induction present on plan	8	9	9	9
Set Induction suitable	6	9	8	9
Set Induction context maintained	7	9	7	9
No. of contextualized activities	6/40 (15%)	19/38 (50%)	21/33 (64%)	20/35 (57%)
Evaluation contextualized	3	7	5	6
Context written on lesson plan	0	5	7	8
Context introduced spontaneously	1	1	0	0
Realistic context	1	7	8	8
Forced context	2	1	1	0
Closure contextualized	2	5	6	5
Homework contextualized	2	4	4	8

Table 2. Examples of Set Inductions and Contexts for Activities

Topic	Set Induction	Contexts for Activities
Shopping	Teacher empties shopping bag and expresses her feelings about shopping	Students choose one real item of clothing and seek classmates' opinions
Professions	Career Day is announced	"Guests" from Venezuela will speak about potential jobs to give students the opportunity to plan their future career
Shopping	Students view poster announcing an upcoming school event	Your school has just advertised a party and you have to go shopping for clothes
Leisure Activities	Teacher pretends to be bored and tries out a number of activities	Your form teacher wants to take the class on an outing. He needs to find out your preferences
Healthy Eating	Teacher indicates that it is lunch time and she needs to buy something for lunch but the cafeteria is closed. Students must help her decide on what options are available	Students are presented with a range of food pictures and are asked to separate meals onto two plates—one they will eat and the other they won't. They explain their choices
Describing People	Teacher explains that she is meeting people at the airport but doesn't know what they look like	Students are at the airport looking at all the passengers to see if they fit their penpal's description
Making Decisions About Spending Money	Students view a DVD of the parade of Carnival bands (as a lead-up to spending money for the event)	It is the Carnival season and you are preparing to go to another school for the grand Calypso competition.
Complaining About Purchases	Teacher enters class with a shopping bag full of clothing items. She explains that they are all birthday presents given to her but each one has a problem	Returning the item to the store in the given context

Topic	Set Induction	Contexts for Activities
The Media	Cameraman/reporter in a simulation of a well-known news talk show, "Morning Edition"	"Morning Edition" is hosting a special French edition and is interviewing students about the youths' opinion of the print media
A Kidnapping – Making a Report	Enactment of a kidnap scene on video	Giving your statement as a witness to the police
Making Comparisons to Describe People	Teacher displays a compliment in Spanish that an old man paid her while she was in Chile. Students engage in conversation about the compliment	Impressing the opposite sex (girls) with compliments

Discussion and Conclusions

It is undeniable that there was growth in these nine student-teachers'understanding and use of context in foreign language teaching and learning. The increase of appropriate contexts incorporated in lesson plans and actually implemented in the classroom is evidence that all nine teachers, by the end of the Dip.Ed. programme, had a specific tool to enhance their students' learning in the classroom. Having reported a change in students' motivation, enjoyment, and learning, teachers also discovered a new classroom management tool—making lessons student-centred—the underlying feature of contextual teaching and learning (Johnson, 2002). The teachers' ability to note changes was also an indication of their own reflective analysis as professionals trying to find meaning and practical outcomes from the symbiosis of theory and practice.

What is significant about the teachers' initial lack of knowledge or understanding of the role of context in language learning and teaching is that it may mean that there is more than one generation of teachers in the nation's schools who lack this knowledge and understanding, which translates into foreign language lessons that are sterile and irrelevant to many students, diminishing their intrinsic motivation to learn (Mehlinger, 1995). It also signals that even though a variety of learning materials have been developed within recent times, teachers are not using them in the intended ways, or do not have access to them. It may also mean that contexts used in the classroom still need to be more

individualized to suit specific social schema, and that learning materials, while they attempt to integrate content and context, are not always all-encompassing socioculturally.

The historical backdrop for this research context is one that has up to this time emphasized academic achievement as a means of upward social mobility. Thus, teaching to the test is zealously practised by a great number of teachers. Ironically, though, both the national and regional curricula and final examinations are strongly influenced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines on proficiency. Spanish is the foreign language studied by the majority of students as opposed to French, and the percentage of students attaining a passing grade in Spanish is relatively low. Lamentably, teachers have not recognized the pedagogical implications of the difference in assessment approaches between their generation and the current generation. Teaching to the test has certainly not equipped foreign language teachers to understand the notion of context.

Another issue warranting great concern is the apparent lack of sharing among department members within the same school. Of the nine teachers under study in this research, at least five had a colleague who had experienced the Foreign Language component of the Dip.Ed. programme. Yet there seemed to be little or no effort at the school departmental level to raise the professional level of foreign language teachers through mentoring or simple discussion. What is also surprising is that it is a requirement that teachers submit schemes of work and lesson plans to Heads of Departments. It may well be that content coverage takes precedence over teaching method and delivery. Overall, the particular context of this research suggests an urgent need for quality control in the planning and implementation of teaching and learning (Bärenfänger & Tschirner, 2008).

It is heartening, though, that although all of the teachers initially expressed serious misgivings about their lack of creativity and imagination generally, eventually, from the data shown in their lesson plans and teaching practice, they were actually able to create suitable contexts as they sought to better understand their students' reality, making their lessons more student-centred (Todhunter, 2007), thus maximizing student learning. Interestingly, though, teachers were reluctant to stray from their planned contexts. This may have been due to the pressure of being observed or to the novelty of embedding the content into contexts, which took effort and time to create and to source support material for.

Implications

The above findings did have implications for the approach to the context issue in the current professional development design. An immediate outcome was that having reflected on the experiences and performance of these nine students, three approaches were adopted for the group of students who participated in the programme the following year. One was the course instructor's relentless emphasis on using context in lessons by providing a variety of examples with every observation or lesson plan submitted, and insistence on its infusion in every lesson. The other was a minor but practical and useful change to the structure of the written lesson plan. The earlier standard format required 2 columns for planning and denoting the activity phase of the lesson:

Objective	Activity

The new amended version now requires 3 columns:

Objective	Context	Activity

Student teachers are now compelled to see context as an essential component of their planning.

Though a seemingly minor detail, the third approach was to use the word *scenario* to better enable the teachers to capture the concept of context. It seemed to clarify to a large extent teachers' confusion or lack of clarity.

Having seen the growth of the nine teachers, especially with regard to teaching language in context, the gap in knowledge of other practising teachers becomes even more pronounced. It is therefore of great concern that in the context of this research, initial professional development is not a requirement to teach in public schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, the teaching of foreign languages (in this case Spanish and French) in this country assumes the hues of many varied and perhaps misguided understandings. The teachers who engage in professional development through the Dip.Ed. programme need to be positioned to have a positive professional influence on others in their department who have not had the opportunity for enhancing their craft. Realistically, it is a great challenge for teachers to harness their resources for departmental sharing without some logistical and moral support from the school's

administration. I am advocating that departments conduct their own mini workshops in prearranged slots on the school's timetable, and that a professional record be kept of such undertakings. These would be useful for inclusion in teachers' portfolios.

On a wider scale, the Foreign Language Unit of the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education can utilize the human resource in schools to conduct zonal or regional workshops on topics such as "teaching language in context," which would redound to the long-term benefit of students. Such workshops can also provide avenues for the development of materials, which can be disseminated via the mechanisms of the Ministry.

Since examination results play such a dominant role in this society, and since teachers do tend to teach to the test, it may be sensible to package assessment familiarization workshops together with the teaching approaches that would have influenced the type of assessment. In other words, syllabus construction and reconstruction should be guided by teacher education programmes that focus on the guiding philosophy of the syllabus and the attendant teaching approaches.

It must be noted, though, that teachers themselves are also responsible for their own development. A culture of self-driven continuous professional development and even personalized learning needs to be nurtured and sustained through informal channels such as professional magazine and journal subscriptions, professional chat rooms, and podcasts. Perhaps a focus on extrinsic motivation of teachers may be one step in the right direction. Competitions for "most creative contexts for topics at middle school level" is one example of motivating foreign language teachers to do their research and to use their creativity, while at the same time alerting them to pertinent areas in their professional practice.

With the current thrust of professional standards for teaching professionals, teaching in context cannot be seen to be just one minor element of professional practice in the field of foreign language education. Indeed, it is at the core of all quality teaching and, moreso, the magic of foreign language teaching.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' ABSENTEEISM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JAMAICA
Perspectives of Community Members

Loraine D. Cook and *Austin Ezenne*

This study sought to determine the root causes of absenteeism in selected primary schools in Jamaica by investigating the influence of personal, educational, and community factors on student absenteeism from school. Data collection techniques involved the use of focus group interviews with parents, teachers, and community members from 71 schools, and with students (aged 7–12 years) from 10 of these schools, who were identified as having very low attendance rates. The findings suggest that the causal factors for absenteeism do not find their genesis in the family only, but also in the schools, the communities, and the students themselves. These factors combine to accentuate absenteeism in primary schools in the rural areas of Jamaica.

Introduction

Absenteeism can be defined as persistent, habitual, and unexplained absence from school (Brooks, 1997, as cited in Bond, 2004). Bond noted that chronic absenteeism occurs when a student is absent without reason 20% or more of school time; "this nominal figure is consistently identified regardless of the specific circumstances of the absenteeism" (p. 8). Bond identified three dimensions of absenteeism: truancy, condoned absenteeism, and school refusal, whereas the Auditor General Victoria (Australia, 2004) identified four major dimensions of absenteeism: truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal, and early leaving. It is important to identify the different dimensions of absenteeism in tackling the problem because they may require different interventions.

Truancy: The Auditor General Victoria (Australia, 2004) describes truancy as:

> the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent. However for the most part truant students tend to spend their time away from

> school and home; time away from home is used to conceal absences from their parents …. Truancy can take the form of fractional truancy, where students arrive late, leave early or skip individual classes. (p. 16)

According to Cunningham (2005), truancy is the absence of a student from school without the knowledge or permission of parents. The truant leaves home under the pretense of going to school but turns away and become involved in out-of-school activities. Truancy is unauthorized non-attendance. Bond (2004) included fractional truancy, which occurs when students arrive late or leave early, or spend entire days away from school.

School refusal: School refusal differs from truancy in that children refuse to attend school even in the face of persuasion and punitive measures from parents and school. These students stay at home with the knowledge of their parents and school administrators (McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001). This form of absenteeism is widely associated with social and medical disorder involving persistent non-attendance at school, excessive anxiety, and physical complaints (Australia, 2004; Bond, 2004). This type of absenteeism can be separated from the other types, given its psychological and/or medical composition.

Several studies show that school refusal is an important dimension in understanding students' absenteeism (Dube & Orpinas, 2009; Kearney, 2007; McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001). For example, Dube and Orpinas noted three reasons for students' refusal to attend school: 17.2% of their participants refused to go to school to avoid fear- or anxiety-producing situations, to escape from adverse social or evaluative situations, or to gain positive tangible rewards; 60.6% missed school to gain parental attention or receive tangible rewards (positive reinforcement); and 22.2% had no specific reason for not attending school.

School withdrawal: Children are absent from school because their parents keep them away from school on a frequent basis because of the parents' needs and priorities. For the most part, these children's parents do not enrol them at school (Australia, 2004). This, Cunningham (2005) referred to as "parental agreed absence" (p. 29). Bond (2004) noted that this does not necessarily equate to approved absence. According to Bond, "absence can only be approved by the school given a reasonable excuse" (p. 8).

Early leaving: This refers to children under 15 who drop out of school before completing their schooling.

Studies suggest that the factors influencing students' absenteeism at the primary level can be classified into medical and non-medical (Bendel, Halfon, & Ever-Hadani, 1976); or four broad categories: home and family, school, community, and personal characteristics of the students (Etsey, 2005; Withers, 2004); or two broad categories: school factors, and family and personal factors (Bond, 2004).

Bendel et al. (1976) indicated that possible medical factors influencing students' absenteeism at the primary level included respiratory infections, toothaches, abdominal pains, headache, and pains on legs or arms; while non-medical reasons for absenteeism were truancy, family events, excursions, and helping family at home.

In addition to the above, Waldfogel and Washbrook (2010) noted that children from low-income homes who had taken/done vocabulary tests were a year behind those from middle-income homes by the age of 5. They recommended that government programmes should target children in the early years before age 5. Such programmes should provide training in effective parenting skills, and early childhood educators should be encouraged to work in partnership with health professionals to support vulnerable families. Waldfogel and Washbrook also noted that 15% of the poorest mothers have problems with basic literacy and numeracy, such as the ability to fill out forms.

The Auditor General Victoria (Australia, 2004) categorized the factors influencing absenteeism under two main headings: family and personal factors, and school factors; and expanded family and personal factors to include low parental valuing of, or interest in, education; low socio-economic status; geographic isolation; and unemployment. School factors include boredom with schoolwork; being bullied, threatened, or involved in fights; inadequate school support and welfare; unsatisfactory relations between students and their teachers; and an irrelevant or restrictive curriculum. These factors do not necessarily influence absenteeism in discrete ways but are likely to be interconnected in their impact on absenteeism.

In Jamaica, Sections 23 and 24 of the Education Act (Jamaica, 1980) declared that children of the compulsory primary age (6–12 years) must get quality full-time education. The Act sets the legal framework governing school enrolment and attendance, and the responsibilities of parents and teachers. Despite the legal requirement for school attendance at the primary level, it was reported in 2001 that the average student attendance at the primary level was 78% (Jamaica. Ministry of Education and Culture [MOEC], 2001). By 2004, the Task Force on Educational Reform in Jamaica noted that:

> although an enrolment rate of 97 percent of 6–11 age group was achieved, attendance rates at primary and all age schools were 72 and 65 percent respectively. These national figures obscure the fact that, in some deep rural areas, the attendance rate is as low as 50 percent. Attempts to enforce compulsory attendance in eight parishes have not resulted in an improvement in attendance rates. (p. 19)

The statements by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2001) and the Task Force on Educational Reform (2004) indicate a decrease in student attendance at the primary level between 2001 and 2004. The Task Force report also highlighted the fact that at the primary level the education system failed to achieve the global standards for literacy and numeracy. Students at this level lacked the necessary skills and competences required for access to secondary education.

One report noted that absenteeism in Jamaica is highest in some geographical locations of the island due to the harvest time in the agricultural sector (Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], 2006). Thompson (2008) noted that student absenteeism is at its highest in the parishes of Clarendon, St. Catherine, and St. Mary. The magnitude of irregular attendance at school and classes does not only affect the absent students, but also impacts on teachers' ability to articulate the curriculum requirements, and to plan and present instructional activities in an organized and meaningful way. Poor school attendance lowers the literacy and numeracy rates of any country (Thompson, 2008). Absenteeism places students at risk; they are unable to achieve their educational, social, and psychological potential and are disadvantaged in the quality of choices they are able to make in later life situations. One possible reason for children being held back at home during this period—especially girls—was to care for their younger siblings (IDB, 2006).

In an attempt to increase school attendance at the primary level, the Ministry of Education implemented the School Feeding Programme since 1939 in a limited number of schools. By 1955 the programme was expanded with the aid of food commodities provided by sources within the United States. Between 1975 and 1988 an agreement was in place between the Governments of Jamaica and the United States for the receipt of supplementary food commodities from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Food was also received from other donors such as the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For the 2007/2008 financial year, the Government reported that the School

Feeding Programme accounted for more than a billion dollars of the budget (http://www.moec.gov.jm/divisions/ed/welfare/index.shtml).

The School Feeding Programme is geared towards alleviating short-term hunger in school and increasing the time students spend in school, with the intent of improving education outcomes in the school. One of the objectives of the *Medium Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework* was to achieve 90% school attendance by students at the primary level on a daily basis by the end of the fiscal year 2007 (Planning Institute of Jamaica, as cited in IDB, 2006); this figure has not being achieved in current times. According to the Ministry of Education, there are approximately 100 primary schools, mostly in the rural areas, which have high levels of absenteeism (ranging from 54% to 80% attendance rate). In 2005, Cunningham noted that "in the Jamaican schooling experience, it is observed rather poignantly that low attendance rates and dropouts are a problem, particularly when they act as constraints on teachers to introduce new materials" (p. 4).

This study is designed to ascertain the root causes of absenteeism in selected primary schools by investigating the influence of personal, educational, and community factors on student absenteeism. These findings will identify the categories and descriptors associated with students who are consistently absent from school in 71 primary schools in Jamaica.

