

ABSTRACT

Principal leadership and primary school
effectiveness in the North Eastern Education
District of Trinidad and Tobago:
Cases and Perspectives

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A case study was designed to examine and analyse the principles and practices of three selected primary school principals in the rural North Eastern Education District of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago who were considered effective by their colleagues and the district school supervisors. The origins and development of the primary sector of the local education system, with reference to the District, and its psycho-social, historical legacy on school administration laid the groundwork for the study. Leadership approaches to school effectiveness were further explored in a wide-ranging literature review. The review provided a theoretical foundation for the research design in terms of the behavioural, programmatic and culturally specific concerns of the principal as leader.

An inductive, qualitative analysis of multiple sources of data revealed that the subjects displayed a professional and occupational identity that was committed to a community service ideal in remote, rural localities. The traditional, bureaucratic role of the primary school administrator was challenged as the principals established their leadership profiles at the centre of school and community life at both the instructional and cultural levels. Theirs was a personal identity to be shared with their communities at large rather than a prescribed role mandated by the established authority, the Ministry of Education, to be performed mainly within the confines of the school.

In recognition of the social and economic deficits of their students, the three principals initiated non-conventional programmes suited to the cultural contexts of their charges, using the human and technical resources available both within and outside of the school. The teachers, parents and other members of the respective communities developed full faith in the ability of the principals. The perceived domination of the subjects became legitimized as their staff members and others grew to believe that both their expert and referent power, which the leaders willingly shared with their followers, justified their moral and professional authority. This authority was vindicated by the acknowledgement of the subjects themselves that advanced professional training, evidenced in their practice, was essential to the effectiveness of primary school principals in the contemporary era.