

**TEACHERS' VIEWS OF QUALITY
TEACHING/LEARNING AT THE INFANT LEVEL
IN A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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This study sought to gain an understanding of the quality of teaching and learning provided at a newly built primary school. This school was intended to provide a setting for high-quality education for young children, and was equipped with modern physical facilities. A qualitative approach was used to obtain teachers' views of the quality of teaching and learning provided at the Infant level of the school. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The questions that guided the study were: (a) What are teachers' views about factors that support quality teaching and learning in the Infant Department of a primary school? and (b) What are teachers' views about factors that inhibit quality teaching and learning in the Infant Department of a primary school? The findings indicated that the quality of teaching and learning provided in the Infant level classrooms was influenced by a number of factors related to the home/school connection, critical school support, teacher attributes, and student attributes. New findings about educational change issues that could facilitate quality teaching when moving to a new school setting also emerged.

Introduction

The thrust of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to provide quality teaching and learning at the early childhood level can be situated within the context of its ratification of international and regional agreements. The importance of providing high-quality education for all from the early childhood level was recognized since the 1990 Jomtien *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990). Later, *The Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000) identified goals for the early childhood and primary school levels, which focus on both quantitative and qualitative expansion of the sectors, to provide education for all.

At the regional level, the CARICOM Heads of Government adopted a "Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development" (1997). This plan identified key issues of focus for providing quality early education. Charles and Williams (2006) identified progress towards achieving early childhood goals in the

Caribbean, but there is still much room for improvement in terms of quality provision.

It is against this backdrop of government initiatives to provide quality early childhood programming for children that this study was conducted. The study investigated teachers' views of quality teaching and learning at the Infant level of a primary school. It sought to determine the success of a major investment in school buildings and infrastructure in improving the quality of teaching and learning at one primary school in Trinidad. The investigation was limited to a study of the views of four teachers in the Infant department of the school. The findings provide an insight into issues to be considered when attempts are made to improve the quality of education. The study was conducted in the Infant department to understand factors that could affect the teaching of young children at a time when the foundation for future learning is being established.

To the best of our knowledge, no similar study has been conducted to determine teachers' views of their experience with change resulting from government expenditure to achieve educational improvement. Research in this area is important because the literature suggests that successful change in education is difficult to achieve. Further, as educational investments in new schools are increasing, research is needed to identify and address possible barriers to improving the quality of schools. Additionally, it is quite likely that the components that need to be carefully managed include providing the support teachers say they need. It seems quite likely that success will depend not only on improving the school buildings and materials, but also on ensuring that stakeholders, including teachers, are equipped for and committed to the change effort. It is for these reasons that this study of teachers' views was conducted.

The questions that guided the study were:

1. *What are teachers' views about factors that support quality teaching and learning in the Infant Department of a primary school?*
2. *What are teachers' views about factors that inhibit quality teaching and learning in the Infant Department of a primary school?*

Quality in Early Childhood Education

Increased attention is being given to the quality of education provided for young children. This is because a strong relationship has been suggested between aspects of classroom quality and improvements in social and academic outcomes for young children (Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Defining quality, however, continues to be challenging. Moss

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and Dahlberg (2008) define quality as an attribute of services for young children which ensures that stated developmental outcomes or learning goals are efficiently achieved. They further explain that quality is determined by the existence of criteria established by experts.

Those criteria, stated as standards of practice for quality in education, are being developed in many countries. In the United Kingdom, the government established quality criteria by using the findings from a commissioned research review. Seven indicators of good quality preschools that have a positive effect on child development were identified:

- adult-child interaction that is responsive, affectionate, and readily available
- well-trained staff committed to working with children
- facilities that are safe and sanitary, and welcoming to parents
- ratios and group sizes that allow staff to interact appropriately with children
- supervision that maintains consistency
- staff development that ensures continuity, stability, and the improvement of quality
- a developmentally appropriate curriculum

In the United States of America, the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) has become a primary measure used to assess quality and inform policy decisions (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005). A study conducted to determine how researchers using the ECERS-R were defining the construct to be measured found wide variation in the definition or conceptualization of quality (La Paro, Thomason, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, & Cassidy, 2012). That review of 76 studies revealed that, for example, some researchers interpreted quality as “classroom quality” while others examined “environmental quality.” The study concluded that although the ECERS-R can provide understandings of broad “global” measures of quality, different interpretations of quality could yield inaccurate understanding of the construct measured. The researchers further pointed out that the ECERS-R provided only limited information on areas such as support for teachers, outdoor play environments, or instructional strategies. The researchers recommended that alternative assessments of quality be also considered since findings are important for informing recommendations and interventions for programmes.

