

# Caymanians in Education: Why do so Few Caymanians Choose Teaching as a Career

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## Introduction

As the Cayman Islands continue to develop, there is an ever-increasing concern that the local culture is becoming diluted to a point where young people no longer have a sense of what it means to be Caymanian. Many people believe that this situation could be rectified if there were more local teachers. Through the years, career opportunities for locals have broadened to encompass a wide variety of options. With the island's growth occurring rapidly from the 1970's, many young people have had limited exposure to the diversity of employment opportunities. Teaching as a career is less attractive to many locals because there are far more lucrative options available to them. Caymanians are looking for opportunities to advance, attain higher social standing and enjoy financial rewards. Many locals have taken up the challenge of becoming teachers, however subsequently left the profession, for careers in which they experience a greater sense of appreciation and are compensated well for their efforts.

The Cayman Islands Government has begun to make changes to address this phenomenon by introducing a leadership-training programme, as well as, continuing to provide scholarships to local students interested in education as a career. However, more initiatives are needed to address this situation so more Caymanians will pursue teaching as a profession. Most local teachers, as well as former teachers, are notably interested in assisting efforts to create a positive environment and experience for teachers; willingly participating in worthwhile endeavors designed to achieve these goals.

## Overview of the Study

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the present shortage of Caymanian teachers and to identify some of the consequences of this phenomenon. The secondary purpose was to discover why this shortage exists. A third purpose was to ascertain what action could be initiated to encourage Caymanians to enter the field of education. The final purpose was to propose recommendations to improve the presence of Caymanians in the teaching profession.

### Significance

This study was undertaken in an effort to provide information to educators and policy makers responsible for recruitment and retention of teachers; clarify issues surrounding teacher attrition; provide insight into design of a vocation which is attractive to local students who are creative, intelligent, committed and professional. Findings should provide direction for delineating and clarifying the nature and scope of this phenomenon, leading to improved job satisfaction for principals and teachers, thereby creating a healthier, happier learning environment. A simple database, developed as part of this study, will allow other researchers to further investigate this vital topic. Most importantly, the results of this study may stimulate further discussion and thought regarding the future of Caymanians in education - creating a change in both the perception and reality of the benefits in teaching.

### Personal Paradigm

The conceptual foundation for this study stemmed from personal experiences over the past thirteen years of living and working in the Cayman Islands. Through reflection of those times, an examination of conditions and attitudes surrounding the issues resulted. Brought into the study, by the author, was a personal paradigm based upon personal observations, research, professional experiences, and colleagues' perceptions. This paradigm created a lens through which the author viewed issues related to the recruitment and retention of local teachers.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research is undertaken in a natural setting where the researcher gathers data in the form of words and representations, attempting to make sense of them. This research approach encompasses five traditions of inquiry: biographical; phenomenological; grounded theory; ethnographic; and case study (Creswell, 1998). A case study is "an exploration of a 'bounded system'...over time through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Furthermore, as Merriam notes, a case study offers "an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meanings for those involved" (1988, p. xii) by exploring "a variety of empirical materials-case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2).

This case study was conducted on Grand Cayman, in the Cayman Islands with approval granted by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee as well as by the Chief Education Officer of the Cayman Islands Government. Additionally, consent forms were issued and signed by each of the teachers, administrators, and former teachers chosen to participate in this inquiry.

Data were collected via tape-recorded interviews with each participant. Questions focused on the perceived reasons why so few Caymanians choose teaching as a career; the consequences of having so few local teachers; what can be done to achieve an increased local teacher population; and challenges in achieving these goals. Within-case analysis was then performed for each group studied to establish a data base for the study. Results from this analysis were collated and cross-case analysis conducted to identify similarities and differences among each of the three cases. Also, government documents were examined to filter out relevant data. Following the document analysis, instances of disconfirming evidence were identified for future consideration. Categorical aggregation was conducted to search for issue-relevant meanings from the analysis completed. Emergent themes were reflected upon, and finally, an interpretive diagram was established which identified action centres that are important for providing more effective recruitment and retention of Caymanian teachers.