Methodology

The research utilized focus group interviews to ascertain the opinion of community members regarding the root causes of student absenteeism within communities that experienced acute absenteeism at the primary level. In this report, absenteeism is not treated as *the* problem but rather as the result of several causes/problems that may find their genesis in the school environment, the community, and the family structure. The schools that participated in this study have been assigned pseudonyms.

The principal research question that guided this study was:

What are the major root causes of student absenteeism?

The following are three operational research questions:

1. *What factors are identified by adults in the selected communities (that is, teachers and parents) as the root causes of absenteeism?*
2. *What factors are identified by students as the root causes of absenteeism?*

3. *How do the root causes of absenteeism identified by students differ from those identified by teachers and parents?*

Selecting Participants

Focus group interviews were carried out in 71 schools in the six educational regions of Jamaica (see Figure 1). The aim of the interviews was to ascertain the root causes of absenteeism from the perspectives of principals, teachers, representatives of parent-teacher associations (PTAs), parents, and in some cases the chairman of the school board; this group is subsequently referred to as the adult group.

In addition, separate focus group interviews were carried out among groups of students from selected schools within Region 6; this region was selected because of its proximity to Kingston and also because it experienced the highest levels of student absenteeism (see Table 1).

Figure 1. Educational regions of Jamaica. (Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture http://www.moec.gov.jm/regions/index.shtml)

Data Collection From Adult Group

Focus group interviews were carried out in which a moderator led a group of persons from each community in a discussion on the causes of absenteeism. This technique allowed for data to be collected from a mixed group of persons (teachers, principals, community members, etc.) with different views of the causes of absenteeism. This approach allowed

the researcher not only to learn about the range of views but also allowed participants to explain the reasoning behind their views.

Focus group interviews were organized in schools identified by the Ministry of Education as having attendance rates below 85% (see Table 1). Focus group participants within each school did not exceed 12 adults. In order to simplify the recruitment process, the focus group discussions took place on the grounds of the schools, which were easily accessible by the relevant community members. Most, if not all, of these schools were located in rural communities that were ranked low on the socio-economic scale; therefore, location of participants near their homes or workplace was very critical in the research design.

Table 1. Sample of Schools

Regions	Number of Schools With High Levels of Student Absenteeism
1	1
2	16
3	5
4	12
5	13
6	24
Total	**71**

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants associated with the schools' administration and work environment (principals, chairman, and teachers), while convenience sampling was used for selecting the parents who were members of the school community. The aim of this combination in the adult focus groups was to create synergy; to provide perspectives from a wide range of experiences, insight, and information on the symptoms and, ultimately, root causes of student absenteeism at the primary level.

Data Collection From Students

Ten schools were selected for participation in students' focus group interviews from the 71 schools that participated in the adult focus groups. These 10 schools were located in the parishes of St. Catherine and Clarendon. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain students' views

on the factors influencing student absenteeism. Overall, this represented 14% of the total number of schools identified with acute cases of low attendance, and 42% of the schools within Region 6. Five primary schools were chosen from each parish. The selection of schools was also based on geographical location and accessibility. Again, these schools were selected from the list of primary schools that had attendance rates below 85%, which was provided by the Ministry of Education.

Purposive sampling was used to select the students who would participate in the interviews; the students were identified by the schools' administration as having very low attendance rates. The students who participated in the focus groups ranged between the ages of 7 and 12. Most of these students were in Grades 3, 4, or 6. Each focus group had 8 to 10 students participating in the interviews, and two research assistants who were interviewers assigned to each of the two parishes.

Developing Interview Schedules

The research assistants carried out interviews using semi-structured interview schedules that were developed to ascertain participants' views on the major causes of student absenteeism at the primary level. Though an interview schedule was used as a guide in the focus group interviews, research assistants were encouraged to ask additional probing questions to elicit additional information in the case of incomplete or vague answers. There were two sets of interview schedules: one for adults and one for students.

The development of interview schedules was guided by the following questions:

- Who are these participants (children, adults, educated, uneducated)?
- Where and why are students continually absent from school?
- What are the major factors which contribute to student absenteeism and why?
- What are the school factors which may have impacted on student absenteeism?
- What are the community factors which may have impacted on student absenteeism?
- What are the family factors which may have impacted on student absenteeism?
- What are the students' factors which may have impacted on student absenteeism?

The guides for the interview schedule were informed by the literature and preliminary discussions in the communities. The interviews are presented in the language the participants used during the focus group sessions, that is, Jamaican Creole.

Data Analysis Techniques

A mixed methods approach was used to analyse the focus group data. The analysis represents data from 71 schools. Data were analysed using Root Cause Analysis (RCA) techniques.

The concurrent strategy of quantifying qualitative data was utilized in analysing the data. Therefore, selected statistical techniques were used to analyse and identify the root causes of student absenteeism at the primary educational level. The quantification of qualitative data enabled the comparison of quantitative and qualitative results.

Root cause is the "deepest underlying cause or causes, of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in the elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom" (Preuss, 2003, p. 3). RCA is a problem-solving process that seeks to locate the ultimate cause or 80/20 rule, known as the Pareto Principle, behind students' absenteeism at the primary level. The 80/20 rule means that in nearly all cases, a few (20%) are vital and many (80%) are trivial (The Pareto Principle, 2008). The Pareto Diagram (see Figure 2) is used to determine which characteristics are the major contributors in a process. The diagram was constructed by ranking the data according to frequency of occurrence and plotting the bars in descending order.

The data analysis procedure was carried out as follows:

1. All the factors identified in the focus groups were listed.
2. A frequency of occurrence table for each factor was developed.
3. The Pareto Principle was applied to identify the vital causes of absenteeism.
4. Content analysis of the responses from focus group interviews resulted in the identification of four key factors. This information was used to produce Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Analysis of Adults' Interviews

The Pareto Principle states that most effects, often 80%, stem from 20% of causes. A healthy approach to Root Cause Analysis, therefore, is to attack these 20% issues, often labelled as "the vital few." The main purpose of the Pareto chart is to display this skewed distribution graphically. The chart (see Figure 2) shows the causes of a problem

sorted by their degree of seriousness, expressed as a frequency of occurrence. The X axis represents the causes and the Y axis to the left represents frequency of occurrence of these causes, while the Y axis to the right gives the Pareto Principle, which is the cumulative percentage.

The Pareto chart separates the vital few from the useful many (see Figure 2); 18 causes of student absenteeism cover 81% of the total frequency of occurrence of the 53 causes of student absenteeism. The 10 top causes of absenteeism out of the 18 vital few were selected for presentation in Table 2.

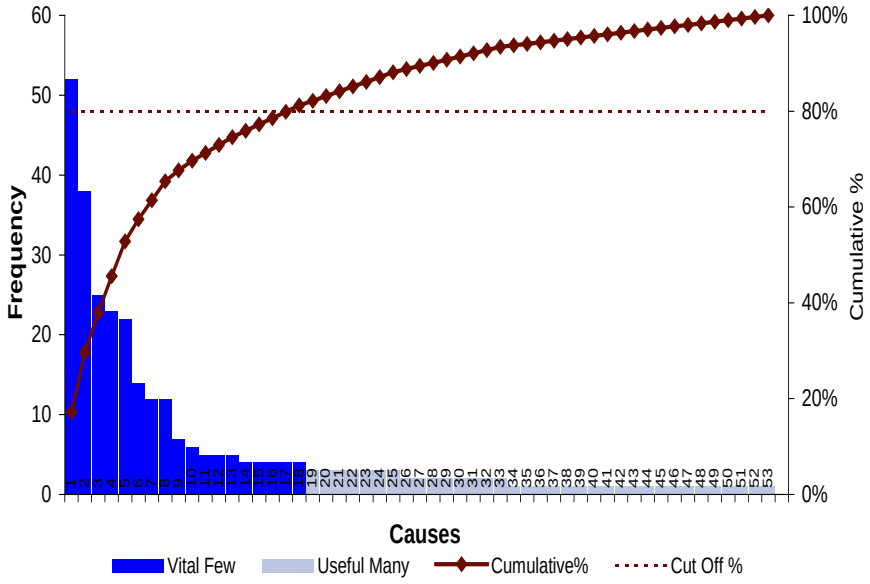

Figure 2. Root causes of student absenteeism.

Based on the focus group interviews, adults at approximately 65 schools (92%) complained that financial constraints affected their ability to provide lunch money and bus fare. Sometimes children went to school without breakfast and lunch money. The financial problems were further exacerbated by poor transportation facilities in the areas. For example, at Bo All Age, participants complained that transportation from the community in which they live to the school is extremely difficult. The taxi fare is J$40 each way and parents complained that they could not afford it. According to the parents, the children have to walk 9 miles to

and from school. This they think is very difficult for the children. Many parents do not think that children should be walking such long distances.

Table 2. Ten Top Causes of Absenteeism & Decoding X–Axis in Figures 2 & 3

Codes	Causes of Absenteeism
1	Financial constraints (high unemployment rate): influence ability to find bus fare and lunch money
2	Little or no value placed on education
3	"Friday mentality" that students don't have to go to school on Fridays
4	Child labour: Thursday & Friday
5	Weather conditions
6	Lack of parental control
7	Chronic sickness (asthma attack)
8	Students have to stay home and take care of siblings
9	Indiscipline
10	Severe water problems

Approximately 45 schools (63%) indicated that parents and the communities did not place much value on education. This is clearly supported in the data as there was recurring evidence of parents keeping their children home on Thursdays and Fridays to work on their subsistence farms and to sell farm products in the market. Also, older children at the primary level are kept from school to care for their siblings while parents go to work. The lack of value for education is further compounded by the young age of some parents in the community.

Student absenteeism needs to be recognized as a symptom of something that is affecting a student's life. When a school is developing strategies for eliminating absenteeism and improving attendance it is very important to have a detailed understanding of the different causal factors affecting absenteeism in the school. The following key causal factors have been identified: parental factors, school factors, student factors, and community factors.

All 369 responses from the adults' interviews were categorized using one of these factors. There are at least five subsidiary factors for each key causal factor (see Figure 3). The subsidiary factors presented in Figure 3 were selected based on frequency of occurrence.

Analysis of Students' Interviews

The main factors that evolved from the students' interviews are presented in Figure 4. The following key causal factors have been identified: parental factors, school factors, student factors, and community factors. Responses from the focus group interviews with the students were categorized using one of these factors. Each key causal factor was broken down into subsidiary factors (see Figure 4). The causal factors and relevant subsidiary factors in Figure 4 that emerged from the data are as outlined below:

Parental factors*:* financial constraints, older siblings given preference over younger siblings at the primary level to attend school, and parents' lack of control of their children

Student factors: Truancy, student indiscipline, and illness

Community factors: Lack of water, lack of electricity, and poor transportation

School factors**:** Non-critical activities on Fridays at the schools

Parental factors

Parental factors are those issues that impact on student absenteeism which are within the control of the parents. Also, society holds the parents responsible for providing sufficient finances, discipline, and education for their children. According to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), "the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents" (Principle 7). Parents who lack financial resources cannot provide for their children's basic educational needs. The recurring theme in the interviews with children was the lack of financial resources on the part of parents/guardians. The interviews are presented in the language the participants used during the focus group sessions, that is, Jamaican Creole.

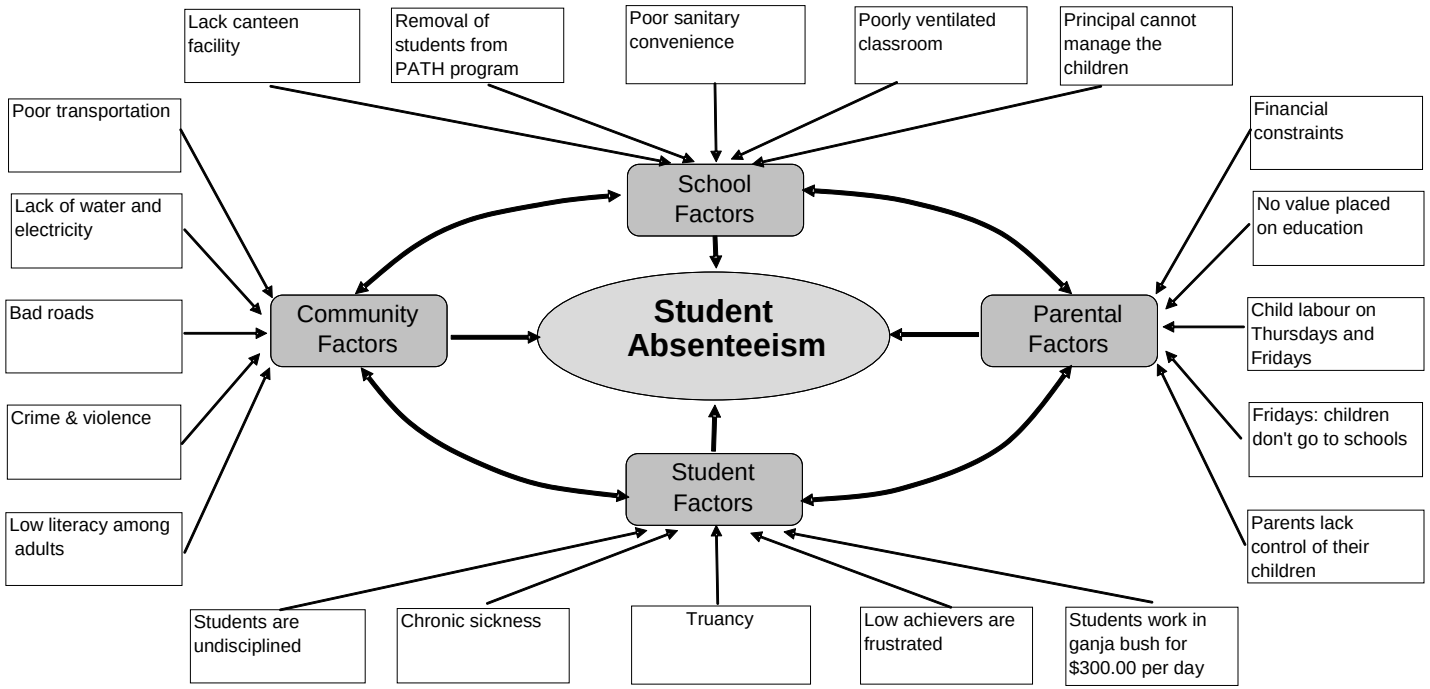

Figure 3. Analyses of key causal factors.

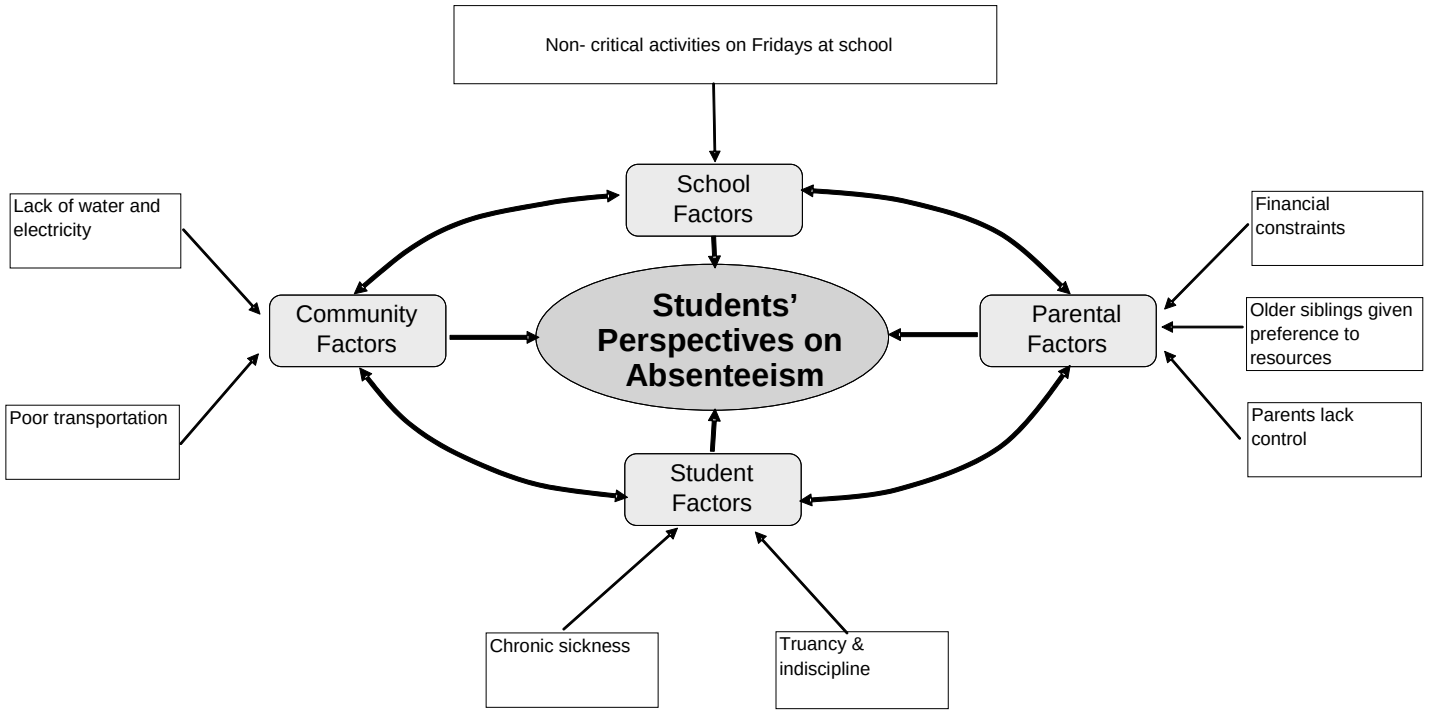

Figure 4. Reasons for students' absenteeism: Root causes.