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In the Caribbean, the importance of education for all beginning at the early childhood level was recognized after the 1990 *Jomtien Declaration* (UNESCO, 1990). *The Dakar Framework* (UNESCO, 2000) further endorsed the importance of learning from birth, as well as the idea that quality early childhood experiences benefit children's growth, learning, and development (Myers, 2004). The *Framework* also identified goals for achieving quality provision, which include good quality primary education by 2015 and the expansion and improvement of early education provision.

At the regional level, the *Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development* (1997) identified key issues of focus for providing quality early education, which include equitable access to quality provision, particularly for disadvantaged children, and an increase in research to inform the development of the early childhood sector. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007* (UNESCO, 2006) later provided a sense of progress towards achieving early childhood goals in the Caribbean. Though the report focuses on the preschool level (birth–5 years old), aspects of its findings are also applicable to the early primary school years, which serves young children 5–8 years old.

The report identified the existence of varying standards of care and quality, and highlighted the urgent need to raise the outputs of early childhood care and education (ECCE) service provision to a higher level. The report further endorsed international research on the importance of quality early learning environments for improved developmental outcomes. Those quality early learning environments include standards of practice for teachers, as well as resources and structures for adult/child, parent/institution, and child/child interactions. They also include resources and their use, and learning opportunities provided.

The findings of a research study conducted in Jamaica identified indicators of quality provision that impact on children's outcomes in early childhood (Williams & Charles, 2008). This first comprehensive longitudinal study of 5 to 6-year-olds profiled the status of children and their learning environments on entry to schools in Jamaica. It was conducted because of concern for, and lack of data on, grade repetition and primary school failure. The study also addressed the absence of information on the preschool child related to health issues, as well as upbringing and learning capacities. Of the 19 indicators identified by the study, five were found to be most significant for child outcomes: socio-economic status, parental education, parental stress, reading books, and early childhood experience. Additionally, since the differences between school types were more noticeable than between social status groups, the

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findings implied that child outcomes could be improved by enhancing the quality of the environments in which children learn and develop.

This study and other national studies conducted in Jamaica, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, the Commonwealth of Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as studies on the whole education sector in Montserrat and Grenada, swayed beliefs in the region towards understanding that quality learning environments could improve children's outcomes in the early years. Additionally, they influenced policy decisions to invest in early childhood development services. Though the assessment of quality may have been limited to "global" measures (La Paro et. al., 2012), useful insights were provided. The findings revealed that throughout the region, the learning environments were not generally structured in a way that reflected how young children learn best. The findings and recommendations helped to foster initiatives such as advocating for early childhood methodologies to inform curriculum reform in preschools and early primary education (Williams & Charles, 2008).

Trinidad and Tobago made a commitment to providing good quality education for all children by 2015. That commitment relates to improving every aspect of the quality of education and ensuring excellence. To this end, the Ministry of Education's *Strategic Plan 2002–2006* includes objectives for the provision of quality education to citizens at all levels (Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002). Standards of practice have therefore been developed which identify quality practices for educating young children. These understandings of quality practices should therefore guide educational change efforts.

Educational Change Issues

Change can be described as the adoption of an innovation where the main goal is to improve outcomes through an alteration of practices (Carlopio, 1998). Several factors influence the success or failure of an educational change effort. One influence is the culture of the school. School culture is a critical consideration in analysing educational change situations since it can facilitate or hinder change. School culture refers to basic beliefs and assumptions about operations, such as what should be taught, how children learn, and the role of the school in addressing broader social issues. The history of the school largely determines the culture that exists. The culture is reflected in the way the school conducts, for example, ceremonies, rituals, and its accomplishments (Altrichter & Elliot, 2000).

Another consideration in examining changes in educational settings is the idea that change occurs at different levels. Further, most changes occur at the superficial level. Sarason (1996) calls this *Type B change*. This occurs when, for example, the teacher changes the seating arrangement to accommodate group work. Slightly deeper change occurs when, for example, teaching methods change. Further, Altrichter and Elliot (2000) note that for real sustained change to occur, basic beliefs and assumptions that shape school culture must also change.

Finnan and Levin (2000) have identified five critical components of beliefs and assumptions to be changed: the school's expectations for students, students' expectations for their school experience, expectations for adults in the school community, beliefs about acceptable educational practices, and beliefs about the desirability of educational change. Additionally, when decisions are made at the state level, a sense of powerlessness may be created at the school site.

The Rand Study of education innovation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978) presented a comprehensive review of 25 years of change efforts. The study found that teachers were critical to the success of an educational change effort. Also, there were four stages of change: mobilization, implementation, adoption, and institutionalization. The study further found that innovations were seldom fully adopted. A crucial influence on adoption in the form intended was the manner in which innovations were introduced, monitored for use, and supported. Further, even when adopted, educational innovations rarely actually became institutionalized. Factors that affected institutionalization were related to changes in personnel, lack of resources, and, most significantly, lack of support for teachers' use of the innovation.