## **Boundaries**

Several boundary conditions may have affected the validity of this inquiry. First, due to time and financial restraints, participation was limited to Grand Cayman during February and March of the year 2003. Second, it was conducted with a total of twelve Caymanian teachers, former teachers and administrators presently living in Grand Cayman; therefore, the views of these individuals may not be representative of their colleagues. Third, within the three groups interviewed, there were no representatives from the private schools or the sister islands. Fourth, by employing the interview method as the primary source of collecting information, interviewees may have been reluctant to divulge information pertinent to the purposes of the enquiry. Fifth, gathering current and reliable information on government policies, procedures and statistics was difficult and incomplete; therefore, a considerable amount of information required collection through personal communications, which proved to be extremely time consuming. Finally, the researcher's lack of experience limited the study as well as the interview questions and analysis. Although the outcomes of this enquiry are interesting and of value to the educational community, the author recommends that readers view these outcomes with caution due to the boundary conditions impacting on the investigation.

## **Major Findings**

Review and analysis of the data gathered from interviews as well as the documentation, generated a number of findings with regard to the recruitment and retention of local teachers. At least two-thirds of the participants supported

the following statements:

1. Teaching as a profession needs to be promoted in the media, at job fairs and in the schools, targeting children from a young age.
2. Teacher training as well as other professional development opportunities are needed locally to attract, retain and maintain high quality local teachers.
3. Teachers must be provided greater opportunities for advancement in level of financial remuneration.
4. Teachers need to be appreciated and recognized for the jobs they perform.
5. A properly developed and monitored induction programme needs to be available for all new teachers, including experienced teachers who are new to the Cayman Islands.
6. Greater opportunities for promotions must be established within the teaching profession.
7. More visible support for teachers and school administrators from the Ministry of Education, Education Department and the Schools Inspectorate.
8. More benefits such as paid sabbatical leave, low interest housing, car loans, and funding for further education are needed as incentives for educators.
9. Greater parental support of teachers, schools and students is needed.
10. Disciplinary structures are poorly defined and weakly enforced, and therefore warrant prompt attention.
11. Quality of local teaching candidates is at times below standard, thereby creating a stressful situation for teachers, students, and administrators.

## Discussion

Based on the major findings of this qualitative study, the literature reviewed and the researcher's personal paradigm, a number of conclusions emerged which are commented upon in this discussion. In order to attract young professional Caymanians to teaching as a career, the profession must be portrayed through advertising as one worthy of serious consideration, as a field that gives back to the community and yields meaningful rewards. Local teacher training for interested and amply qualified persons needs to be readily available; in addition, diverse developmental experiences relating to teaching, which provide significant opportunities for students to develop leadership skills must be advanced. The majority of participants, as well as a great deal of the professional literature, directed attention to the need for a properly initiated, well organized and consistently monitored induction programme, designed to provide inexperienced teachers with support and vital information as they embark on this challenging new career. Many participants expressed that a similar programme should also be available to veteran teachers who are new to the island.

Retaining teachers encompasses a whole other set of requirements. Although most participants perceived present salaries for new teachers were at a reasonable level, the lack of career advancement and promotion within the field prevents teachers from advancing in position and salary. Many people perceive other professions to be far ahead of teaching, with regard to advancement potential. Professional development is another area of contention, teachers are not provided with adequate opportunities or financial support to further their education. Even though many teachers have chosen the profession for intrinsic reasons, they become disheartened when extrinsic incentives are not forthcoming.

Participants and the literature offered a great deal of information; however, time and space limitations prevented the inclusion of all data in the final summation. Some of those comments and views, however, proved to be particularly insightful and were included as disconfirming evidence. Several participants noted that although increasing the number of local teachers is of great value, it would only be of value if those entering the field are highly skilled and maintain high academic standards. Participants would not like to see under qualified candidates placed in teaching situations solely on the grounds that they are Caymanian. Half of the participants identified the lower social standing of teachers as a root cause for the insufficient interest of local students in the teaching profession. This concept was identified in the literature as a significant contributing factor.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from this qualitative study; review of the literature; and the researcher's personal paradigm, a

number of recommendations have been proposed for consideration. Due to this author's lack of knowledge in the deployment of responsibilities within the local education system the areas for considered suggestions have been grouped into two sections: Cayman Islands Government (Ministry of Education, Education Department, and Education Council); and local school administration.

