



**FACILITATING
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
FROM
RHETORIC TO REALITY**

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And

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*"The best laid scheme of
mice and men
Often go awry"*

Robert Burns,
"To a Mouse"

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No matter how carefully a project is planned, even though we plan to the best of our ability, something may still go wrong with it



THE PROJECT

The *Parent Empowerment to Enhance the Performance of Students (PEEPS)* Project was designed to work with guardians/parents of students at the primary school level to facilitate their active participation in the holistic development of their children/charges.



- The project is facilitated by researchers from the School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine and the National Parents teachers Association, Trinidad and Tobago.
- Two low performing schools were identified
 - Rural co-ed
 - Urban boys'



THE TEAM

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AIM OF PROJECT

- To determine the needs of parents/guardians of Standard three students with respect to their ability to actively support the academic and other school activities of their children/charges .
- To mount an action research project aimed at helping parents/guardians to be better equipped to participate in their children's education.



RESEARCH QUESTION

- To what extent does the school ethos impact on parent involvement at low performing rural co-ed school?



ETHOS: DEFINITION

- The aims, principles and expectations that a school sets out, both explicitly and implicitly, to support the process of enabling learning in an ordered, safe and secure environment.
- It reflects the beliefs of the school and encompasses a set of values that it aims to promote across its curriculum and sets the climate and outlook of the school.



- The school ethos ‘...is reflected in the way pupils relate to each other, how pupils relate to staff, and how the school relates to the community it serves’



THE SCHOOL

- Rural – low performing
- Enrolment: 60 students
- Denominational
- School Board.
- 6 teachers
- Vice-principal retired (was not replaced)
- 1 principal (first one ill retired)
- School had no principal for two terms (teacher in charge)
- New principal.



THE RHETORIC: GREAT EXPECTATIONS

- Prepare plan from an ecological systems perspective to work with parents using appreciative inquiry to identify parents social capital .
- The theory was based on the premise that human beings do not develop in isolation but are influenced by their interactions with their family, home, school, community and the society at large (Bronfrenbrenner1975,)



THE RHETORIC CONTINUED

- This approach is conceptualised as " both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p.159).



METHODOLOGY

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Theatre Arts
- Workshops
- Audio visual aids



THE REALITY: EXPERIENCE FROM THE FIELD

Learned helplessness-Seligman and Maier(1967)

- The state of mind created when animal/human being learns to behave helplessly, even with the means to escape or avoid an unpleasant situation



OUR EXPERIENCE/FINDINGS

○ **Low enrollment**

“ The board wanted to close the school because we of the low numbers. I am not sure how long we will continue. The parents do not want to send the children to our school” (Standard 2 teacher).

○ **Lack of interest by original school board and principal**

“ Well I am not well. I had triple bypass. I do not want to over-exert myself. The children’s parents are not coming when we call. I am not sure what to do again.”



- Drab physical structure
- Lack of motivation by teachers

“ I do not feel motivated to teach. The students are not working to the best of their ability. Many parents cannot help their children (Standard 5 teacher).

- Absenteeism by teachers/principal

“ the principal is not here today again. I am not sure if he will be in tomorrow.” (teacher in charge)



OUR EXPERIENCE/FINDINGS

- Low expectation at SEA exams
 - *“ I have six students in my class. They are too weak to write the SEA. Imagine I invited the parents to a meeting to discuss the upcoming SEA only two parents came” (Standard five teacher)*
 - No interest in PTA movement
- “Parents are not interested in becoming a part of the PTA.” (Standard one teacher).*
- Lack of autonomy by principal *“ I can't do anything without the Board approval” (New principal)*



OUR EXPERIENCE/FINDINGS

- Do not see school as an asset in community

“The school does not help us much. The principal is never at school. How can he help us?” (parent)

- Seldom visit school to discuss child 'progress and performance

“I do not get time off from work to come to school. I am a single parent. I need the job to take care of my children.” (parent)



○ Do think they can make a difference.

“ tell us what we should do. You are the experts.
We can work with your plans.”(grand parent).



CHANGES

- New Principal started with gusto!
- Improve physical structure
- Increase involvement by Board
- Increase number of meetings between parents, Principal and teachers
- Home visits by Principal
- Community involvement
- By the end of the first term he too felt helpless.



DISCUSSION

- The findings suggest:
- That the teachers have been in a learned helpless situation for so long ,that even with the circumstances changing i.e. Cleaner environment
- New principal
- Improve physical structure
- Increased Board involvement



- Improved physical structure and increased participation by the board and principal in school related matters increases involvement of teachers but not parents.