Some recurrent indicators of financial constraints are: siblings in high school who were given preference to attend school over the younger children in primary school; inadequate sets of uniform; and the fact that parents on some days simply did not have the necessary funds for their child/children to go to school. The following extracts from the interviews conducted at two schools illustrate the preference given to the child who attends secondary school over the child who attends primary school. Several children indicated that whenever there was scarcity of resources, the child who attended secondary school was sent to school while they (the children at the primary level) had to remain home. Several students from Juan All Age supported this view:

Interviewer: *So when you are absent from school, they are also absent from school?*

Student: *No miss.*

Interviewer: *They go to school?*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Interviewer: *Why do they go to school and you are absent?*

Student: *My aunty sends them and they are bigger than us and when we don't go him a fi go (he will have to go).*

Older siblings were given preference over siblings at the primary level to attend school because parents and students perceived high schools as having more stringent consequences for student absenteeism than the primary schools. A student from Cassius River Primary explained that his parents kept him home and sent his brother at the secondary school instead since his brother was more likely to get suspended from school.

Student: *Miss my breda kyaahn absent (Miss, My brother can't be absent).*

Interviewer: *Your brother kyaahn absent from school, why?*

Student: *Miss him will get suspension.*

Interviewer: *Oh he'll get suspension.*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Interviewer: *So, but you can be absent and you don't get any suspension. So you stay home and your brother go?*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Students were absent because parents did not have the funds for them to go to school; there was no money for lunch or bus fare. This lack of

funds even affected items such as uniforms, which are fairly fixed in cost for the school year. Students from Wood Valley All Age explained that *"some times the parent don't have any money miss and some time uniform dirty."*

There were instances when parents lacked control over their children's behaviour, to the extent that a student from McCook's All Age confessed that watching TV on Thursdays resulted in him being absent from school on a Friday because he was too tired to get up. Another student from Juan All Age indicated a similar problem of oversleeping in the morning as the reason for being absent from school the following day:

Student: *And sometime mi wake up late miss, no get fi kom (don't get to come).*

Interviewer: *When you wake up late you don't come?*

Student: *Miss like all 8:00 or 9.*

Student factors

Student factors are incidents within the students' control. For example, truancy is the decision of the child to stay from school without parental knowledge or consent. Illness is also a student factor since it is mainly the student who complains of being sick.

Several students admitted to truancy. These students refer to truancy as "Skulling School"; they are sent to school by their parents or guardians but they do not attend, they detour on their way to school. The students gave the following reasons for "skulling" school:

- Accompanying cousin to see boyfriend (frequency: once)
- Don't like school (frequency: once)
- Go to bush to cook and smoke (frequency: once)
- Go to the river (frequency: once)
- Play money football (frequency: once)
- Go to game shops (frequency: seven times)

Note that the game shops have the highest frequency. One could extrapolate that these students do not like school and may find it boring. The following excerpt demonstrates student attitude towards school and the contribution of game shops to students' absenteeism. A student from Herwick All Age gives an example of the activities students are engaged in when in a state of truancy:

Student: *Miss, my brother and myself skull school and go to the game shop.*

Interviewer:	*You and your brother skull school?*
Student:	*Miss he placed a bet that I should go to the game shop.*
Interviewer:	*Ok, so when you go to the game shop what you do?*
Student:	*Miss, I sit and wait on him.*
Interviewer:	*Ok, so how long you stayed at the game shop for, the whole day?*
Student:	*No.*
Interviewer:	*Until what time?*
Student:	*Until his game is finish.*

Students who were absent on week days other than Fridays indicated that there were times when they were too ill to attend school. Many complained of being sick with flu or diarrhea, while others simply found school boring. For example, a student from Herwick All Age said, "miss *sometimes I don't want to go to school because school is boring; a lot of playing."*

Community factors

Community factors are resources that are the responsibility of the local government to make accessible to every member living within a community; such factors are outside of the control of the parent, child, and school. These resources include water and transportation. Water shortage did not seem to be a real issue for students who attended the following schools: Cook All Age, Parks All Age, and Herwick All Age.

Three of the communities had acute water shortage, which impacted on student absenteeism from school; uniforms were dirty, there was no water to bathe or, in some instances, to drink. To compound the water problem in these communities, residents had to purchase water from the water trucks from their already limited financial resources at the cost of J$150.00. Also there were times when the water trucks did not come to the communities.

There were those students who did not have to purchase water but could obtain water from the standpipe or river. However, even this impacted on students being able to reach school early; sometimes the children were needed at home to "carry water," while at other times the pipes were not functional.

Transportation

Several of the students who participated in the focus groups lived within walking distance of the schools. In some schools mixed transportation modes were dominant for students; those who took taxi paid fares

ranging from $20 to $30 each way. Students from several of the schools complained that the taxis and buses did not like to stop for them in the mornings because they paid the lowest fare; as a result they were late for school most mornings. Depending on what time they arrived at school in the morning they were deemed absent after the register was marked. Students from Cook All Age explained:

*Interviewer**:*** *So do you have a problem getting bus to school?*

Student: *Yes miss…*

Interviewer: *Alright let's take it one at a time. What's the problem that you have?*

Student: *Miss like Monday morning.*

Interviewer: *What happens on Monday morning**?***

Student: *Miss they're full.*

Interviewer: *They're full, alright.*

Student: *Miss they don't want to stop for us, miss.*

Interviewer: *They don't want to stop for you, alright. You can sit but how much do you pay on the taxi?*

Student: *Miss. Sometime they take $20.00 from us. And $60. I pay $20.*

Interviewer: *So do they often pick you up when you want to come? Or they are just like the bus; they don't want to carry you?*

Student: *Miss, some of the taxis don't take little children they take the high school children instead.*

The wearing of school uniforms was linked to the price that students were charged for transportation by bus and taxi drivers. Students from Juan All Age enlightened the interviewer about the link between wearing uniforms and transportation cost. The students explained that they were charged higher fares when they wore *pretty clothes.* This affected them especially on a Friday when the school would be less stringent about the wearing of uniforms and they would be allowed to supplement their uniforms with pretty clothes.

Many of these students have a limited supply of uniforms for the week; whenever the one or two uniforms are dirty and there is no water and electricity to provide clean uniforms for school, the students have no choice but to stay home due to the increased transportation cost that pretty clothes attracts. Transportation cost does exacerbate the financial constraints of the struggling family.

School factors

Students reported that they found Friday school either boring or teachers gave too much schoolwork. Students from Mount Rosser All Age complained that they were given too much work on a Friday. Students from several schools complained that Friday was a day of play. In two of the focus groups, 6 out of 10 students indicated that they were absent regularly on a Friday (12 out of a total of 20 students). One student from Herwick All Age explained that his aunt refused to send him to Friday school because she did not perceive the activities as valuable:

Interviewer: *Friday is the last day. So what you don't do much at school on a Friday?*

Student: *No miss, is like …. play.*

Student: *Miss. Sometime my aunt does not send me because it's just play on a Friday, so she says that she don't have any money to waste.*

Discussion

Participants' Perspectives on Student Absenteeism

One has to be cautious when comparing the outcomes of the students' interviews with those of the adults because there are certain issues that were emphasized in the adults' interviews which were not emphasized in the interviews with the students. For example, students were not asked to evaluate the school facilities or the teacher's relationship with parents, whereas adults were asked specific questions concerning these factors. Therefore, the fact that these issues were not outcomes of the students' interview is not an indication that they are non-critical issues.

Despite this, it is important to compare similar issues that were discussed in the interviews with students and adults. When Figure 2 is compared with Figure 3, one can observe that from the students' perspective the parents do not lack an appreciation of the value of education. Based on the analysis of the students' interviews it was clear that the students felt that parents cultivate positive attitudes toward education. The indicators of parents' attitudes toward education were assistance with homework and openness to discussing career choices with their children.

Most of the students reported that they receive help from parents with their homework. Whenever parents were not able to help or were absent from the home, other members of the family assisted with homework. The outcomes of the analysis of the students' interviews suggested that

parents assisted their children by doing examples, by reading through the homework with them, or doing the homework. The following excerpts confirm these findings.

Herwick All Age

Interviewer: *Alright, your parents help you with you homework? Your mom or your dad help you when you get homework?*

Student: *Yes miss, all the time.*

Juan All Age

Interviewer: *Your parents help you to do your homework?*

Student: *My parents help me miss.*

Interviewer: *Sometimes they help?*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Interviewer: *How do they help, how do they help, how do your parents help you?*

Student: *They show me what to do miss.*

Interviewer: *They show you what to do.*

Student: *Miss and when I don't know the answer they tell me.*

Students from Juan All Age and Rosser Primary explained how their parents helped with homework:

Juan All Age

Interviewer: *Sometime you do it at school. How do your parents help you with your homework?*

Student: *Sometime she read it with me.*

Rosser Primary

Interviewer: *So who help you with your homework, your mummy? How does she help?*

Student: *She show me.*

Students told the research assistant that other members of the family also gave assistance.

Herwick All Age

*Interviewer**:*** *You live with who?*

Student: *My grandmother.*

Interviewer: *You live with your grandmother?*

Student: *…she's old miss.*

Interviewer: *So you have to work on your own?*

Student: *Miss my brother help me.*

Interviewer: *What about you, your parents help you with your home work?*

Student: *Sometime.*

Parents were open to discussions about their children's career choice and encouraged their children to aim for careers such as nursing, law, medicine, teaching, singing, and hairdressing. Several other career choices came to the fore:

Cook All Age

Interviewer: *Now do you talk to your parents about what you want to do when you get older? …Did they agree with your being a nurse?*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Interviewer: *And what they say about it?*

Student: *Miss they say that, that is good.*

Student: *Miss they say that they want me to become a doctor.*

Interviewer: *They want you to become a doctor you, you talk to your parents about what you want to do?*

Student: *Yes miss.*

Interviewer: *And what they say about it?*

Student: *Miss my mother says I must do my best, so that I can achieve…*

Transportation was another point of difference between the outcomes of the interviews with students and adults. In the adult interviews the road conditions and the inadequate number of public transportation vehicles were emphasized. For the students the emphasis was more on public transportation drivers and conductors not wanting to "pick them up" for school because of the low fare primary school children pay. The students also linked their absence from school with the problems that occur when they don't have enough uniforms, or when transportation to school is inadequate.

From the analysis of the students' interviews there was little indication of child labour. Instead, students were for the most part absent from school because of financial constraints, engagement with household chores, providing assistance with younger siblings, and watching

television. There was little suggestion from the data that students were kept at home to earn money.

The domino effect of the financial constraints is: insufficient number of uniforms, lack of lunch money, and lack of funds for transportation to school. Students felt that it was not important to attend school on Fridays based on the activities that took place. Acute water shortage and poor transportation were prominent in both the interviews of the adults and children (compare Figures 2 and 3).

The causal factors for absenteeism do not find their genesis in the family only, but also in the schools, the communities, and the students; the combination of these factors accentuates absenteeism at the primary school in the rural areas of Jamaica.

Conclusion

The Root Cause Analysis identified four causal factors of student absenteeism:

- **Parental factors**: several of the communities experience high levels of unemployment—this has resulted in parents' inability to find bus fare and lunch money for their children.
- **Student factors**: truancy, students' indiscipline, and illness.
- **Community factors**: lack of water, lack of electricity, and poor transportation.
- **School factors**: non-critical activities on Fridays at the schools.

The solution to absenteeism is multidimensional—the four key causal factors need to work in an integrated way in resolving the problem of absenteeism. As García-Gracia (2008) pointed out, schools must reach out to the reality of their communities and their families: (a) schools should have a greater level of coordination with the different government agencies within their areas to enable a better understanding of the extent of the problem in the area; (b) there should also be coordination among schools within the community and in other communities within close proximity; and (c) common projects should be designed for schools in the community. Community members along with the leaders of the schools need to be more united in challenging the government—their members of parliament—in improving the utilities within the community.

Parenting programmes among low-income families are crucial in dealing with student absenteeism at the primary level: (a) they are needed to address the values parents place on education in the

development of their children (see Figure 3); and (b) they are needed in the school communities to aid parents, especially young parents (in their teens and early twenties), in the development of effective parenting skills, since community members in the adult focus groups indicated that parents were struggling with managing their children's behaviour.

In several of the communities the severe financial constraints were caused by high levels of unemployment among parents (see Figure 2). Where possible, the school administrators within the community could consider joint programmes with skills training institutions for enhancing parents' working skills and exposing them to alternate competency-based training. For example, school administrators from one of the schools that participated in this study joined with Heart (Human Employment and Resource Training) Trust in conducting evening classes for parents who had become unemployed due to the closure of a garment factory in the area. The aim is to assist parents in re-entering the job market and thus increasing their income-earning power and allowing them the financial capacity to provide for their children. In addition, with the help of relevant government agencies, the schools need to propagate adult literacy classes in the evenings for parents, with the objectives of enhancing parents' appreciation for education in their everyday lives and equipping them to assist their children in school work at home.

Reid (2003) pointed out that "truancy thrives when students know there is little risk of being caught" (p. 5). This implies that school administrators need to revisit the sanctions meted out for truancy by the schools, and more stringent structures need to be implemented in the schools to identify truants and design early interventions that can address the students' psychological and physiological needs. Several participants in the study indicated that the games shop in the community was a contributing factor to truancy. It is important for the school to work along with community members in eradicating truancy.

One very evident implication from the Root Cause Analysis is that the solution for student absenteeism does not depend only on the education system. The Ministry of Education must take leadership in coordinating government sectors that provide services related both directly and indirectly to the delivery of education. A range of agencies and entities may need to collaborate if the problem of student absenteeism is to be reduced/eliminated, including parish councils, which are responsible for the maintenance of road systems; and utility companies, which are responsible for the supply of water and electricity.

The students who participated in the study are still in primary school and, as such, are still considered minors/dependent. Their reasons for not going to school are a reflection of the inadequacies of their parents, the

community in which they live, and the nation's failure to provide the opportunity for them to fully realize the Ministry of Education's mandate that "each of our children can learn and all of our children must." If appropriate steps are not taken to address the hindrances to quality education for these children and others in similar predicaments, then this mandate becomes a farce.

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SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Perspectives From Two Marginalized Contexts

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This study shares the perspectives and experiences of members of staff from two established special education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago on the issue of how they are responding to national calls for inclusive education. Methodology within the case study tradition included narrative analysis of responses to open-ended questions, observations, document analysis, and the critical experiences of the co-researchers. Findings reveal resilience as one characteristic displayed by the staff of special schools in addressing inclusive education. There is also a concern about whether social justice is possible with an inherited elitism. Staff identified challenges, which include building and sustaining collaborative relationships, resourcing and utilizing technology for education, culturally responsive teaching, early identification and intervention, and teacher preparation. Recommendations for moving forward include more local and Caribbean-wide practices that address culturally responsive curricula, action research-based interventions, a continuum of professional development systems targeting teacher dispositions, and public mobilization regarding the role of education in social justice.

