

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS'
CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

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This study adopted a qualitative method using a phenomenological approach as advocated primarily by Van Manen (1990). Chapter one includes an introduction with the background, problem statement, research questions, purpose and significance of the study. The literature review in chapter two provides an indication of the available research while chapter three outlines the methods used to collect and analyse data. In chapter four I constructed a rich description, with appropriate interpretation embedded in hermeneutic phenomenology.

The purpose of the research was to investigate primary teachers' conceptions, thinking and experience of Social Studies, and innovation in the curriculum. All participants are currently full-time or part-time student-teachers at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Purposive sampling was utilized to select a team of four who experienced both the former and the new innovative Social Studies curriculum. The purpose was to describe the essence of meanings as unearthed from the information gathered.

Data was collected through group meetings, informal talks, emails, text messages, and observations but more importantly in-depth interviews. Several themes emerged from the data, the most important being Social Studies as Life and Daily Living; together with Self-efficacy; Understanding Self and Others in the International Context; and Explorations. The co-researchers also saw innovation as an improvement and expressed the view that it must benefit students. Their responses indicated that they experienced mixed emotions including fear, uncertainty, apathy, happiness and excitement. The data also revealed that teachers experienced a shift in thinking, gravitated towards embracing the new curriculum, and saw research as a critical factor. However participants were vague in their understanding of the inevitable controversies and complexities which characterize social life in this postmodern era. These findings are important for review of the curriculum, and providing information for stakeholders including teachers, principals, teacher-educators, curriculum planners, consultants and policy makers.

Keywords: Leela Ramsook; Phenomenology; Curriculum innovation; Conceptions of Social Studies; Experiences and Teacher-thinking