## **Cayman Islands Government**

Cayman Islands Government through the Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Culture; Education Council; and Education Department is responsible for all public and private educational institutions in the Cayman Islands. Documentation available through these bodies, relating to policies and procedures in the recruitment and retention of local teachers is limited. However through observation and communication with various government officials this author was able to ascertain that efforts are being made to enhance the attractiveness of the profession. The availability of government scholarships has been noted by several of the participants as being readily available. However, equal numbers of participants indicated these scholarships have not been available in sufficient amounts to cover necessary expenses. Although many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the rate at which changes have been occurring within the education system, they noted several areas of concern, which are slowly being addressed. The Education Department in conjunction with the Schools Inspectorate initiated a training programme for administrators, which has been specifically tailored to assist them in meeting the demands of providing leadership for local schools.

A number of recommendations are hereby proposed for consideration by government officials:

1. Clarify policies dealing with scholarship provisions for students studying education and review the level of assistance available to ensure participants are able to sufficiently cover all college expenses.
2. Establish secured low interest loan facilities for teachers to purchase cars and homes.
3. Arrange for adequate funding of annual professional development for all teachers as well as paid sabbatical leave for local teachers following their fifth consecutive year of teaching. Sabbatical leave should be for a period of at least twelve months in order for them to participate in advanced degrees, work in a different country, or conduct research.
4. Create a teacher-training programme, through a relationship with a well established university in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, or the Caribbean which will allow students to study locally for the first two years while participating in various local schools, gaining knowledge and experience, followed by two years attendance overseas. This arrangement also needs to provide an opportunity for students to complete their student teaching in the Cayman Islands.
5. Investigate how programmes currently available through the Community College of the Cayman Islands, International College of the Cayman Islands, University of the West Indies, and various online programmes can be utilized in creating a more comprehensive and unified local training programme.
6. Initiate an island wide induction programme for all new local teachers establishing clear guidelines and procedures. Assigning an administrative post responsibility for its effective implementation.
7. Establish a centralized educational library designated for teachers and education students to utilize for research and information gathering in order to facilitate more comprehensive studies into local education as well as opportunities to build on works that have already been conducted. This library could also serve as a teacher resource center.
8. Initiate the introduction of senior teacher posts to honor and recognize highly skilled and dedicated teachers. Re-allocate teaching positions on the government salary scales to allow for advancement in salary as teachers develop and provide greater experience to the service.
9. Initiate an in-depth study of present discipline policies and issues surrounding student conduct, recruiting key educators to develop more effective procedures for creating a healthy, happy and safe learning environment for students and teachers.
10. Establish a high profile marketing campaign designed to improve the image of teaching in the community.

## **Local Schools**

Recommendations for local schools focus on the need to improve the portrayal of teaching as a professional and

honorable profession as well as encourage and support new teachers. More specifically, the following suggestions have been proposed for consideration by local school administrators, teachers and parents:

1. Encourage young teachers to share ideas, value their opinions and 'tap into' their enthusiasm for teaching.
2. Work with teachers to develop personal career planning.
3. Empower school administrators and teachers to make changes in their schools to establish the best possible learning environment.
4. Encourage students who demonstrate aptitude for teaching to consider it as a career.
5. Set higher expectations for teacher aides. Encourage them to stretch themselves, making the most of their experience.
6. Encourage parents to become involved in the schools on various levels, thereby creating opportunities for teachers and administrators to communicate with the parents and the community more effectively.

## Emergent Profile

A thoughtful analysis of the rich data base established through this case study approach enabled emerging themes to be identified regarding provisions for the advancement in recruitment and retention of high quality local teachers. Results yielded through cross-case analysis of the twelve participants revealed all participants viewing careers in teaching being undersold. More effective promotion of teaching as a career would encourage more students to explore teaching as a viable profession. Local teacher training opportunities lack direction and coordination; an endorsed and well-managed programme must be established. More substantial advancement for teachers is essential to sustain professional interest, as well as, providing motivated and skilled teachers occasion to advance financially without having to leave the classroom. Creating an atmosphere within the profession that recognizes teaching as an honorable profession with opportunities to advance will create an elevated standing in the eyes of the general public. The most powerful tool of recognition and the one most recognized in Caymanian society is monetary. Incentives and benefits such as sabbatical leave, and secured low interest loans need to be introduced to create a more attractive package. Communication between Ministry of Education, Education Department, Schools Inspectorate, local school administration, and teachers needs continuous scrutiny to ensure information is flowing smoothly.