Introduction

This paper shares the perspectives and experiences of staff from the Cascade School for the Deaf (CSFD) and the Wharton-Patrick Special School (WPS) on how they are responding to national calls for inclusive education, and how their responses might contribute to social justice. WPS serves students with emotional/behavioural and related learning difficulties (SEBDs).

Educators in Trinidad and Tobago remain unconvinced that policymakers are providing the means and ways to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Conrad & Brown, 2007). This has been viewed as a lack of will on the part of policymakers rather than a lack of money (Brown & Conrad, 2007;

Worrell, 2006). Yet, initiatives of the Ministry of Education (MOE) expect regular and special schools to be partners in the inclusive process. This position is perceived to be reasonable regardless of the resources provided to support inclusive practice. It is the teachers and school leaders' challenge to generate a positive and responsive environment that determines the success of inclusion and social justice (Gause, 2008).

Key Concepts

Inclusive education

As Caribbean and Trinbagonian [from Trinidad and Tobago] educators and special educators, we might view "inclusion" as a meeting of rivers and the seas. Here, currents that represent human rights and capital, social justice, meritocracy, and economic productivity meet, merge, and displace. Within these cross currents we seek to delineate between the rhetoric and the reality of inclusive practices; more specifically, disability inclusion.

We celebrate the case for addressing exclusionary practices based on race, ethnicity, social class, gender and orientation, religion, and age. Indeed, we applaud the recognition that inclusion and inclusive education are not limited to issues of persons with disabilities. However, we argue that as special educators there is need to move beyond the rhetoric of inclusive disability education to making this a reality, and to help the case for a broader conceptualization of inclusion that facilitates citizenship education committed to a democratic society. This is especially so in multi-ethnic, developing, or less developed countries such as Trinidad and Tobago. Here, we are still wrestling with a politics of difference, and the postcolonial burdens of power, privilege, and elitism—very slow in relinquishing their holds. In such a context, we need progressive educators who are committed to social action, responsive research, and pedagogy aimed at promoting a democratic society and teaching the "other" (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). We affirm that while we want progressive educators, they should not be crusaders in the classroom, but facilitators helping learners to explore values, actions, and their consequences (Banks, 2006).

These activities are just as critical to the rich academic diversity in our classrooms. For example, students should be encouraged to explore differences and to recognize that this is normal; notwithstanding the fact that for some learners, skill diversity is significant enough to warrant specially designed instruction to realize educational equality (Banks & Banks, 2006).

For purposes of this paper, we describe inclusive education as a philosophy and process of organization and teaching that addresses and responds to the diverse needs of all learners. This is accomplished through "increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities. It involves modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). Inclusion involves the reduction and elimination of exclusionary practices in education, by creating and sustaining welcoming learning communities. Inclusion is not a place but a process that includes a continuum of student support services.

The *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) has proven to be a significant catalyst to inclusive education practice worldwide. This statement recognizes the need for and commitment to providing education for all learners within the regular education system. It further states that children with disabilities or significant academic needs and skills must have access to regular schooling and child-centred pedagogy.

The co-researchers recognize the diverse interpretations and explanations of inclusive education, while acknowledging that their predominant perspective on inclusive education is framed by their roles as special educators.

Social justice education

The increasing recognition that inclusive education is about democratizing learning environments and the facilitation of opportunities for all students makes it a key to social justice (UNESCO, 2008). While there is no single definition for social justice, there are two main social justice theories—the individualistic or rights-based and the communitarian. Individualistic philosophies consider whether a particular set of policies are acceptable and fair in serving a person. Communitarian philosophies consider whether policies serve the interests of a defined group with a shared sense of community. Neither of these two sets of social justice principles relates directly to students with disabilities. In an effort to address this, Christensen & Dorn (1997) argue for a relational approach. This perspective is based on a comprehensive understanding of the history of discrimination and privilege against people with disabilities and differences. The relational approach asserts that it is in the quality of relationships that we identify justice or the lack of it.

Understanding the Contexts

The Special Schools

In Trinidad and Tobago, as elsewhere, philanthropists and religious institutions have led the journey towards social justice by addressing the special and educational needs of persons with disabilities since 1943. In its 1966 Education Act, Trinidad and Tobago included a statement on provision for students with handicapping conditions, and in 1981 the Special Education Unit was formed. This Unit supervised the more established special schools like the CSFD (1943), Santa Cruz School for the Blind (1952), Princess Elizabeth School for the Physically Handicapped (1953), WPS (1958), Audrey Jeffers School for the Deaf (1967), and the Lady Hochoy Homes/Schools for the Mentally Retarded (1961). When the Pointe-a-Pierre Government Special School was developed in 1988, it was subsumed within the Unit's authority (Conrad & Conrad, 2007).

Over the last decade, the Unit has been incorporated into the Student Support Services Division (SSSD). This comprises Guidance and Counselling, School Social Work, and Special Education/Diagnostic Prescriptive Services (Trinidad and Tobago [T&T]. Ministry of Education [MOE], 2004). All institutional and private special schools are now supervised through the SSSD.

Cascade School for the Deaf (CSFD)

Reverend Frederick Gilby and a local team that included the then Anglican Bishop, Arthur H. Anstey, have been identified as the visionaries responsible for the school's founding. This followed the establishment of the Trinidad Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb in 1942. The CSFD was named for its location at Cascade Road, Cascade—a suburb of Port of Spain.

It is a two-storied structure with an additional west wing that includes residential facilities, sewing, and information technology services. CSFD caters for approximately 114 students with hearing impairments (SWHIs) and 25 special education teachers. The school and its related host institution, the Trinidad and Tobago Association in Aid of the Deaf, have contributed significantly to educational development nationally and have produced outstanding pioneers and educators. It has led the integration movement towards inclusive movement in the Caribbean for over 30 years (Paul, 2008).

Wharton Patrick School (WPS)

This was established within the country's only psychiatric hospital as the School for the Mentally Handicapped. It was subsequently named the Wharton-Patrick School after its two founders—Mildred Wharton, a volunteer; and Dr. Nesta Patrick, a celebrated pioneer in social work, education, and child welfare throughout the Caribbean.

Students attending WPS may be: (a) patients of the psychiatric hospital, (b) students from regular primary schools on short-term intervention, (c) children referred by the Child Guidance Clinic, or (d) from a growing number of walk-ins. Students generally exhibit serious emotional/behavioural disorders (SEBDs) and related mild to moderate learning difficulties, and/or pervasive developmental disorders.

In 1990, WPS was relocated outside of the hospital to better serve regular schools with, or at risk of, SEBDs. The original building has undergone significant redesign, and now is a two-storied building with two additional annexes. WPS has established itself as a resource centre for behaviour and classroom management. As with the Cascade School for the Deaf, it has earned a reputation for outstanding staff and pioneering efforts.

National Efforts

The shift in special education from a humanitarian and charitable to a rights-based/social justice paradigm emerged with the establishment of the Special Education Unit. It signalled an emphasis on resource development and public accountability. The road to this point was paved by the efforts of informed parents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and educational pioneers including Lydia Harper and Wallace Pedro with education of the Deaf; John Knox and Errol Pilgrim with the Blind; Claris Manswell with the Physically Handicapped; Nesta Patrick with the emotionally disturbed; and others like Eileen Guilleaume in Tobago.

In the mid-1980s, a few special educators accessed key reports and aggressively disseminated these. This strategy helped to shape professional opinions and actions. Among such reports was the Marge Report (1984), which estimated significant percentages of students with disabilities needing urgent intervention. The CIDA/University of Manitoba's Sensitization Special Education Project (1987–1990) and the collaborative project involving The Association for Special Education (TASETT), the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA), and the University of Sheffield further mobilized teachers and jolted teacher education initiatives towards exploring and addressing

postcolonial relationships and understandings regarding social justice and education.

The MOE responded with a national consultation, which emphasized a philosophy that students with special needs have the right to "full opportunity for self development in a wholesome educational environment" and equal education treatment in the "most productive and least restrictive environment" (T&T. National Consultation on Special Education, 1990, pp. 57, 58). A subsequent education policy paper (T&T. National Task Force on Education, 1994) echoed the earlier report's appeal for prevention, multi-professional assessment and intervention, and decentralized services. The 1990 report articulated as its mission the mainstreaming of children with special needs—except for severe cases. Subsequently, the MOE's 2004 report on the development of education in Trinidad and Tobago asserted the government's commitment to a socially inclusive education system.

Despite these laudable efforts, education remains stymied by: (a) a sluggish bureaucracy, inadequate teacher preparation, and ineffective leadership (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Worrell, 2006); (b) complications of educational funding and failing curricular delivery (Lavia, 2007); and (c) a conflicted national philosophy ensnared by meritocracy and economic inequalities (Armstrong, Armstrong, Lynch, & Severin, 2005).

One is reminded that special education is not just the maintenance of the status quo but, as all education, about preparing the nation's children to be active partners in society and in nation building. As such, all teachers are transformative leaders, advocates, and agents of change. Schools, then, are communities where models of democracy and social justice are nurtured (Gause, 2008).

As in any community, challenges abound. The more resilient teachers respond to these with creativity and energetic style, engaging students about their feelings and giving voice. Such teachers also use critical observations, transform their assignments, and reflect on their own mission as teachers (Nieto, 2005).

International Efforts

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasized parental right to educational choice (Article 26 (3)), affording a basis upon which parent groups and educators may seek equal accessibility to schooling. With the proclamation of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) came the exploration of its theme of full participation and equality.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) went further, supporting inclusion as the preferred educational practice for students with disabilities. Yet it emphasized value for the services of the special schools as valuable resources for the development of inclusive schools. The staff of these special institutions possess the expertise needed for early screening and identification of children with disabilities:

> Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools . . . or units within inclusive schools - may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools. (Item 9, p. 12)

The Statement identified new and expanded roles, including the provision of professional support to regular schools, and aligning curricular content and method to the individual needs. More recently, in 2006, the UN passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—of which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory—unambiguously supporting inclusive schooling.

Information Gathering and Analysis

We used a qualitative dual case study to explore the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of staff at two special schools. We describe this as an intrinsic case study since the two schools that we focus upon are within two miles of each other, and both have long traditions working with the community and other regular schools. Both cases are bounded by the time of the data collection (November to May 2008), geographic location (in Trinidad), and in their programmes that offer special education services (Creswell, 2006; Stake, 1995).

The schools had shared their perspectives on inclusive education and social justice at a symposium in November 2008 on inclusive education hosted by the Special Education Committee of TTUTA, at which the primary researcher was the feature speaker. The perspective from the CSFD was informed by data from the M.Ed. thesis of one of the co-researchers of this paper. Following the symposium, because of the completeness of the contributions of the CSFD and WPS presenters, they were invited to collaborate with the primary researcher to write a paper.

Further, they were asked to seek responses from 19 respondents to three guiding questions:

1. *How is your school best responding to inclusive education expectations?*

2. *What are the major challenges you face in providing services?*
3. *What are your recommendations for facilitating a socially just education for students with special needs?*

At the time of the data analysis, four responses from one special school were unaccounted for. However, the opinions of four other respondents—experienced regular education teachers working with special school students with disabilities—were included in the analysis. Subsequently, through document analysis, a group meeting, and numerous revisions, narratives were developed. In our examination and interpretation of the data, we were guided by the Data Analysis Spiral approach (Creswell, 2006). One of the researchers is knowledgeable about both schools. He taught at and was a principal at one, and has a good working knowledge of the other, based on his former roles as president of the Association for Special Education and chair of the Special Education Committee, TTUTA. The two schools are just about a mile apart and historically have also enjoyed a close collaborative relationship. All researchers know each other and have articulated a high level of trust with each other and the conclusions of the study.

We used crystallization through multiple forms of data collection and representation, including collaborative poetry, to ascertain and illustrate trustworthiness of the data and findings (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000).

Results and Discussion

In response to the first guiding question: *"How is your school best responding to inclusive education expectations?"* the narratives reveal a basic sense of satisfaction that they were doing their best given the situation and resources. Both schools saw their success in terms of facilitating social justice through facilitating inclusion where appropriate.

Following a prompt by one reviewer, the co-researchers decided to explore the respondents' interpretation of "inclusion," and so reviewed comments and solicited clarification in this regard. Four respondents limited their concept of inclusion to meeting the specific and individualized needs of students within their schools. The analysis reveals that 11 of 19 respondents interpret inclusion as a welcomed encompassing of minority or oppressed groups into society and schools, with an emphasis on students with disabilities or at risk of such disabling contexts. Among indicators of a broader interpretation of inclusion are statements alluding to: (a) the role of dispositions and teacher education in accommodating learner differences; (b) school leadership commitment

to all learners in their schools as communities, including immigrants; (c) the need for culturally responsive pedagogy; (d) co-ed versus same-sex schools; (e) pervasive elitism; (f) notions of successful schools versus those identified as warranting "performance enhancement programming;" and (g) those prestigious schools where behavioural problems and academic difficulties appear to be invisible or hidden. The other respondents portray inclusion as more directly an issue linked to accommodating students with disabilities in regular schools.

Essentially, the narratives indicate a consciousness that while the respondents were committed to getting their charges engaged in non-segregated schooling, they were mindful of a bigger picture—their role as special teachers in the identification and classification of student differences as deficits; how this related to the students' self worth; the distribution of resources; and the rejection of difference as normal, even desired.

CFSD and WPS accept the concept of including students with disabilities into regular education, as well as those who are without disabilities into segregated settings. They share a commitment to facilitating these practices. They also consider social justice to be synonymous with an adequate and effective approach to inclusive education. Staff, however, distinguish between the rhetoric of inclusive education and the commitment to a systematic inclusion of students, along with adequate and sustainable support services: "*Without adequate services it's just talk—not inclusion*" (WPS2).

As far as CSFD is concerned, they have been addressing issues of inclusive practice and social justice long before these terms "*became fashionable*" [CSFD1]:

> *It was just the honorable thing to do . . . to ensure that you were not keeping back your students. After all our country has benefitted from leaders at the highest levels who were deaf or hearing impaired. Remember Eric Williams?* [CSFD]

Support units or mainstream units serve as the major strategy for addressing inclusion. These units provide critical support to academically and socially integrate students. Where a support unit has been established within a regular school, the school is deemed the "host" school. Students who satisfy criteria developed by the teachers of CSFD are mainstreamed. These include: visible and viable parent support, effective sign language and oral speech, and being less than eight years old for initial integration. The attitudes and dispositions of regular teachers at the host schools play a critical role:

> *Teachers were welcoming to the children and quite willing to make additional efforts to accommodate their needs. Some even wrote notes to the parents of deaf students inviting them to Parent/Teacher conferences*. [CSFD]

In sharing their best interventions, CSFD identifies several stories of successful inclusion. One 15-year-old boy with very little oral speech, and who gets "*terrible grades in all academic subjects*" is celebrated. He is given the pseudonym Jaheem. A poem is developed to share his story:

Jaheem
loves life dancing
and "signing" [American Sign Language] his success
yet little oral speech frustrates
his goals

Language
Comprehension
and representation
remains the biggest challenge
for him

Know though,
that he affirms
his survivor spirit . . .
making bridges anchored with smiles
and hope

We fear
that his hunger
for learning will soon end
Successful inclusion needs more
than hope

We use
student centered
Curriculum that is
Total and Culturally rich
Because

We know
Ability

is ONE of many doors
denying inclusive space to
Jaheem

Respondents share that Jaheem uses Sign Language and Total Communication effectively and dances with the school choir in the Parang Competition [Music, sung mostly in Spanish at Christmas time, which reflects the strong Hispanic colonizing influence] despite ongoing challenges:

> *He has not had life easy–his father is incarcerated, his mother long gone from his life. Yet he has developed the social understandings and signing skills that allow him to communicate effectively with both hearing and deaf people. His smile is always infectious, and students and teachers alike describe him as "fun to be with." He was also the first prefect [student leader] that is hearing impaired at the school.* [CSFD]

Like Jaheem, most students at one such support unit shared the view that they neither felt lonely nor isolated, but bonded to each other. Some were confident enough to teach Sign Language and befriend their hearing peers and teachers.