Teachers should therefore be an important consideration in educational change efforts. Some researchers have found that teachers must be an integral part of the change process (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Further, Cochran-Smith (2002) expressed the view that making teachers part of the change process must begin with their professional preparation. This idea is linked to the views of Carlopio (1998), who stated that change is not a "decision event" but rather a social process that occurs over a period of time. As a result, those involved in the change must engage in a learning process. This helps them to appreciate the aims and goals of the proposed change, and to make adjustments to accommodate the new practices. Therefore, planning for personal and professional growth of individuals before attempting to implement change is important.

The literature seems to suggest, therefore, that change in education should be carefully managed since there are several components that

must succeed for the change to occur as intended. Also, teachers should understand the proposed change and be carefully supported throughout the change process, as they are critical to the success of an educational innovation.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to gain an understanding of the factors that might be impacting the quality of teaching and learning provided at the Infant level of an urban primary school in Trinidad. In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, four teachers were chosen for the study using a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling facilitates the selection of cases that allow the researcher to discover, understand, and gain insights into the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, fictitious names have been given to the participants and other persons mentioned in the study. The participants were all certified teachers with a range of teaching experience: Mary had taught for 19 years, 13 of which had been spent teaching Infants; Edith had taught for 18 years, 3 of which had been spent teaching Infants; Tricia had taught for 16 years, 11 of which had been spent teaching Infants; and Beryl had taught for two years, both of which had been spent teaching Infants. All the teachers had a teaching diploma, and Edith also had an undergraduate degree in Psychology.

Data were collected through audio-taped interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and sought to obtain the teachers' views on:

1. what helped, or did not help, teaching at the Infant level;
2. the ways in which supports for teachers had improved, or not improved, over the years;
3. the qualities of a good Infant teacher;
4. why some children in their class learn better than others;
5. what they could do to improve their teaching;
6. what could be done to help children improve their learning;
7. what served as a deterrent to their teaching and what change they would like to see;
8. what served as a deterrent to children's learning and what change they would like to see; and
9. how teaching and learning could be improved at their school.

Verbatim transcription was done of all the interviews. The data analysis process involved coding the data, comparing the codes, and grouping similar or related codes to form themes. It was an ongoing, iterative process in which the codes and themes generated were constantly reviewed and refined.

Two strategies—peer reviewing and member checking—were employed in this study to establish trustworthiness or credibility of the findings. Firstly, in the peer reviewing process, the transcripts were analysed independently by both researchers. The researchers then met to compare and discuss the codes assigned to the data as well as the emerging themes. The second strategy, member checking, involved taking the data (the interview transcripts) back to the participants, and asking them to clarify points and/or issues emerging from the analysis. The member checking process also sought to ensure that our interpretations of the data were in line with the participants' meanings.

Findings

Teachers' views of what facilitated or impeded quality teaching and learning in the Infant level of the school were linked to three main areas: critical school supports, home/school connection, and existing challenges.

Critical School Supports

Teacher attributes. Three teachers believed that an important part of teaching and learning was the need to be caring to the students, and to show a genuine interest in their long-term development. Caring and commitment were therefore important teacher attributes. Mary noted:

This is the foundation, and once you show these children genuine love...show them that you really care about their education and that you really want them to learn...and you will go all out to ensure that, that is what is necessary.

The teacher's ability to make the learning experience exciting for students was also seen as an asset in providing quality teaching and learning. Mary stressed that one needed to be "*an exciting teacher, a creative teacher, a genuinely interested teacher and...genuinely love children.*" For Mary, genuine interest and love for students meant ensuring that they were well disciplined and that they covered the syllabus. She stressed that a good student "*pays attention...follows instruction... [and] is not disruptive.*" She insisted that the students remain silent and focused on the task assigned to them at all times.

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Like Mary, Edith expressed a commitment to making a difference in the students' lives and to their long-term development as individuals:

To me, this is what I envision as a good teacher, not just the curriculum because we have a national test or SEA [Secondary Entrance Assessment] or whatever, but the individuals themselves so that you can move them from one stage to the next. So at least they will be that much better having left you than when they first came.

However, unlike Mary, Edith's idea of caring and commitment to students meant creating a more relaxed and interactive environment in the classroom. Beryl's view of a caring teacher was one who allowed students to be, "Loud and boisterous and say anything that comes to their mind as soon as I ask a question." She cared for her students by giving them the freedom to say or do whatever they felt like most of the time.