## Interpretive Diagrams

From the vast amounts of data gathered, areas of consensus were noted and emerging themes identified. A simple model emerged for improving the provisions to enhance recruitment and retention of local teachers. Interpretation of the diagram reflects a number of action centres for providing adequate encouragement to local teachers. If the government and local schools hope to improve the image of teaching as a career choice for locals, incentives and structures must be realized. The government as well as local schools should consider adopting a number of action centres into the existing decision making process. Tentative action centres, which constitute the model, are shown in Figure 1. A brief comment on each centre can be found in Table 1. This framework is perceived by the author to be a starting point for developing a more comprehensive model that will accommodate the complexities and dynamics of providing appropriate policies and programmes to enhance the ability to recruit and retain local teachers in the Cayman Islands.

Figure 1: Action Centres for Providing Appropriate Support Services for Recruitment and Retention of Caymanian Teachers



| <b>Table 1: Action Centres for Enhancing the Recruitment and Retention of Caymanian Teachers</b> |  |
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| <b>Action Centre 1 - Benefits</b>  | Benefits such as sabbatical leave, low interest loan facilities, travel benefits, and funding for advanced education will create a greater sense of being appreciated.             |
| <b>Action Centre 2 - Discipline</b>  | Creating a safe and civil environment for both teachers and students benefits learning as well as teacher satisfaction.  |
| <b>Action Centre 3 - Financial</b>   | Although salaries have increased in recent years, they are not attractive to highly skilled local students.  |
| <b>Action Centre 4 - Parental Support</b>  | To most effectively teach a child, teachers need the support of the parents, when that support is present, teachers enjoy their jobs more.   |
| <b>Action Centre 5 - Advertising of Career</b>   | New strategies are required to promote teaching through media campaigns and programmes in schools including careers classes.   |
| <b>Action Centre 6 - Advancement &amp; Promotion</b>   | There needs to be greater opportunity for teachers to be promoted without losing teachers from the classrooms.   |
| <b>Action Centre 7 - Quality of Candidates</b>   | If candidates of the highest quality are going to be attracted to the profession, standards must be consistently high. Less able teachers damage the reputation of the profession. |
| <b>Action Centre 8 - Recognition &amp; Appreciation</b>  | Needs to be shown in a way that teachers truly feel honored and must never be done without sincerity and thoughtful consideration.   |

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| <b>Action Centre 9 - Support</b>                       | When teachers know they have the support of those in leadership, they are far more willing to make extra efforts.  |
| <b>Action Centre 10 - Local Training Opportunities</b> | Teaching is a dynamic career and requires that teachers are able to benefit from continuing professional development. Also, far more locals would participate in teacher training if they could study locally. |
| <b>Action Centre 11 - Induction Programme</b>          | New teachers need the added support and guidance from a caring and knowledgeable senior teacher.   |

## Future Research

Despite the obvious and growing interest in creating an attractive situation for the recruitment and retention of local teachers, literature regarding incentives and provisions for its development are virtually non-existent. This inadequate database provides immense occasion for further research to broaden our understanding of the contribution local teachers' make to the inculcation and shaping of our society. Far more research is needed on various topics relating to education and the environment for learning. One area illuminated, as a result of this study was the influence changes in society have had on the educational system. The loss of traditional Caymanian culture and values has been accelerated considerably by modern lifestyles and exposure to divergent values.

Outcomes of this investigation may encourage others to initiate research studies in this important area of inquiry. Recommendations for future research include the following topics:

1. Examine the cultural changes within Caymanian society as it relates to the social and academic development of local students.
2. Conduct a follow up survey of all teachers, administrators, and former teachers in the Cayman Islands, inclusive of non-Caymanian, to further expand the data available on teacher job satisfaction and factors which lead to teacher attrition.
3. Examine the parity of teachers' pay to other civil servants, including the rate and availability of advancements.
4. Expand this study to include other Caribbean countries.
5. Examine the Caymanianization of other professions on the island.
6. Conduct an inquiry into local student behavior and methods of improving learning and teaching environments.

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