At WPS, staff portray inclusive education practice and the aim of social justice as "*efforts in progress*":

> *Our students are perceived as "being mad", "acting mad" or just "too bad". Indeed schools, society, and often their own parents feel threatened and burdened. So for us the main job is marketing hope and social skills development. Our main strategies for social justice remain information sharing, advocacy, and establishing positive collaborative relationships with parents and schools.*

Service is afforded to regular schools on request. WPS identifies its success with in-service training, advisory services, and short-term withdrawal of students at risk. This applies when a student is exhibiting behaviours that pose a threat to self or others. A behavioural intervention plan is determined in collaboration with the referring school. This generally will involve staff at the school also participating in some specific training, and a collaborative response to the problem that involves the parents and the student. Often these services warrant a further referral to the Diagnostic Specialist or SSSD.

The WPS staff identifies a student named Peter as one of their successes and makes a case for his inclusion through poetry:

For Pete's sake
we ask a place
In your classroom so that
He can practice his social skills
And grow

"For Peace's sake"
You say "No . . .
disruption will follow;
Class . . . School will deteriorate
besides . . .

The teachers
are not ready--
Support is not available--
Parents might protest his presence
You see."

For Pete's sake
We ask that
you include him and we
will provide support, resources . . .
training . . .

"Well maybe . . .
I'll talk with staff.
No promises! Don't quote me . . . "
But it's 'bout the teachers not Pete
You see?

WPS1 shares that Pete's early life was marred by a string of events and circumstances that negatively impacted on his development. By age 14 he had been incarcerated at the Youth Training Centre:

> *The magistrate deemed him "beyond control" and so had him remanded to the facility. We have been advised that he is now better adjusting to his situation.*

While WPS celebrates its growing relationships with some regular schools, they express caution that these schools are often less likely to welcome the students in most need of social inclusion, namely "*those with a history of violence or combined behavioral and developmental difficulties.*"

About Resilience and Advocacy

In response to guiding question 2: *What are the major challenges you face in providing services*? CSFD identifies the following: (a) host school relationships; (b) curriculum, pedagogy, and communication link; (c) screening, assessment, and early intervention; (d) professional development; and (e) use of technology in education. WPS identifies its primary challenges as relating to host school relationships [which they refer to as partner schools], curriculum, and pedagogy. Other challenges are the: (a) pervasive shortage of staff at the facility, (b) difficulties pairing SEBDs and at-risk students with positive peer models, and (c) public/parent education and partnership development.

Host school relationships

Both CSFD and WPS are sensitive to their host school context, the regular teachers' dispositions and attitudes, and the behaviour of regular peers. There is a pervasive perception by parents and teachers of the Deaf that SWHIs are welcome if they do not pose learning or behavioural challenges to the host school. With SEBD students that is a given, so resistance is high. Regular teachers appear to be more tolerant of SWHIs rather than committed to being more responsive to the students or changing their teaching styles. Paul (2008) notes the opinion of one parent recorded in an earlier paper that if it took a lot of effort to get the child with hearing impairment included, the regular teacher lacked commitment.

For WPS, the dispositions of teachers at partner schools are influenced by fear of violence, disruption, and negative models to their regular students. Further, such students often reflect an intersection of factors including: (a) inadequate or inappropriate parenting skills, (b) abuse and neglect, (c) family disruptions, (d) poor academic achievement, (e) poor social skills, and (f) few social ties and mixing with anti-social peers. These nourish the view that "*students with behavioural difficulties handicap the learning of others, pose a threat to themselves or the school's image, and make parents uncomfortable*" (WPS1).

Another challenge for CSFD is poverty of space:

> *In one instance, the unit is within the school, but it is actually half of a typical class space, located next to the toilet. It provides no reprieve from the noise of other classes separated by only a chalkboard.*

Culturally responsive pedagogy

This is not referring to ethnicity but to the marginalized cultures of the hearing impaired and the emotional/behavioural and academically challenged.

For SWHIs, their first language is Sign Language. With the paucity of training and development in this area, there is a generated sense of inadequacy in higher order literacy skills; with a resultant and serious challenge in Language Arts and Social Studies. Also, SWHIs are largely visual learners. Interpreters aim to provide the visual "equivalent" of the teachers' instruction.

Some educators of the Deaf view inclusion as more exclusive for children who are deaf, and advocate that SWHIs should receive direct instruction from trained Sign Language teachers (Cohen, 1994).

WPS staff assert that there is a need for biblio-therapeutic and responsive material that is geared both to the reading and emotional levels of students. Such materials should also engage the reader with situations that include issues and model appropriate behaviours. Regular education teachers need to be more sensitive to home contexts typified by single parents, sibling-parenting, drugs, and violence, among other factors.

An inclusive environment must also be nurtured through leadership, access to needed resources, and a caring community, which is not limited to the school context:

> *Too many of our students are all alone emotionally. They do not feel as if they belong to a community. Even when they are welcomed at WPS or a partner school, there is an ongoing tension about what happens when they leave school. Our system needs to ensure that appropriate education and support is continued as needed.* [WPS]

Teacher preparation and professional development

Both schools agree on a critical need for teacher education. They applaud the efforts of The University of Trinidad and Tobago's (UTT) pre-service, generalist special education programme. However, CSFD and WPS voice the need for specialist training in their respective areas, and in-service training of experienced teachers in regular and special schools.

With the discontinuation of The University of the West Indies' (UWI) Certificate in the Teaching of the Hearing-Impaired, there are no courses in the Education of Deaf Students available, nor is there ongoing professional development for already trained teachers of the Deaf. Recently, the MOE added "Assistant Interpreters" to secondary schools

where SWHIs are integrated, in the absence of professional training programmes and standards.

The situation is similar with WPS, with no initial training and professional development programmes for the education of SEBDs. Further, WPS has had only 50% staffing for more than 5 years. Only one of the three staff members has completed professional training in the area. The competences of the other two have been nurtured and shaped by their commitment to teamwork and ongoing staff development, led by the principal:

> *We too need training! And we need seasoned, well-qualified teachers who can earn the respect of regular ed teachers; many who oppose the inclusion of special needs students into their schools.* [WPS1]

WPS is also concerned about the difficulty of recruiting teachers in the area of behavioural difficulties. With no difference in remuneration for special school placement options, they claim that special education teachers are generally more attracted to "*safer student populations*."

Sense of community. Both CSFD and WPS express views of feeling marginalized as a community of students and teachers. CSFD shared that the absence of sign language in local television programming, particularly public information, "*suggests that SWHIs are unimportant*":

> *Too often budget speeches, hurricane warnings, important news bulletins are unsigned and uncaptioned. No wonder our students see us as the "other" and build their own sense of community. Unfortunately we the teachers get caught in the middle.* [CSFD]

A particular concern of CSFD pointed to safety and emergency concerns. CSFD posits that school and public safety concerns warrant a system that provides visual alerting devices for emergency situations.

WPS holds that the community at large needs to take greater responsibility for helping decrease the rising incidence of violence, insensitivity, and lack of accountability. They assert that schools and students are reflections of the broader society; and appropriate values, dispositions, and attitudes by students are inextricably linked to the community. Society itself and, by extension, the MOE seem to be portraying such disabilities as "collateral damage."

Screening, early intervention, and assessment

This is also a priority area for both schools: "*We cannot continue with crisis intervention and ignore both the contributing factors and early signs*" (WPS3).

The lack of either a national system of screening to determine deafness at birth (or at least within three months of birth) or a national Parent Support Programme for parents of deaf children results in parents being unsure of what to do and where to go to get help:

> *In the meantime, the most valuable years of language learning and development would have been lost, and that, really, is the disability—deafness without language.* [CSFD]

Nor is there any locally available language development intervention programme for pre-lingual infants with hearing impairments that make use of current research findings and advances in modern technology. Unaddressed deafness places the child with hearing loss at a steep and distinct disadvantage: "*From quite early, many . . . are set on a path to low self-esteem, academic and socialization problems in the short to medium term*" (CSFD).

Routinely, national tests are designed with the hearing child in mind and exclusive of the needs of SWHIs. There is an urgent need to develop a system that allows those who are grading examinations to identify SWHIs. Paul (2008) contends that nowhere is this more glaring than in the section of the English examination papers that tests Poetic Language and its interpretation. In these papers, deaf students are confronted with onomatopoeia, and other aural/oral poetic devices for which they have had absolutely no corresponding schematic systems.

The Way Forward

With regard to question 3: *What are your recommendations for facilitating a socially just education for students with special needs*? three themes emerge from the narratives: culturally responsive research and pedagogy; teacher education and in-service training; and a National Centre for early identification, intervention, and support.

Culturally responsive research and pedagogy

Both CSFD and WPS urge the need for research that addresses local concerns and needs. For CSFD, this should urgently address the teaching of English as a second language and a Caribbeanization of signs that reflect Trinidad and Tobago and Caribbean words and phrases. WPS proposes the use of action-based collaborative research by special and regular schools on the efficacy of their strategies: *"Perhaps this could be emphasized at the teachers college. We would be happy to accommodate such student teacher researchers*" [WPS3].

Other suggestions include:

- Ensuring that examinations are moderated and scripts of SWHIs are identified and marked by persons trained in Sign Language and Deaf culture [CSFD]
- Providing safe, appropriate, and adequate learning spaces where SWHIs, SEBDs, and other students with disabilities can retreat for supplemental tuition—this might be after school and weekends [CSFD, WPS]
- Utilizing contemporary and adequate technology, particularly for communication issues [CSFD]
- Mandating that automatic suspension should go along with alternative placements along a continuum for an offending child/child with behaviour difficulties [WPS]
- Establishing the teaching of Sign Language as part of the National Curriculum [CSFD]

Teacher education

CSFD and WPS propose addressing the need for categorical or cross-categorical specialist teachers teaching in special schools or regular education teachers working or interested in working with SWHIs and SEBDs. This, WPS contends, will utilize existing experienced teachers, and also provide mentors and models for the new wave of pre-service special education teachers. WPS also made a case for shorter courses aimed at the re-education of existing special and, particularly, regular education teachers. These might include courses that:

> *enhance classroom/behaviuor management skills; review underlying philosophies and attitudes; and assert that it is the right of the child to an education that will ensure all-round development . . . not just merit based privilege*. [WPS1]

In addition, CSFD suggests a system to provide internationally accepted training and certification of interpreters for deaf citizens. Together, CSFD and WPS further suggest the need for teacher educators and policymakers to review the philosophies and policies that underlie special education. This, it is hoped, will highlight the importance of high standards in teacher recruitment and the need to have courses that explore the social construction of disability, without denying the challenges and needs evident in the academic development of students with disabilities. Teacher education and professional development for enhancing pedagogical and services organization remain critical at multi-levels—special educators, regular teachers, and administrators. However,

there is no less the need to provides courses or forums that explore how privilege and power intersect with disability and other marginalizing concepts; related meanings of inclusion; and the role of educators—including special educators—in all this.

National Centre

CSFD visualizes a centre that provides training in early screening, identification, and intervention in Sign Language and Speech. WPS, however, anticipates that such a centre should go beyond screening and early intervention, and should serve as a clearing house and database of materials accessible to professionals and parents. Such a centre should also aim at ameliorating risk factors and building resilience in the child and the family through inter-ministerial and interagency [NGOs] collaboration.

Summary and Conclusions

We note the resilience of the staff at each school, striving through collaborative practice to be resourceful advocates and educators. Staff at both schools place emphasis on their evolving relationship with supportive schools.

The differences lie with the delivery of services and the prevailing attitudes towards their student clients. CSFD has decentralized services through support units, while WPS takes a broader range of their services to the regular schools on a more personal level. Increasing the number of staff with appropriately trained specialists would readily enhance this. Modifying the work of Prouty (2007), the co-researchers strive to summarize the voices of the students at these schools through the following:

We do
not have to earn
the right to learn. It’s ours.
And if because of faulty laws
Errors
of design,
And too many
places where still far **too**
many people do not care, then
for us. . .
that class
room door Is still

beyond our reach, Please know
those wrongs do not remove our right
to learn
So here
we are with you
The future is our name
And all we claim Is this:
our right
to learn.
We insist
that you respect
not subject, ignore, nor
reject by politricking
Our right!

(adapted with permission from R. Prouty, 2007)

For SWHIs, the key problems lie in enhancing communication within the students' subculture, collaboratively enhancing higher expectations of teachers, and increasing the effectiveness with their host schools. With WPS, negative perceptions and fear associated with psychiatric or developmental disorders create barriers with their partner schools. Both CSFD and WPS, however, have embraced the principle and practice of inclusive education; and reject the position that special schools are part of the problem of exclusion and cannot be partners in the process of social justice.

Regardless of these realities and barriers, CSFD and WPS note the assurance of the *White Paper* on education (T&T. National Task Force on Education, 1994) that all our citizens should be provided with the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest.

This brings attention to the role of policymakers in providing resources needed, and to question whether this apparent apathy is a reflection of the value given to the cause and the stakeholders (Worrell, 2006). All educators should be prepared to be advocates and activists, committed to advancing the move towards socially just pedagogy. Inadequate training, inconsistent leadership, and minimal consultation with teachers plagued these efforts (Conrad & Brown, 2007).

WPS acknowledges efforts by the state towards social justice. These include the role of the SSSD in supporting inclusion models; government's active collaboration with United Nation agencies regarding inclusive education reform; and "*the School Feeding, Textbook Rental, Transportation, Public Assistance programmes and teacher education*"

(WPS 2). The recently established University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) offers pre-service programmes leading to the B.Ed., with a specialist option in Special Education.

While we applaud these efforts, more is needed to adjust teacher expectations and attitudes if *all* are to believe that they belong in our classrooms, are valued, and are being prepared to be active partners in our democracy (Corbett, 2001). Teacher education reform should address both pre-service training and ongoing professional development programmes. Teachers should be professionally prepared to accept that all students learn, that difference is normal, and that they should take responsibility for educating all the students in their classes (Black-Hawkins, Florian, & Rouse, 2007) regardless of real or perceived learner or learning differences. Further, teacher confidence must be re-affirmed through culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Florian (2007), they must be re-convinced and even convinced that they are capable of teaching all children, through skilful teaching and knowledge of learner differences. We add to this the need for reflective practice focusing on learner differences and similarities; and an exploration of how personal philosophies inform our dispositions and pedagogy.

Recommendations

We recommend four core strategies for achieving effective inclusion and, by extension, socially just education. This revolves around a community where all are valued and actively engaged in maintaining such an environment. The four strategies are:

1. Revisiting the purpose of education and inclusive practices as an issue of social justice, and the maintenance of democracy hinged on relationships and community (Giroux, 1988; Hopkins, 1997)
2. Reviewing teacher education preparation and re-education to provide effective culturally responsive teaching and assessment (Gause, 2008)
3. Ensuring that educational leadership preparation is advocacy oriented, responsive, community-centred, and committed to transformation (Conrad & Brown, 2007; Gause, 2008; Ryan, 2006)
4. Establishing a National Centre combined with a Parent Support Network, which will serve as a clearing house for local and international research, and a resource/support centre for the students, professionals, friends, and parents of students.

A thread woven through these core strategies is community-centred collaboration. We urge the development of collaborative community-centred skills in each of the core approaches. Effective collaboration brings leaders, teachers, teacher educators, parents, and community groups or businesses together with students to achieve a socially just society and pedagogy. Collaborative practice and the four strategies proposed, while not perfect, will lead the way forward and connect the major themes emerging from the narratives of CSFD and WPS. We hold the informed view that social justice through inclusive education lies with strong visionary leadership, collaborative practice, and resource development involving all parents, community, government, and regular and special educators. Further, while we use a disability frame to explore how two special schools respond to mandated roles in inclusive education and to interpret these responses, we recognize that inclusion, though embracing of, is bigger than students with disabilities. We strive to summarize our views as follows:

We talk
Bout how every creed,
and race find an equal place . . .
Time to add learner
difference;

And to
reform teaching
to reflect value, concern
and respect for all the children
as well.