The fourth teacher, Tricia, did not express the need for teachers to be caring and committed. Instead, she focused on the importance of teaching experience to quality teaching. She said that teacher training college did not prepare her for teaching. Her view was that, "They [the Ministry of Education] tend to drop you straight out of college and you are like 'What to do?'" Tricia had experienced six transfers after completing her training. Her views appeared to represent understandings and techniques that she had developed for teaching students, based on her teaching experiences. She said, "Once they have the behaviour, then you have no problem teaching and they listen then, and you don't have to discipline the child." Tricia also stated that at the Infant level:

You have to change your language. You have to literally bring it all the way down. You even have to use slang with them. First you break it down then you raise it to Standard English. You cannot speak Standard English with them at first because some of them don't know what you mean.

Tricia also felt that some students who did not get assistance with homework, and as a result could not answer questions in class, knew "nothing at all." This tabula rasa understanding seemed to justify her classification of children who did not do homework as less able to learn than others. It may more likely have been disadvantaged home situations that affected students' learning. Tricia also appeared to have been using intuitive ideas rather than sound pedagogical knowledge when she spoke of a class as a good or bad batch of students. She said, "Well this batch good, they could read, the parents speak to me, I talk to them." Her

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views reflected whole class teaching rather than teaching that recognized the importance of facilitating parent partnerships and catering for individual differences.

Mary, however, was quite clear that the teacher needed to facilitate parental involvement; the teacher needs to accommodate regular visits by the parents to communicate about the educational progress and needs of the child. Mary said:

I always tell my parents please come and visit me on a regular basis; let me tell you about your child, don't let me see you only on orientation day and then I don't see you after that. I want you to come, tell me Miss when can I come? And I will let you know....that's why I have a parent-teacher correspondence book....every child has one.

The teacher also needed knowledge of home issues that impact on learning in special situations. Edith felt that the teacher needed to know the child's home situation to provide quality teaching for individual differences. She said: *"You need to know who is your clientele, know who you're working with and know the background as well - the families from which they come."* She spoke of a boy who had not been performing. By the second term she realized that something was wrong and spoke to his mother when she eventually saw her. She learnt that there had been a divorce and the boy was having difficulty doing his schoolwork because he missed his father. In dealing with problems in the classroom, Edith seemed to draw on her years of experience in teaching and her knowledge of home issues that might impact on children's learning. She reflected on her experience in dealing with similar situations and commented:

When you know these things [source of students' problems], you will realize that the child is not always trying to be deliberately delinquent or disobedient, but they have things on their minds and you can't teach the A, B, C and the 1, 2, 3 without settling the issues they have on their minds.

Resources. All four teachers expressed the view that the availability of resources was a critical school support needed for teaching at the Infant level. Mary said that at the Infant level children need to be involved in a lot of tactile activities to help concretize concepts. Tricia further added that resources were important, *"because we don't stress too much on writing. [During] the last term we stress on writing. At first it's more eye-hand coordination and things like that to get the motor skills going."*

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Further, they felt that the lack of resources was a problem that existed prior to the move to the new school building and persisted after the move. Mary said: *“The Ministry does not provide many things.”* Beryl added: *“They [the Ministry of Education] supply a couple, like the Jolly Phonics which I am heavy into ...and the books to go along with it but that’s just phonics.”* With this understanding of the importance of resources to Infant teaching, the teachers attempted to meet the shortfall by using their own finances and creativity. Tricia further stated that teachers purchased most of the resources they needed. Mary endorsed this point when she said: *“Most of the time we have to get our own resources. We have to recycle a lot like old toilet paper rolls and bottle covers.”* Beryl expressed her disappointment with the lack of resources supplied. She felt that the availability of a well-stocked resource room for teachers’ use would make teaching easier.

Using their own initiative at the new school site, the teachers attempted to establish a resource room. Tricia said:

At the beginning we had arranged for a resource room. We have the room, but it's empty. I'm hoping at least we can buy resources, put them in the room so teachers can use them and put them back. Like a library system.

Beryl added that the new school included other rooms but not a resource room. She said: *“We have a Diagnostics Room...we have a special room...we don’t really have a resource room per se.... I have my own resources.”*

Conducive learning environment. The teachers said that the learning environment should meet certain criteria to be conducive to quality teaching and learning. They all acknowledged that the new school environment was more conducive to learning and supported quality teaching and learning. Mary reflected on the heat, noise, and other unfavourable physical conditions at the old school that had negatively impacted on learning. She said: *“We had to put up with heat and noise and lack of facilities and so on and whenever it’s raining we would get wet....we didn’t have the yard space and a lot of different problems we had.”* She also added that the air conditioning at the new school site helped. She said:

When we were at the older building, after lunch, work could not take place because at that time you are sweaty, you are hot, you are tired. Everyone just want to sleep.....here full of energy; even at 1 o’clock, half one, quarter to two, 2 o’clock we want to go on to something else. We are not so easily tired.

