

ABSTRACT

Teaching Science in a Jamaican Primary School: Through the eyes of the Grade Six Teacher

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The ultimate goal of primary science educators is to help young children to develop and use scientific process skills and attitudes. It is therefore the responsibility of each teacher in the primary science classroom to create opportunities to help children develop and use these skills and attitudes. Effective teaching and learning of science in the primary classroom is not solely dependent on the teacher. The physical environment in which learning must take place and the availability of suitable resources will also impact on the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

This study attempted to describe the classroom practices of two teachers of the grade six in two Jamaican primary schools as they attempt to teach primary science to the young children in their charge. In this study you will find a description of the teachers' science knowledge, their perceptions of the teaching and

learning of science and the availability of appropriate resources that are needed to provide meaningful learning experiences. I also attempted to provide explanations for the classroom practices of these two teachers.

A qualitative approach was used in order to give voice to each of the two teachers. Observation of the teachers as they teach, interviews conducted with each teacher and examination of their lesson plans provided valuable information on the classroom practices, their perceptions of the teaching and learning of science and the science knowledge of these teachers.

The results of the study indicated that the classroom practices of these two teachers seemed to be strongly influenced by their science knowledge and their own perception of the teaching and learning of science. This was reflected in the teaching strategies that they used, the learning experiences they provided for the children in the classroom and the limited attempt that was made to stimulate students' interest in science. The resources available for the teaching of primary science also influenced their classroom practices.

The teaching strategies used by both teachers were selected primarily to enhance content delivery. This resulted in the students being provided with little or in some instances no opportunities for the development and use of scientific process

skills and attitudes. Content delivery was the main focus in both classrooms. Attempts at stimulating students' interest were evident in one classroom but appeared to have been absent from the other. The science knowledge of the participants seemed to have been less than adequate.

The teacher training programs in the Teacher Training Colleges, therefore, need to focus on significantly improving the science knowledge of student teachers as well as positively influencing student teachers' perception of the teaching and learning of science. The Ministry of Education needs to conduct regular training workshops for in-service teachers and provide the Primary Schools with suitable furniture and other resource materials that are needed to enhance the teaching and learning of primary science.

Keywords: Primary Science; Teaching Primary Science; Science Knowledge; Teaching Strategies; Process Skills; Teacher Perception; Children and Primary Science