We need
Pedagogy
that is 'We Culture Rich'
Not individualistic
Other

WE must
find alternate
spaces and time to make
all learners and teachers alike
reflect

On where
we are going
with "we and them" schooling.
Look closer at this inclusion
Ole talk.

Are we . . .
assuming that
equality in place
brings equity in citizenry . . .
for all?

Ella!! [calling witness to Ella Andall, calypsonian – Missing Generation (see Appendix)]
Thank you sister.
Missing Generation
is a condemnation
Of us
Elders.

[sigh] Do we
the Colonized
handicap our learners
with labels of worth rather than
freedom?

[long pause/final appeal]

Teachers
consider Lovelace—
first free self then "other" . . .
then see ourselves in each other
Amen?

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Appendix

Missing Generation by Ella Andall

Without truth there is no life to honor
Without love no reason to live
There's still time to change inhumane behaviour
And to learn all that we should give
This world is not our own we're just licensed custodians to guard to guide and feed our children's needs
Yet we fill their hearts with hate alone and show no direction
We daily kill the plants; we throw away the seeds . . .

There's a missing generation out there . . . who cares
Find them we better find them
they are dying disappearing everywhere' who cares
Find them . . . we better find them
Somebody better pray, somebody better pray
there's a missing generation and soon if we don't find them
they're surely going to find us one day
There's a missing generation
And soon if we don't find them there'll be no generation to care

In this world of overriding ambition,
in this world where Money must rule
Hearts of rock washed in blood and corruption
Hatred only kindness can cool
Those cries that fill the night shout out for love and salvation
Are we to hear yet turn and walk away
Or should we stand with hands outstretched to show protection
And boldly still the fears that make them stray

CHORUS

Look behind every sound of thunder
Search beneath every mound of dirt
There you'll find the price of our behaviour
hiding from the cause of their hurt
Look out there goes another lonely son or daughter
With unshed tears and smiles we've never seen
Lets all reach out and snatch just one from their Destroyer
And change that heart to one that's pure and clean

CHORUS

With one touch there is so much to offer
Feel the hearts of those yet unborn
See the smiles hear the joyful laughter
of the generation to come
Let's join our hearts and dream our dreams like our ancestors
Striving the hungry mouths and minds to feed
For this last chance to touch the soul of our creation
Let's till the ground . . . help to prepare the seed

CHORUS

Somebody better pray…somebody; Somebody better pray…somebody.

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"DON'T TREAT ME LIKE I'M BAD!" Social Competence and Teacher Roles in Young Children's Social Development at Three Primary Schools in Trinidad

Sabeerah Abdul-Majied

This qualitative case study investigated how teachers at three primary schools, classified as high-, medium-, and low-performing, contributed to social competence development in 5-7-year-old children. The schools served children from one community in Trinidad who were most likely to have come from disadvantaged situations. The Caribbean cultural context was considered in analysing the effectiveness of supports provided by teachers for children's social competence development. The results indicated that the children studied could be classified as *Troublemakers, Troubled-aggressive* or *Troubled-passive, Typical* or *Good,* based on the social behaviours they displayed. Each classification group seemed to have needed different types of assistance from teachers based on the origin and nature of the behavioural difficulties observed. Teachers at the three schools, however, responded with similar strategies of control to manage the behaviours of all children. These methods were ineffective. Teacher training, reduced adult-child ratio, and parent outreach programmes are recommended for supporting children's development of social competence.

Introduction

"My boy ain't a terror! I think Miss not treating him right…the humane part...that is what the education part of the system is missing...human relations." This view was expressed by a single parent whose 5-year-old son entered primary school with social competence problems. She hoped that the class teacher would have assisted in guiding her son towards better behaviours and increased learning. Although not realizing it, this mother was advocating social competence development for her child. In this context, and independent of any study, she had made an important link. She had linked the class teacher as being crucial to the development of her child both in terms of his social competence and also in terms of his intellectual development.

Katz and McClellan (1997) suggest that teachers can play a significant role in facilitating social development in children. That role

can be fulfilled by establishing an early childhood environment that supports the development of social competence in children. The extent to which that favourable environment is created can vary tremendously from one setting to another, depending on teacher characteristics. Those characteristics include an understanding of the social needs and capabilities of the children, being knowledgeable about appropriate supports that children need, and intentionally and purposefully supporting children's social development (Katz & McClellan, 1997). The issue of the strategies and approaches used by three teachers to facilitate children's social competence development forms the crux of this study.

There are several definitions of social competence. Those definitions usually revolve around the ability of an individual "to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships with peers" (Katz & McClellan, 1997, p. 1). The definition used in this study (Welsh & Bierman, 1998) states that social competence is a broad term used to describe social effectiveness in children. It refers to the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviours that children need to establish successful social relationships. Those skills and behaviours include social skills, social awareness, and self-confidence. Emotional intelligence, which refers to the child's ability to understand others' emotions, perceive subtle social cues, "read" complex social situations, and demonstrate insight about others' motivations and goals, is also included in this definition of social competence. As a result, children who are socially competent have a wide repertoire of social skills and are able to establish and maintain satisfying relationships, and avoid negative interactions.

Several teaching strategies that can be used to support young children's social development have been reviewed by Kemple (2004). Those strategies have been ordered in a schema that advises teachers about which strategies to consider first (Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001). Teachers are encouraged to consider the most naturalistic approaches first, before moving on to more structured approaches. A hierarchical pyramid model represents this approach for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behaviours in young children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). The model suggests that naturalistic strategies such as facilitating the development of meaningful relationships and creating a supportive classroom environment be used before progressing to specific individualized teaching strategies and interventions.

London (2002) suggested that teaching practices which occur in classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago are rooted in our colonial past. Those practices entrench habits of obedience, order, punctuality, and honesty,

which were needed to teach the masses to accept the then highly unequal social and economic structure of the colonies. These beliefs led to practices of drill repetition and memorization of rules and tables to develop mental discipline. Punishment for infringement of school rules also became an important feature. London believes that despite massive efforts to change the traditional, formal teaching practices (since political independence in 1962), many restrictive approaches like rote learning are still in operation today. These deny children the opportunities needed to practise and develop appropriate social skills.

This paper examines strategies used to teach 12 children in three schools in Trinidad, in order to understand how some teachers support social competence development in young children. Findings from the investigation informed recommendations for appropriate practices for supporting the development of social competence in young children.

The investigation asked the following research questions:

1. *What are the social competencies displayed by 12 young children during their second year at three primary schools?*
2. *What is the role of the infant teacher in the social development of children with different levels of social competencies?*

The study was guided by two theoretical positions that facilitate a systematic investigation of children's social development within a cultural context. Firstly, the theoretical position of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) guided the study. This position advocates that programmes for children should be based on age-related characteristics that are used to develop experiences most likely to promote children's optimal learning and development. Those programmes should also adapt and respond to each child as an individual. Additionally, what is known about the social and cultural context of children's home situations should be considered in order to understand children's values, expectations, and their behavioural and linguistic background. This understanding is necessary to make learning experiences at school more meaningful, relevant, and respectful of the children and their families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Secondly, the Developmental Niche theoretical framework, which was developed from studies of child behaviour and development in different cultural contexts, was also used to focus the study. This model recognizes that behaviour and development are co-produced by the interaction of the individual and the environment. Additionally, in this model, three major subsystems function like a larger system that interacts with aspects of the culture. Those subsystems are the physical and social

environment in which the child resides, the customs of child care, and child rearing that is mediated by customs and the psychology of the caretaker (Harkness & Super, 1994). This model was therefore used in conjunction with Developmentally Appropriate Practice to analyse the cultural contexts that shaped the children's social development.

Literature Review

Katz and McClellan (1997) identified three aspects of social behaviour that constitute social competence. Those aspects are Individual Attributes, like showing the capacity to empathize; Social Skills Attributes, like asserting rights and needs appropriately; and Peer Relationship Attributes, such as being usually accepted instead of being neglected or rejected by classmates. They further advised that teachers should examine children's progress towards developing these three categories of attributes every three to four months. If the attributes are usually observed, children can be said to be developing adequate social growth. However, if many of the items are not observed for a child, intervention strategies are recommended.

Studies suggest that unless children obtain at least a minimal level of social competence in the early years (by about age 6 years) they can become "at risk" for developing a number of social problems that can affect them throughout life (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987). Research also suggests that what children learn later in school largely depends on their social and emotional competence, as well as the cognitive skills they develop in their first few years of life (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Studies also provide significant evidence which shows that when frequent opportunities are provided to strengthen social competence during childhood, a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and national pride are enhanced (Hartup & Moore, 1990; Kinsey, 2000; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Theories suggest that children's peer relationships affect their later development and school adjustment. One study investigated peer relationships in aggressive children on entry to kindergarten and followed the children for two years (Ladd & Burgess, 2001, as cited in Ladd, 2005). The purpose was to determine whether aggressive behaviours were predictive of adjustment problems during the first years at school. The aggressive children studied were found to develop problems in thinking, behavioural problems, negative attitudes towards school, classroom disengagement, and tended to underachieve. If aggression continued throughout the primary school their adjustment

problems worsened. The conclusion from the study was that childhood aggression is a predictor of adjustment and conduct problems into adulthood. This suggested that children who are aggressive need school intervention.

Further, Ladd (1999), in a review of research on children's peer relationships and social competence, identified enduring themes prior to the 1990s that continued to influence research. He also listed research that was based on new concepts and issues. Among the themes that were repeated were investigations that looked at the effects of children's behaviour on the formation and maintenance of peer relationships. Correlation play group and experimental studies were the methods used to identify a link between prosocial behaviour and peer acceptance (Denham & Holt 1993; Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990). For example, when the role of aggression was investigated in play group studies, it was found that some forms of aggression, like angry-reactive aggression, significantly reduced peer acceptance throughout primary school, while rough play was more likely to be tolerated.

Children differ in aggressiveness and individual differences in aggression remain fairly stable over time (Ladd, 2005). Findings indicate a link between early aggression and later misbehaviour and involvement in serious crimes and violent behaviour (Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Moffitt, 1993; Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1998, as cited in Ladd, 2005). Another strand of investigation examined withdrawn behaviours and problems that become internalized. The findings were that children who display withdrawn or solitary behaviour can get caught up in debilitating cycles of behaviour that lead to negative self-perceptions and internalizing problems (Mc Dougall et al., 2001, as cited in Ladd, 2005). Gazelle and Ladd (2003) further expanded on this theory as they hypothesized that withdrawn children fail to develop some social skills. These children, they state, also become aware of their deficits and develop negative self-perceptions that lead to internalizing problems like anxiety and depression.

Teachers should ensure that the environment they create supports social competence development. Social competence is most likely to be facilitated in an environment of warmth, respect, acceptance of the child, and belief that the child can become socially competent (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Kyriacou (1997) noted that classrooms dominated by teacher talk afford students the opportunity to speak in a constrained context, usually only in response to questioning. Children's contributions and comments tend to be adjusted to what the teacher anticipates as dialogue. In this scenario, students' responses are rejected not because

they do not make sense or are incorrect but because they do not match the teacher's requirements. This type of classroom practice tends to undermine the self-esteem of learners and impedes the development of language skills and critical thinking—all necessary elements of social competence development.

Bredekamp and Copple (1997), in their discussion of children's self-esteem (estimation of self-worth, pride, or shame in their competence), state that experiences which shape young children's self-esteem are very important as they also influence children's behaviour. If children develop a negative image of themselves they are likely to become more aggressive. This leads to dislike by peers and further erosion of their self-esteem

Stipek, Daniels, Galluzo, & Milburn (1992) found that in programmes which are highly teacher-directed, emphasis is placed on children's academic performance. As a result, the social aspects of learning are ignored or neglected. This is contrary to evidence supporting good teaching practice (Hartup & Moore, 1990). Their findings support the view that appropriate teaching practices should encourage children's intellectual development while also enhancing their social, emotional, and physical development. Practices that narrowly focus on academic skills limit intellectual development and might damage the social and emotional development of young children. Cohen (2001) expressed the view that at school, children should have opportunities to strengthen their affective and cognitive abilities simultaneously. He contends that children with average intellectual abilities but superior social and emotional skills may be more successful at school and later on in society than those with superior intellectual abilities who have lesser social and emotional skills.

Although research on the social aspect of child development in the Caribbean is thin, there are some findings from studies which reflect cultural understandings that impact on child development. Roopnarine (2006), in establishing current understandings of the child and childhood in the Caribbean, noted that images of childhood are developed from a variety of sources, which include religious traditions, ancestral culture, sociohistorical understandings, and new understandings of the rights and needs of children. Parents believe, for example, that good parenting practice includes the use of physical punishment to train children appropriately (Rohner, Kean, & Cournoyer, 1991, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006).

Support for this belief is found in a survey of 10-14-year-old Barbadian children conducted by Anderson and Payne (1994, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). They found that 40% of boys and 51% of girls

approved of flogging 5-7-year-old children. Similarly, Barbadian adults held the same views (Handwerker, 1996). Caning or beating the child with a stick or belt, or using verbal denigration were common disciplinary methods used both in the home and at school (Anderson & Payne, 1994, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). This is a troubling practice since physical punishment in the Caribbean appears to be severe and very different from other countries. Also, available evidence shows that physical punishment is associated with psychological difficulties in children (Gershoff, 2002).

Additionally, definitions of competent children can be gleaned from African-Caribbean and Indian-Caribbean parents' belief about appropriate childhood behaviours. The view is that children should be obedient and compliant, and they should demonstrate utmost respect for adults and exhibit proper conduct in their presence (Durbrow, 1999; Wilson et al., 2003, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). A study conducted by Grant, Leo-Rhynie, and Alexander (1983) found that 100% of parents in Antigua, 96% in St. Kitts, 85% in St. Lucia, 94% in St. Vincent, 82% in Barbados, and 95% in Jamaica believed that children should obey their parents. Dominican parents, in describing childhood competence, included respecting and obeying adults, academic competence, doing chores well, getting along with peers, and participating in community and school activities (Durbrow, 1999, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006).

The Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1995), designed to understand children's experiences in early childhood settings, collected data on teacher beliefs about important areas of learning and development for children. The participants were 4-5-year-old children in 96 public and 96 private early childhood centres. The methods of data collection included two 10-minute observations per child, questionnaires, and child development status measures. Social competence of children was measured. The findings were that there were some positive aspects of provision for children but there were also many areas for concern. These included the limited amount of free activity for children in the programmes, as well as limited choice and an overemphasis on academics.

One study conducted in a rural community in St. Vincent examined relations among peer status, academic scores, and how teachers rated delinquency, learning problems, conduct, and sensitivity in 168 children ages 6-12 years old (Jimerson, Durbrow, & Wagstaff, 2009). Children nominated by their peers were classified in five groups as: rejected (28); popular (24); average (85); controversial (8); and neglected (23). The

findings revealed that the academic scores of rejected children were significantly lower than popular children. Another significant finding was that unlike in developed countries, rejected children were not rated significantly higher by teachers in terms of sensitivity, delinquency, and conduct problems.

In another study, Samms-Vaughan (2000) investigated the consequences of changes in family structure on Jamaican children. Her findings were that children who live in homes where the relationships of their parent figures were less "stable," such as common-law (unmarried parents) and visiting unions, and those in single-parent homes or homes with a biological and step-parent were more withdrawn in their social interactions. Additionally, children who frequently moved from one residence to another, in the process of child shifting, also exhibited problem behaviours, including depression, silent resentment, and anger. It was found, too, that the problems demonstrated by these children negatively affected their impoverished homes and their schooling.

The literature review established the meaning and significance of social competence in child development. The review also examined teacher activities that can assist children to acquire social attributes which are necessary for successful social interactions and learning at school. In the Caribbean, where the study was conducted, cultural understandings of childhood and childrearing provided an important aspect of the context for interpreting study findings.

Methodology

The underlying consideration in choosing the method for this research was consistent with the view of Greig and Taylor (1995), which is that it should facilitate a systematic and scientific search for information aimed at improving our knowledge about children. In choosing between the two principal methods of scientific inquiry, the quantitative and the qualitative research approaches, the qualitative research approach was preferred. Hatch (1995) expressed the view that qualitative methods are better suited for answering questions in early childhood settings where in-depth rich understandings are sought. As a result, the design facilitated observing and listening to interactions to draw conclusions.