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An appropriate school building benefited both the teachers and children. Mary said:

I am feeling it and experiencing it...as a teacher, I have the energy, I have more energy. I can do more, I have nothing to distract me; no outside noise...and we can work...you should hear the deafening silence inside here when we are working.

She also added that the children were more willing to learn, more receptive, and:

they listen more, they can hear you better; I don't have to shout. Whereas before you had to be shouting; I'd go home, my voice sore, now they could hear you....I would say there is a drastic improvement and you know what? I believe in a few years to come we will see the results in SEA and so on.

Mary further described the inhumane conditions at the former school. She said:

To me it was inhumane; we didn't have a sick bay, a staffroom, nothing like that. At one time we were sharing bathrooms with the male members of staff; we had to even fight for that....you come to school, you open your cupboard, a rat jumps out at you, and your books are sticky with urine. That's terrible, terrible! No place for the children to play. So thank God we are now in this environment.

Mary expressed the view that an appropriate adult-child ratio was 14 or 15 to one teacher. All teachers had a similar view. They therefore felt that when the ratio was increased to 25 students to one teacher, quality teaching was compromised. Mary said that the increase in student numbers was a challenge. She said: "*Over at the old school site, you had a smaller number.*" She also added that, as a result, teachers got accustomed to providing "*individual attention and correcting work faster and having a faster turnover.*"

Also, the Infant programme was organized around a two-year cycle. As a consequence, the increase in students in the second year disrupted the established two-year teaching plan for Infants, and further compromised quality for the new students who were accepted without going to first year. Mary said:

Here actually at the beginning it was challenging with the 25 children...because the extra that I got...remember this is 2nd Year and we usually have them for 2 years, we do a rotation. When they come into 1st Year they stay with me until 2nd Year

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and then from 2nd Year they go to Standard 1. So I would've had them for a year and I would've known them and their strengths and weaknesses so when I came here and I got that extra 10, I had to start over with those 10...they were not accustomed to me, they were not accustomed to my style of teaching, so I had to like teach them discipline and so on.

Special supports for Infant teaching. This theme was quite strong. Teachers repeatedly stated that teaching young children needs special supports and considerations for quality teaching that may not necessarily apply to the higher classes. Mary, for example, spoke about needing a teacher assistant because the hands-on workload in the Infant classes is greater. She stressed:

I strongly believe that we need assistants at the Infant level. Every class suppose to have one because the volume of work that we have to do...the amount of corrections...we have to go to each child, it's not like they're so independent...you have to go to each child to ensure that they have the correct number of blocks or whatever...we do things like that and it is very important for me to have a lot of help....so that would help.

Mary added that when she got an assistant through the On-the-Job-Training (OJT) programme it really helped her. The assistant cut shapes and stuck worksheets while she was able to focus on the task of teaching. Further, Mary's view was that the school did not provide the teacher with remedial reading support to make the child ready to learn to read in her class.

Preparation for relocation. Teachers also expressed the view that moving to a new school building was a special event, which needed careful planning to ensure that the intended outcome of providing an improved quality teaching service was achieved. Additionally, the unique conditions and problems at the old school site should be understood to plan for the changes. This did not occur in the transition from the old to the new building. Teachers therefore reflected on the resulting problems they experienced throughout the transition period. The special factors that should have been considered in planning the transition were related to the prolonged period of adverse conditions that teachers and students had experienced at the old school. Mary said that teachers had experienced a lot of hardship specific to that school. She reflected:

We went through so much and to me it was a lot of psychological trauma we went through and then to just come here and expect us to make a sudden turn around; I find that was a bit harsh. I

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think we should have been given the opportunity to get counseling to prepare us, to prepare the children about this new environment and so on.

Beryl added:

None of the teachers got to finish their 3rd term; we didn't even have promotion for the 2nd Years because of that major disruption because we were out of classes over a month and then they had their August vacation and came back to [the new] school.

Teachers therefore believed that they needed a period of adjustment to their new surroundings before teaching began and both teachers and students needed counselling services to assist the transition. Mary stated:

Something was wrong with my hearing because of the noise...sometimes you couldn't hear yourself because it was all enclosed where we were. I found that we should have been given at least two weeks into the new term for us to settle and to have some counselling sessions and for us to talk about our feelings to just bring things out; whatever we were hiding inside and I found that we didn't have that forum...to heal, so we all went into our classrooms and we all had to do our own things.

Mary also said: *"I think we needed that time to recuperate from the years...it was like almost five years we were displaced and then prior to that we had all the problems."* Additionally, since they had to move into an unfinished building that was still under construction, the health of teachers and students, who might have been affected by the construction dust at the new site, should have been a consideration.