Ethnography was chosen as the method since it is particularly useful for studying childhood. This method of inquiry allows children to participate in the production of sociological data. The voices of children are directly heard as opposed to experimental or survey research studies (Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). Further, the case study was the most appropriate design to investigate the multiple variables that impact on

young children's social learning. Those variables include the child, peers, the teacher, and the significant adults in the child's life, both at school and in the home community. They were important because those variables in turn impact on the child's development of social competence. The case study allowed for an empirical inquiry of the issue of social competence within the real-life context of the school. Merriam (1998) recommends the case study method of investigation in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not always clear.

After deciding on the case study approach for this inquiry, a review of the theoretical framework and the problem (to understand the experience of social competence learning for different children in different schooling situations) revealed that multiple cases needed to be studied. Also, selecting cases at multiple sites seemed to be the optimum method for obtaining the unique cases that Abramson (as cited in Merriam, 1998) believed to be essential to capture an understanding and an appreciation for the human condition.

The Research Sites

From the review of the literature and the general objective of the research it was decided that schools which appeared to reflect differences in social experiences for children within one cultural community should be selected. This selection criterion was adopted to address the problem of generalizability, which is often raised by critics of qualitative research (Parry, 2000). That is, to what extent can findings from one school be generalized to another school? Although there is no intention of the qualitative researcher to adopt the random sampling approach used by quantitative research approaches, the issue of generalizability is addressed by purposively selecting sites that share similarities and yet have differences with each other.

Since policymakers and researchers have been especially concerned about increasing the achievement levels of poor children who live in urban environments, the research sought to provide data on children from a disadvantaged situation. The schools selected were from one community considered to be a depressed and high-crime area, based on media reports and statistics from the Central Statistical Office. For example, in 1999 the Morvant Police Station reported the highest number of total crimes and serious crimes committed in the North Eastern Division (Trinidad and Tobago. Central Statistical Office, 2002).

From my 15 years experience as a primary school teacher and curriculum facilitator working in north Trinidad, as well as from

discussions held with school supervisors, it was understood that primary schools have been informally categorized as *high*, *medium*, and *low* performing. At the time of the study, these categories were based on the academic results primary schools received when students sat the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Examination. The results determined whether students got secondary education at the 5- or 7-year Traditional Sector schools, which offer an academic-type programme; or the New Sector schools, which comprise mainly a two-tiered system of the 3-year junior secondary schools with transitions to the 2-year or 4-year senior secondary or senior comprehensive schools. This second system also includes the 5-year composite and the newest secondary schools, which offer academic and technical/vocational courses (George & Quamina-Aiyejina, 2003). Parents, students, and teachers preferred the Traditional Sector schools.

Based on the secondary school placement results, the data indicated that it was valid to classify the primary schools under review as high-, medium-, and low-performing schools. Secondly, the analysis also revealed that parents seemed to prefer to send their children to the better performing primary schools, as the school population was higher in the better performing primary schools and lower where the SEA results were poorer and fewer children secured places at the prestigious traditional secondary schools. As a result, in the classification of schools, high, medium, and low academic ratings equated high, medium, and low demand by the parents. Three schools representing the categories of high, medium, and low performing or demand were finally selected.

District Christian Primary (DCP) emerged as the highest demanded school, Upper Central Government Primary (UCP) as the school of medium demand, and Palm Grove Government Primary (PGP) as the school of lowest demand [all names are pseudonyms]. The schools cater for both boys and girls in the Port of Spain Central Educational Division. The highest performing school, DCP, is a denominational school. The other two schools, UCP and PGP, are both government schools. These represent the categories of schools needed for the study. At the highest ranked school, 25% of the students passed for the traditional secondary schools. At the medium-ranked school, 8% secured places at the traditional schools, and at the low-performing school, 0% of the students secured places at the traditional schools.

The Schools on Entry: Selecting Classrooms

My main purpose thereafter was to select a first-year class at each of the three primary schools. At DCP, the children were streamed by ability,

based on their performance on the teacher-made entrance examination. I did not select the A-stream because they were the "brightest" children from the intake, and were treated differently from the "others." The classes were more orderly, and the teachers appeared to be stricter in terms of their constant demands for discipline and neat completion of assigned seat tasks. The C-stream was also not selected because the teacher was untrained and often absent. After observing each of the three infant classes in session over a one-week period, I chose the first-year B-stream (29 students) since the teaching context seemed to represent the average teaching/learning situation at the school.

At UCP, there were two first-year classes. The classes were not separated by ability. After an informal interview with the principal and observation of the classes in session over a two-day period, the class with 24 students was selected. Observations focused on looking for similarities in teacher characteristics with the B-stream teacher selected at the first school site. The first-year teacher was on her first appointment after receiving her pre-degree diploma from teachers' training college and was in the same year group as the teacher selected at the first school.

At PGP there were two first-year classes. The children were not separated by ability. During my one-week observation period at this school, I saw only one first-year teacher since the other teacher was always absent. There was great indiscipline in the teacher's absence. I therefore decided to conduct the study in the class with the teacher with a low absenteeism rate. There were 24 students in that class.

The teachers at both DCP and UCP had been teaching for four years and most of that time was in the infant department where the children were 5- and 6-year-olds. They both had a pre-degree teacher's diploma and their attachments were the second school appointment to which each was assigned after graduating from teachers' training college. The teacher at DCP had studied early childhood education as her elective course at training college. At PGP, the teacher had been teaching for 31 years. She had a teaching diploma like the other two teachers, but in addition she had received a certificate in Early Childhood Education and a bachelors' degree in Education from The University of the West Indies.

Student Selection

Using purposeful sampling, first-year students at each school, whose ages ranged between 5 and 7 years, were selected with the assistance of the class teacher. Since there was no available record of social competence, students were selected based on teacher perceptions of a range of student behaviours. The cases also represented both sexes and as

far as possible the ethnic mix and academic status of students. I was aware that in order to obtain comprehensive data the sample had to be limited. As a result, 12 students—two males and two females at PGP and DCP, and one male and three females at UCP—were the participants selected based on consultation with the class teacher, observation of behaviours, and parental consent. Details of their profile are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1. The 12 Case Study Children

School	Name	Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Identified Behaviour	Academic Status
DCP	Joel Chandra Tenika Nkosi	M F F M	6 6 6 6	Mixed Indian African Mixed	Bad Good Fair Good	A+ B+ B B
UCP	Tania Jack Sherry Laura	F M F F	6 6 5 5	African African African African	Bad Good Good Fair	A+ A B B
PGP	Diana Dane Sita Ken	F M F M	6 6 5 6	African African Indian African	Bad Fair Good Excellent	B B A A+

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected over 16 months. That period included the last term in the First Year when initial observations were made to select observation sites and participants, and the three terms in the Second Year when study data were collected. Non-participant observations of student/teacher, student/peer and student/adult interactions were conducted during formal classes. Three infant classrooms were observed for two half-day sessions each week for the first term. Thereafter, the observation method was modified to include a mid-term observation period of six weeks, during which time three consecutive whole-day sessions were spent at each school. During each visit one child was

identified for close observation. In this way each child was targeted for focused study at least once every month.

The Social Attributes Checklist (McClellan & Katz, 1993) used in this study identifies attributes of a child's social behaviour that teachers are advised to examine periodically. The checklist was intended as a guide to support other methods, like teacher observations, used to assess a child's social status. Teachers were asked to collect data on children's social competence at the start of the study to establish the initial social competence of each child. It was again used at the middle and at the end of the study to identify any changes that might have occurred in the social attributes examined by the instrument. Since the checklist items were not entirely culture-specific to the children studied, teachers were asked to write additional jottings to explain their observations when necessary.

The second source of data was from interviews conducted with participants and significant adults like teachers, principals, and parents, which were audiotaped and later transcribed, coded, and analysed for emerging themes. Those themes guided further data collection. Home visits were also undertaken to understand the culture of the home community. The final source of data was derived from student work samples and school records, which were used to triangulate data from other sources.

Trustworthiness

The research design considered the notion that interviewing young children is problematic because of their limited verbal capacities, level of conceptual development, and information processing skills (Martin, 1988, as cited in Hatch, 1995). They sometimes confuse the order of events. Reliability was therefore established by overlapping sources of data, for example, observation and audio recordings. Additionally, time was a limitation as there were delays in gaining official access to the schools and data had to be collected during children's 2-year stay in the infant department. As a result data collection was limited to children's second year at school.

Findings

Research Question 1

What are the social competencies displayed by 12 young children during their second year at three primary schools?

To respond to this question, data from the 24 categories examined by the Social Attributes Checklist was used to first establish the general level of children's social competence at each school. Then the social competencies of each child were determined. A cross-case analysis of the checklist findings was then completed (see Appendix). Three significant findings were:

1. All children showed a capacity for humour and used non-verbal interactions to communicate.
2. All children accepted peers or adults of other ethnic groups. In addition, 6 of the 12 children studied demonstrated more than 80% of the social attributes examined. These more socially competent children still needed to learn skills like expressing their wishes and wants, turn taking, and how to enter discussions.
3. A significant finding was that four of the better behaved children did not demonstrate empathy. Of the 12 children studied, 7 did not display empathy. None of the boys showed empathy.

The lack of empathy demonstrated by the boys in particular can be explained within the context of the culture. Cultures define differently what is appropriate interaction and feelings for its members. Additionally, cultures have different expectations for the social behaviours of boys and girls (Katz & McClellan, 1997). It is quite possible that the children learnt that it was inappropriate for males to demonstrate feelings like empathy. However, empathy is an important social attribute. Berk (2006) noted that as early as age 2, a child can sense and try to relieve another's distress.

Additionally, the checklist findings revealed that all schools had one or two children who did not demonstrate one third or more of the 24 attributes examined. Even though the schools were ranked in the community according to their academic rating, children demonstrated or did not demonstrate similar social attributes across schools. The least demanded school did have children with the largest number of unobserved social attributes. Dane and Diana were the students who seemed to be demonstrating the least social competence. The attributes that they did not display were often the same, such as being acutely lonely, not expressing wishes clearly and asserting needs appropriately, not taking turns easily, and not being able to negotiate and compromise. Additionally, the social difficulties that children displayed at the start of the year-long study remained the same at the middle and at the end of the study regardless of the school students attended.

The reason for no improvement in children's behaviours might be that while there was an emphasis on ensuring that children were taught the academic syllabus, there was no documentation to record, or planned intervention to address, social competencies that children lacked. The focus on academics in education observed seems consistent with beliefs about childhood competence and appropriate behaviours expressed by low-income African-Caribbean and Indian-Caribbean parents in Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Grenada, and Antigua. The belief is that good children are academically competent, cooperative, respectful, compliant, and obedient (Roopnarine & Brown, 1997; Wilson, Wilson, & Berkley-Caines, 2003). The expectations of parents seem to mirror practices at school that focused on academics. As a result, no social intervention programme existed to assist children who needed to learn social competencies, like Dane and Diana, to improve in behaviours.

An additional finding was that the two children for whom the greatest numbers of social attributes were not observed (Diana – 17 out of 24; and Dane – 10 out of 24) attended PGP, the school parents least wanted their children to attend. PGP seemed to have had the highest number of children from homes with difficult family circumstances. Katz and McClellan (1997) noted that one group of children with social difficulties at school enter school with social/emotional problems. Dane and Diana seemed to fit into that group. Diana, for example, arrived at school late and moody. The teacher said that her face was always "*wrench-up and sour*."

A check of her home background revealed that she came from a poor family with an unemployed stepfather, and a brother and a younger stepsister. She also lived in a violent community and was used to severe corporal punishment. Her mother said, "*I does cut her skin sometime when she misbehave*." Her mother also said, "*Diana and Damien [her brother] need a lot of things. They father not helping. They aint have no proper clothes, shoes. That does stress them out. Diana does be vex she aint have nice clothes to go out*."

This type of childhood experience can be interpreted in the context of childrearing and socialization in the Caribbean, particularly within disadvantaged home situations. Parents believe, for example, that a good parent would use physical punishment to train children properly (Rohner, Kean, & Cournoyer, 1991, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). As a result, the use of corporal punishment is a widely held belief that has resulted in harsh disciplinary measures being sometimes practised. This may have affected the behaviours of some children. Findings from a cross-national

study of mother-child dyads in China, India, Italy, Kenya, the Philippines, and Thailand revealed that the perceived normativeness of physical discipline had a moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and childhood aggression and anxiety. However, the more frequent use of physical discipline was associated with behavioural difficulties in children even when viewed as normative (Lansford et al., 2005).

Another finding was that children identified by their teachers as "good behaved" at two schools (Sherry at UCP and Nkosi at DCP) were among the five children in the study who did not demonstrate one third or more of the social attributes examined. Classroom observations confirmed that the teacher's definition of "good behaved child" in both instances was quiet and non-disruptive during class time. The data revealed that the children who were identified as "good behaved" were experiencing social difficulties. They were not, for example, participating in discussions, negotiating and compromising, approaching others, expressing wishes and wants clearly, or empathizing.

Their behaviours were consistent with the aforementioned definition of a good child in the Caribbean being cooperative and respectful. However, these children seemed to have also demonstrated some behavioural characteristics that could have made them victims of bullying. Nkosi, more so than Sherry, for example, did not get involved in situations that required negotiation and compromise as he did not voluntarily interact with his peers. Instead he followed whatever was decided by others. Not only did he not assert himself but he also allowed others to bully him at times. That bullying extended from the playground into the classroom, where during seatwork he allowed his academically weaker but more socially assertive seatmates to "copy" from him. This type of passive behaviour had a negative impact on his peer relationship. He was not accepted by most children and, therefore, was not invited by friends to join in play, friendship, and work.

Nkosi was not identified as a child with serious social competence problems but rather as an over-dependent child. The checklist however revealed that he did not demonstrate many social attributes examined. However, it seems quite likely that because he was non-aggressive his grave situation was underestimated by his class teacher who did not believe he had a serious interaction problem. The idea expressed by Katz and McClellan (1997) that children may lack appropriate skills because they do not have opportunities to learn and practise them seemed to apply to Nkosi. His grandfather did almost everything for him so he learnt not to try for himself.

Sherry was similarly quiet and good behaved. She did not readily contribute to the discussions but had to be invited. Her teacher said, "*She does not talk much at work or play. Sherry never seems angry. She has to be asked to contribute. She may tell a peer to tell Miss* [what she wanted to say]." At the end of the school year, however, her teacher reported that though minimal she was initiating conversations at times. The social attributes that were not observed for Sherry may have been linked to her maturation. Fields and Fields (2006) said that it was important to have long-term goals for children when helping them to develop behaviours that are associated with maturation.

What seemed to be emerging from the data was that the children could be classified into four child types based on the similarities of their observed social behaviours. The four child types were:

- The Troublemakers 2 children
- The Troubled Child
  - Aggressive 2 children
  - Passive 1 child
- The Typical Child 6 children
- The Good Child 1 child

The child types discovered in this study have similarities to the "sociometric status types" named in a seminal study by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982), as reported in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). Peer relationships were examined to determine some reasons for successful and unsuccessful peer relations. Children were asked to say whom they liked and did not like among their peers. Based on the findings children were categorized as *popular*, *controversial*, *rejected*, *neglected*, or *average*.

These categories were described by later research as reported in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). One profile of *popular* and *controversial* children was that they could manipulate social situations to ensure that they were the leaders. They disliked losing and were sometimes involved in verbal conflicts. They had a high dominance status among their peers during play. However, their leadership could sometimes be disruptive. The characteristics of this category matched some of the behaviours of the two Troublemakers [so labelled by their teachers] in this study.

Tania was one Troublemaker who often modified given assignments and bent the rules to engage in her "new" made-up tasks for as long as she could get away with it. She did not cope well with rebuffs and corrections from teachers or children as she became angry. She seemed

to be lonely at times because she had no real friend even though she had lots of playmates. Like Joel, the other Troublemaker, Tania quarrelled when she was angry. Also, she usually did not compromise with her peers appropriately because she always tried to take control in all her interactions. She always sought to be the centre of attention.