Teachers believed that even though the move was complete they could still benefit from counselling. Mary supported her point by saying that:

Teaching is not only about delivering a syllabus, it's not all about that; we are preparing individuals to live in this world....this is about a holistic education, coming to school and I believe that we need people to come in, to speak to the children [about] just basic things about life and about how we should live as human beings, with one another and with our environment and so on....we should have that for children and for the teachers. And you know what? We should ask the teachers how they feel and don't just dictate to them and expect that as adults we will just fall into place.

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There was a view that teachers felt hurt because the school management was trying to dictate quality practices rather than listening to teachers' needs and ideas, and providing the supports they recommended. Mary expressed her dissatisfaction with the method used to demand improvement. She said methods to get teachers to improve their teaching included telling them, "All eyes are on you." She also added: "You cannot be 'buffing' people and expect a miracle. They are accustomed to a certain lifestyle."

The findings are summarized in Table 1, which lists the five areas of Critical Supports needed at the school level for quality teaching and learning to occur, and provides details on each area. The most detailed explanations were provided for three areas, namely, teacher attributes, a conducive learning environment, and preparation for relocation. The teachers seemed to place most value on these areas of support.

Table 1. Critical School Supports Needed for Quality Teaching and Learning

Support Categories	Details
1. Teacher Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caring and committed to students• Make learning exciting for students• Facilitate parental involvement• Have knowledge of home issues that impact on learning• Teaching experience
2. Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Necessary for Infant teaching; limited writing at that level• A well-stocked resource room is needed
3. Conducive Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cool and quiet classrooms• Yard space for children to play• Adult-child ratio of 14 or 15 children to one teacher• Teacher stays with children for two years
4. Special Supports for Infant Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A teacher assistant is needed because hands-on workload in the Infant classes is greater• Remedial reading support should be provided by the school

Support Categories	Details
5. Preparation for Relocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The unique conditions and problems at the old school site should be considered in planning for the change• Counselling is needed for teachers and students• A period of adjustment is needed before teaching at the new school begins• Teachers' views should be considered

Home/School Connection

Parental support for learning. Mary expressed the view that quality teaching involves the important element of parental support at home for the learning that takes place at school. She stated that:

the children who are very successful in my view are those who when they go home....education continues; they learn their work, they read...they're suppose to read every day at home in any case.....they do their homework, do their projects and so on.

She continued that “*the parents [who] are genuinely helpful and interested in their children’s education... are the children who are always successful.*” Tricia shared a similar view. She said: “*Some of them, their parents don’t mind putting out. They do things at home with their children. They buy all the books and resources for their children.*” Mary also said that another deterrent to quality teaching occurred when “*you send for a copy book or two and they don’t send it.*” Her point was that when parents do not provide necessary school supplies, teaching at school is negatively affected. Mary further stated that in most cases the deterrent to quality teaching and learning at school was “*the lack of support at home.*” Edith said:

I don’t want to make it sound so bad like I’m not getting any [support] but there are those who [support]...the other 50%, they just totally fall short and it affects the students’ work in the class so I’m getting the things done but it’s just not the way I would like it. There is a lack of support when children arrive at school without discipline and the teacher has to discipline them before teaching.

Tricia said: “*Behaviour-wise....if the children come to school without behaviour, then you have discipline problems in school and that affects what you can do in class.*” Beryl noted:

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The children I have trouble with are the ones that are not supported and some of them [parents] are very vocal... I have one particular child, I ask him to have his mother come in, well we usually write to our parents and they write back but I really needed to talk to her one-on-one and when she came she made it known to me that she is missing a day's work and she turns to her child after...like I am not finished talking to her, I'm not finished discussing everything with her, she calls him and says "this is \$350 I am missing to be here" and that's how the conversation went. When I was saying to her that his letters are not formed properly or some of them back-to-front [reversed], she would say "well I think he doing real good" and I would say "yes he is but there's room for improvement." Doing good is different to being at the class level, and that's what we're working on.

Parents' expectation for children. Beryl wanted to raise parents' expectation for their children's performance. She felt that all children should be performing at the average class level. However, some parents had a mindset that said once the child was learning something new it was good enough.

Parent/teacher communication. Mary believed that an open line of communication should be established between the teacher and the parent. This leads to improvements in the child's work. She reflected:

Parents will always communicate with me and we always have the line of communication open. It is very important to have that connection with your parents; that's the only way they know you as teacher. They know the children's ability and so on and we work together and I see a lot of improvements.

An added benefit Mary noted was that parents who communicate regularly with the teacher, using the open lines of communication provided by the teacher, reward the teacher with help. She stated that: *"At the end of the term...the parents come out and help you with your class parties...all these little things."*

The findings relating to the Home/School Connection are summarized in Table 2, which lists the three areas to consider in establishing a home/school connection, and provides details to explain each area. Teachers provided most details for parental support for learning and mentioned the other two areas—parents' expectation for children and parent/teacher communication.

Table 2. Home/School Connection Needed for Quality Teaching and Learning

Home/School Connection	Details
1. Parental Support for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There should be daily continuity at home for learning that takes place at school• Parents should be genuinely helpful and interested• School supplies should be provided• Parents should discipline their children• Communicate with teachers in a non-aggressive manner
2. Parents' Expectation for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents should have high expectations for their children
3. Parent/Teacher Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An open line of communication should be established

Challenges

Inappropriate child behaviours. The findings indicate that there were some pre-existing problems at the school, which needed to be addressed as a matter of priority, in order for the new school to be established as a model of quality teaching and learning. A major problem seemed to be a lack of discipline at the school, which manifested itself in various ways: the bullying of the younger children, cursing in the corridors even in the presence of teachers, and littering of the school yard.

Beryl gave an insight into bullying at the Infant level, where the practice seemed to be quite serious:

We did say to the principal that the disruption was huge because it affected the children terribly.... They [the older pupils] would harass my children. They would do all sorts of things; they would mock them, they intimidate them, they make them very, very uneasy. Like if they were to go to the bathroom they would come and knock on the door and shake on the door.

Beryl felt that the “lack of orientation” to the new school might have contributed in part to the lack of respect and the uncaring attitude that

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students showed for the new environment. According to Beryl, she often had cause to exclaim: “*Oh my gosh look at this new place!*”

Problems in the students’ home environment were seen by all the teachers as another issue that impacted the quality of teaching and learning at the school. Edith reflected on the issue and shared the approach she sometimes used to divert the students’ minds away from their home problems:

Again the home issues...a lot of them will have that on their mind. They will come up first thing, they want to talk about what happen last night or what didn't happen last night....what I tend to do is try to pull them away from that environment, so I try to make it fun-filled in a certain way. You know in every lesson, if it is some piece of literature, or somebody could tell a story or for us to do a song or something before I even start the lesson or as part of the lesson, to try to really pull them away from that. But if I don't, that's where their mind tends to remain sometimes.

It was generally agreed that teachers needed to use their initiative in dealing with students who had home problems, but they did not feel qualified or confident in doing so. Edith lamented the fact that:

We do have a social worker but she is swamped...so we have that facility to refer the child to the social worker but then in the interim while she is being located, we still have to face the child and find the initiative. Support may come also in terms of the principal. He does sometimes say...you may go ahead and use this initiative but that is still a bug; it's a bug because though I may know of certain techniques, what to use, what not to use, not being qualified you're not sure.

Therefore, providing quality teaching and learning in the classrooms hinged a lot on the teachers’ willingness and ability to make a difference in the students’ lives.

The findings relating to existing Challenges are summarized in Table 3, which lists the two issues that seemed to undermine quality teaching and learning: Inappropriate Child Behaviours, which was a school-wide problem; and Unaddressed Home Problems, which was linked to the problem of school indiscipline. Additionally, adequate support could not be provided for unaddressed home problems that affected learning. This was because teachers were unqualified and the social worker could not handle the volume of cases.

Table 3. Challenges That Affected Quality Teaching and Learning

Challenges	Details
1. Inappropriate Child Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School Indiscipline<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Bullying of younger children○ Cursing○ Littering○ Lack of care for the new school
2. Unaddressed Home Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers were unqualified to treat children's problems• Social worker was swamped with work

Discussion

This study sought to uncover teachers' views about factors that supported or hindered quality teaching and learning at the Infant level of a primary school. The school was new with improved facilities—a marked improvement over the old school building. There were high expectations for good quality teaching and learning. The findings revealed three broad areas that seemed to impact the quality of teaching and learning in the Infant level of the school: Critical School Supports, Home/School Connection, and existing Challenges.

The Critical School Supports identified in the study were: Teacher Attributes, Resources, Conducive Learning Environment, Special Supports for Infant Teaching, and Preparation for Relocation. Of those five areas, only two were partially addressed—Providing a Conducive Learning Environment and Providing Resources. The environment was enhanced in that the building was new and improved, and air conditioned classrooms were more conducive to learning. Additionally, some resources were provided, but they were insufficient. Critical Supports were apparently not provided to improve Teacher Attributes necessary for quality teaching.

The findings revealed that even though there was a common view that caring and commitment were critical to quality teaching and learning, these attributes seemed to have different meanings to the teachers. For Mary, caring was equated with rigid discipline and keeping children on task. Even though she was well intentioned she may have been hurting

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children socially and emotionally. Edith seemed to have a more holistic view of the ethic of caring. For her, an understanding of factors in the home was often necessary for dealing with problems that arose in the classroom. Beryl, on the other hand, encouraged students to be free to express themselves in ways that seemed to contribute to chaos in the classroom.