The "acting out behaviours" of Troublemakers seemed to have been a defence mechanism to cope with problems of being a child with above-average learning ability in a class with activities that were usually under-stimulating and boring. Katz and McClellan (1997) provided support for this idea when they mentioned that a child may engage in disruptive behaviour as a way of making school more interesting. Additionally, her actions may have been partly related to differences in the expectations for behaviour between school and home. Both she and the other Troublemaker were encouraged to be creative, independent thinkers in their home setting but forced to be passive followers at school. Fields and Fields (2006) referred to the cultural mismatch that negatively affects some children's behaviour when the school expects a standard of behaviour that is different from what is expected at home. Such children may fail socially at school.

Dane and Diana, the two Troubled aggressive children, displayed behaviours similar to *Aggressive rejected* children. *Aggressive rejected* children were described as dishonest, impulsive, and non-cooperative (Cillessen et al., as cited in Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). As a result, they tended to engage in arguing and fighting. This type of behaviour was noted when on one occasion a group of boys complained to the class teacher that Diana was angry and was venting her feelings by pelting and quarrelling with another student by the school fence.

Nkosi was the Troubled passive child identified. Although his behaviours were similar to Sherry in that they were both quiet and well-behaved, observation revealed that he was sometimes bullied by his peers who demanded answers to class work. Also, when the teacher corrected him Nkosi became scared and sometimes acted nervously thereafter. His problem seemed to have originated from a dysfunctional home situation. His teacher said that his mother was in an abusive relationship and his grandfather over-compensated for the negative home situation by doing everything for his grandson. Nkosi just sat at his table in the back of the class and waited to follow the teacher's instruction.

Sherry was classed among the Typical children who were well behaved most of the times, and did not seem to have a home situation like the Troubled children or an individual need that was not addressed at school like the Troublemakers. The Typical child category, to which the majority of the children belonged, was really a continuum that included

Jack who was borderline Troubled passive and Tenika who was a borderline Troublemaker at one end of the continuum and Chandra whose social attributes were almost equivalent to Ken, the Good child, at the other end. The Typical child usually followed the rules during class time and obeyed teacher instructions. As a result, the names of children in this category were usually not called for admonition or singled out for praise. However, children who were borderline Troublemakers or Troubled aggressive, though demonstrating the behaviours of the Typical child most of the time, sometimes displayed behaviours consistent with a Troublemaker or a Troubled aggressive child and were punished.

Typical children experienced some problems at times but were generally willing and able to conform to school rules and to please the teacher. Out of class they played with friends with minimal conflict or sought help when problems arose. They needed help at times and they depended on the teacher or an adult to provide that assistance. One Typical child, Laura, turned and said to me as I observed at the back of the class, "*Miss, Tania miserable. She does beat up people. She does call me Lizard*." She wanted me to intervene and tell Tania to stop calling her names she did not like. There were times when children in this category deviated from the norm but it was usually a temporary infringement. Adult monitoring was necessary to guide Typical children through conflict and or negative situations that sometimes arose.

The final category of child type observed, the Good child, was the most socially competent child in the study, who was referred to as a "gentleman" and promoted as the model student by his teacher. When the teacher was absent he automatically and always engaged in a silent activity, usually reading. Ken had the fewest social attribute shortcomings. His major asset was that socially he had good manners, was always quiet, and cognitively he was the "brightest" child in the class. His reading ability was above average, and he placed first on class tests. Also, he usually gave the right answers to questions. As a result, Ken's pro-social behaviour was usually mentioned in conjunction with his "brightness" [how intelligent he was]. This child was loved by all his peers. The qualities of the good child are consistent with Durbrow's (1999) findings, as cited in Roopnarine (2006), that children in the Caribbean are expected to be obedient, compliant, respectful, and have proper conduct.

The qualities of the good child appeared to be similar to the *Popular child* type identified by Newcomb et al. (1993) in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). They suggested that popular children "have good interpersonal skills, are not high in aggression, and are not withdrawn"

(p. 148). Ken's teacher encouraged him to maintain his behaviour. As a result, at the end of the school year the teacher said, when asked to comment on his expressiveness, "*He still does not come forward to say anything*." Ken seemed to have needed teacher intervention to learn how to clearly express his feelings, wishes, and wants to others. He may similarly not have expressed empathy because he did not risk interaction that may have jeopardized his "good child" status.

It can be summarized, therefore, that since all children did not demonstrate some of the identified social attributes, they needed assistance to improve their social competence. It was significant that none of the boys demonstrated empathy. Additionally, the classification of children in behaviour types facilitated analysis of observed behaviours. Troubled children seem to have needed intervention that also addressed their stressful home situations. Quiet children needed to be observed more closely for social problems that could easily go unnoticed. Also, Troublemakers may have been very creative or gifted children who needed to learn social competencies that they lacked and to be challenged to channel their energies.

Research Question 2

What is the role of the infant teacher in the social development of children with different levels of social competencies?

Two pedagogical approaches—modelling and ignoring—were generally used to cue the behaviour teachers wanted from children when they did not demonstrate it. First of all, the teachers modelled some behaviours that they wanted their students to adopt in response to situations. At other times certain behaviours were ignored. The teachers usually modelled desired behaviours as situations arose, as the following examples illustrate.

Modelling

A word study session was in progress during which the children were asked to volunteer words, which the teacher wrote on the board. Ken said his word after the teacher had taken the last word for that part of the exercise. She modelled the skill of negotiation when she said to him, "*Can we leave out your word Ken*?" he responded, "*Yes Miss*." Later on in that same exercise caring was modelled when a child said "bat" as an example of an "et" word. When some children in the class laughed at the child who made the error, the teacher quickly pointed out to the class that children who said wrong things were not to be laughed at.

Good manners were also sometimes modelled. It was the most frequently taught social attribute. In spite of this teaching effort, the children who came to school lacking manners, like the Troubled children, did not develop social competence in that area over the period observed. It is quite likely that they needed practice opportunities to learn how to reason for themselves. As a result, even though the teacher demonstrated good manners, children did not internalize and so did not produce the desired response. Fields and Fields (2006) stated that too often adults focus on teaching children words that are socially acceptable, which they memorize and repeat sometimes only to get out of trouble. However, the utterances are superficial as the children have not understood what is being taught nor have they developed true caring feelings.

Ignoring

Name calling was another type of behaviour children demonstrated at times. The teacher's response was neutrality or indifference. From later discussion with teachers and parents, I came to understand that in that community name-calling was a regular practice and usually the person called was not offended. It was however unacceptable social behaviour in the wider national community, and even on occasion in that community as name-calling sometimes led to fights on the way home or in the schoolyard. Also, some children were hurt by name calling. For example, Diana's mother said that Diana complained that on her way home from school children called her "pumpkin head." Diana did not like the nickname.

Children therefore needed to know when it was appropriate to indulge in name-calling and how to recognize and desist when someone was offended. Katz and McClellan (1997) suggested that teacher intervention was necessary when negative labelling of peers who were different or disliked occurred. Since some children were hurt after name-calling episodes, the teacher needed to help the children to accept peers who were different. As a result, even though there were examples of teaching episodes to encourage appropriate behaviours or discourage inappropriate behaviours, children did not adopt the target behaviours. The one-time incidents of instruction in behaviour needed to be backed up by multiple opportunities for social interaction to provide the experiences children needed to adopt the desired behaviours.

There were other problem situations that arose where behaviour control was the method employed. This method of control was used at two levels: "Individual Behaviour Control," when a single child

displayed an inappropriate behaviour; and "General Behaviour Control," when the entire class was corrected for a problem.

Individual Behaviour Control

At the three sites studied teachers often resorted to controlling the behaviours of "children who were giving problems." They were usually the Troublemakers previously identified or those Typical children who were inclined to be Troublemakers at times. They were addressed by methods that included shouted commands, punishment, stern demands for obedience, and the use of prayers.

Shouted commands

Often for talking in class out of turn, children were quickly noticed by the teacher and singled out for mention. At DCP Tenika was a known "talker." She often talked to her seatmate as the teacher worked on the board. When the teacher noticed Tenika's distraction she stopped teaching. The teacher then shouted out to Tenika on two occasions, telling her to put her feet down and stop talking, before she complied. Similar instances of talking and playing in class occurred often at all three sites when the teacher was distracted or absent from the class. Sometimes the teacher next door would eventually come to the class and shout out instructions to the disruptive children [who were caught] to be quiet and seated. When teachers establish the supports for classroom interaction, many difficulties, such as those mentioned, cease or decrease in severity (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

Commands were sometimes quite stern when a teacher addressed a habitual offender. This occurred usually when whole-class teaching was taking place and the offender was a distance away from the class teacher. For example, at UCP the teacher suddenly shouted sternly, "*Tania I will not tolerate you disturbing the class this term*!" Like corporal punishment, this approach did not help the child to acquire social competence. Tania was quiet for a while, but soon returned to talking to a friend while the teacher was teaching. It appeared that methods used to change behaviours were ineffective for the long term. As a result, Troublemakers, who appeared to have been the most intelligent children, were the ones most often reprimanded. Their "acting out" behaviours persisted and often they disturbed other children and caused some of them to be also disruptive.

Punishment

After individuals were identified and called on to stop talking or playing in class, some form of punishment usually followed. These included

having the child stand up and close his/her eyes for up to 20 minutes or fold his/her arms placing a finger on the lips for up to 10 minutes. Corporal punishment was sometimes used. At times children had to stand in a corner of the classroom or just outside the classroom, or they were kept inside the class to do schoolwork during a recess period. These techniques did not result in a change in behaviour. In fact, for the Troublemakers, who were the most frequent offenders, punishment was a good opportunity to engage in an "outwitting behaviour."

Outwitting behaviours were behaviours that were deceptively clever and allowed Troublemakers to "beat the system" and avoid being punished for disobeying instructions or breaking the rules. Tania, for example, was observed running outside with a friend for water, when the rule was one at a time. She avoided being caught and so outwitted her teacher. Fields and Fields (2006) expressed the view that some adults believe that it is enough to tell children how to behave and then to punish them for non-compliance. This is an ineffective approach since changing social behaviours takes time and should be a long-term goal.

Demanded obedience

At all three centres disobeying teacher instructions was not tolerated. The teacher at UCP was the most adamant about not accommodating deviance from her instructions. To even question her directive was seen as disobedience that needed to be swiftly corrected. No child was allowed to be assertive or to question or challenge any teacher decision. The teacher's decision was final. This belief was constant at the three schools. The method of control used was authoritarian because the adult made the rules and punishment was administered for any deviation (Fields & Fields, 2006). There was little provision for power sharing where the views of both the adult and child would have been accommodated in the teaching/learning process.

Prayers

The school prayer was another method used to curb student disobedience. At DCP, in particular, belief in God was a core understanding. As a result, children had to ask daily for forgiveness for their mistakes in their school prayer. The School Pledge, which was recited daily, also addressed being respectful and obedient, and honest and truthful. It stated that there should be no fighting and cursing. Children were also frequently reminded at assembly to have respect for elders and the staff. Children with behavioural problems were asked to pay particular attention to their prayers and ask God to help them to change their ways.

Even though these virtuous prayers were repeated daily they seemed to have no effect on the behaviours of the children with behavioural problems. Like the method used for teaching manners, children did not internalize the behaviours that were appropriate.

General Problem Behaviour Control

This refers to methods used to control the entire class. Though similar to methods used on individuals, a combination of two corrective measures, like shouted commands and punishment, rather than a single method, was more likely to be used.

Shouting, punishment, and threats

All the teachers referred to excessive talking by the class in general as a major social behavioural problem that negatively affected children's academic performance. Corrective measures usually involved shouting at the class and/or administering corporal punishment to the main culprits. Corporal punishment or the threats of it were common methods used to control whole-class talking.

Fields and Fields (2006) reported that classroom discipline is the single greatest challenge facing teachers today. They also stated that to be effective, disciplinary approaches must focus on more than behaviour control to teach other things. Teachers of young children, they further stated, should understand the early years to be an important time for children to learn complex functions related to behaviour, like emotion regulation. The method of commanding compliance was totally not in keeping with the support system young children need. Children seemed to have needed to be taught the desired social behaviours.

Teacher talk sessions

Teacher talk was another common method used to curb excessive talking. At UCP the teacher said, "*Every day you have to say the same thing. We pray on lines and then say the anthem every day. You ask them what they are supposed to do. They know. Yet still they don't do it. They twist and turn.*" Based on her comments the method was ineffective yet it continued to be used.

Another problem behaviour was fighting, which was a problem at all sites but was most prevalent among the children at PGP. The older children were usually involved in the fights but the infants looked on and learnt. Ms. Woodroff at PGP further identified the main fighters to be limited to "*the boys, I could pinpoint them.*" The class was spoken to about solving conflicts through dialogue when fights occurred. Fields and Fields (2006) referred to the work of King and Gartrell (2003), who

cautioned against viewing typical boy behaviour as problem behaviour. Boys have more testosterone hormone and are therefore more aggressive. They need more physical activity than girls (Fields & Fields, 2006). Therefore, a curriculum that included more physical activity for boys, along with teaching conflict resolution skills, may have benefitted both boys and girls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

No significant difference was observed in children's social competencies that was linked to the type of school they attended. Type refers to whether the school was perceived as "good" and was highly demanded by parents or not. As a result, general statements about teaching for social competence can be made based on the behavioural characteristics of children rather than school types. This study was able to link social behaviours observed to five child types. This categorization facilitates identification of social competencies that groups of children are likely to have mastered or need to learn. As a result, teaching for social competence can target teaching specific social attributes to children by child types.

It was observed, too, that the teaching methods used to change children's behaviours did not result in long-term changes in behaviour. The majority of instances of social skills teaching were reactive and involved methods devised by the teacher to control either individual child behaviours or whole-class behaviours. As a result, the teacher's role in social competence development could be said to have been limited to behaviour control. This approach can be linked to cultural understandings of children—that they should be obedient and compliant and that adults should demand good behaviour, resorting to physical punishment if necessary.

Since teachers were using methods that appeared to be ineffective, teacher training based on philosophies that support developmentally appropriate practice for teaching social competence to children seemed to be needed. The introduction of teacher aides could reduce the adult-child ratio and may better facilitate individualized teaching of social skills. Parent outreach programmes may assist parents with relationship problems who sometimes have children with behavioural problems at school. Finally, intervention programmes for teaching social competence need to be introduced on the school curriculum.

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Appendix
Cross-Case Analysis of Checklist Findings

	Palm Grove Primary					Upper Central Primary					District Christian Primary			
Individual Attributes	Diana	Dane	Ken	Sita		Tania	Laura	Jack	Sherry		Joel	Chandra	Nkosi	Tenika
Positive mood	X	X	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	X	√	√
Not very dependent on adults	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	X	X
Comes willingly to setting	X	√	√	√		√	X	√	√		√	√	√	√
Copes with rebuffs	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	√		X	√	X	√
Shows capacity to empathize	X	X	X	√		√	√	X	X		X	X	X	√
Cares about peers	X	X	√	√		√	√	X	X		√	√	√	√
Shows humour	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Not acutely lonely	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Peer-Related Attributes														
Usually accepted vs. rejected by peers	X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Sometimes invited by other children to play & work	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√

(continued)

Cross-Case Analysis of Checklist Findings (continued)

	Palm Grove Primary					Upper Central Primary					District Christian Primary			
Social Skills	Diana	Dane	Ken	Sita		Tania	Laura	Jack	Sherry		Joel	Chandra	Nkosi	Tenika
Approaches others positively	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	X	X	√
Express wishes clearly	X	X	X	X		√	√	√	X		√	√	X	X
Asserts rights & needs appropriately	X	√	√	√		X	√	√	√		X	X	X	√
Is not easily Intimidated by bullies	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	X		√	√	X	√
Expresses frustrations & anger effectively	X	√	√	√		X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Takes turn fairly easily	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	√	√	X
Shows interest in others	X	X	√	√		√	√	X	√		√	√	√	√
Negotiates/compromises	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	√	X	√
Does not draw undue attention to self	X	√	√	√		X	X	√	√		√	√	√	X
Accesses play and work groups	X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	X	√
Interacts non-verbally with peers	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Accepts peers & adults of other ethnic groups	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Enters discussions	√	√	√	√		√	√	X	X		√	X	X	√
TOTAL Attributes not observed for each child	**17**	**10**	**2**	**1**		**8**	**2**	**4**	**8**		**6**	**4**	**10**	**4**

Key: √ Social Attribute observed
X Social Attribute not observed

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