The difference in views about quality teaching could be attributed in part to teaching experience and the level of teacher training. Edith had 18 years teaching experience and had completed an undergraduate degree in child psychology. Her views reflected contemporary understandings of how young children learn and develop, and of issues that are likely to impact on their learning. Mary had 19 years teaching experience and a diploma in teaching. Her goals seemed to focus on academic achievement and classroom discipline. Katz and Chard (2000) caution against focusing on academic goals for children. They recommend that in early education, teachers should pursue intellectual goals that encourage investigation and problem solving as opposed to strictly academic goals that limit children's cognitive development.

Beryl had two years teaching experience and had recently graduated with a Teaching Diploma. Her views about teaching and practice in the classroom reflected a laissez-faire approach to teaching.

Tricia had 16 years teaching experience. Her views seemed to have been influenced by the changes in teaching appointments she had experienced in a short space of time, and her unpreparedness for the teaching situations she met. She generalized about the needs of children in her class, which seemed not to be based on her knowledge of their individual needs. Tricia referred to children as good or bad "batches"; she believed that children who did not get help at home knew "*nothing at all*." Also, her code switching from Standard English to dialect to address all children because one child did not understand seemed to indicate a "one size fits all" approach to teaching. Since she did say that her teacher training did not prepare her for the job, more training for teaching young students would have helped.

In addition, Special Supports for Infant Teachers were apparently not provided and teachers and students did not receive Preparation for Relocation.

We can conclude, therefore, that teachers received only minimal support for quality teaching and learning. That support was limited to the non-human aspect, that is, the physical building improvement and resources. Critical supports related to the human aspects of teaching, such as providing special supports for Infant teachers and preparing

teachers and students psychologically for the relocation, were not provided.

This finding supports the position adopted by Hiebert et al. (2002) and Lieberman and Miller (2001) that teachers in an educational change effort should be an important consideration in any attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This did not occur at the site studied. Teachers were not given the time or support necessary to internalize the new goals. As a result, it seems as though teachers were right in feeling that a lot more had to be changed to provide quality teaching and learning.

The Home/School Connection also needed to be addressed. Problems that existed in relation to parental support for learning, low educational expectations on the part of parents for their children, and inadequate parent/teacher communication were not addressed. It is currently recommended practice that schools support close ties with parents and families of young children. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) advocate collaboration between families and staff to develop a relationship that benefits the child's holistic development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment* (2005) states that respect for family child-rearing practices and rights for decision making should be recognized in establishing trust between school and parents. This implies that parents and the relationship they have with their children should be considered in planning for good quality education. At the school studied this was not addressed.

Finally, the existing Challenges identified by the teachers were not addressed. Children behaved inappropriately and did not show care for their new school. In particular, there was inadequate support to resolve problems that the children brought with them from their homes. As a result, old problems persisted at the new school. This type of transfer of old problems to the new school situation could be interpreted as an undesirable school culture that did not change. Altrichter and Elliot's (2000) view that the history of the school largely determines the culture that exists should have been considered and addressed. It must be further noted that an old school culture does not automatically change with the provision of a new school building.

Additionally, Carlopio's (1998) definition of change as the adoption of an innovation mainly for improving outcomes through an alteration of practices seemed to have been what was intended. The new school facilities were intended to produce quality teaching and learning. However, teachers expressed the view that several "other" factors were not considered. The view that professional preparation and inclusion of

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teachers in the change process from the onset is necessary seems relevant to this discussion (Cochran-Smith, 2002).

Issues to Be Considered in School Improvement Initiatives

Though the findings of this qualitative research cannot be generalized, the insights gained can be considered in addressing similar situations of educational change. The writers identify some issues that should be given consideration in future efforts to implement change in the school context. Firstly, for school improvement to take place, all stakeholders (particularly teachers) should form part of a collaborative team to address the teaching/learning aspects of the school. These aspects include new and relevant perspectives on curriculum design, curriculum development, teaching, learning, and assessment, which constitute the core technologies of education. Secondly, there is the need to formulate policies, plans, and interventions, like in-house professional development workshops to change the old practices and support and sustain a regime of new practices and institutionalize them. Thirdly, reward systems, mentoring, supervision, and evaluation/assessment are also necessary structures. These are new organizational arrangements that motivate teachers and students, but they are relatively rare today in our schools and should form part of the change initiative. Finally, action research can encourage collaborative involvement, and assist with changing values and the new system of norms or professional and behavioural practices that are associated with successful change and sustainable development.

Conclusion

The views expressed by teachers regarding the provision of quality teaching and learning included what should be considered when moving to a new school. Additionally, supports for teaching young children and general improvements for providing quality education were explored. This study identified, like previous research in educational change and innovation, that creating a model school involves more than improving the school building and infrastructure. Additionally, new findings were that three specific areas of focus should be considered when establishing a model school: providing Critical School Supports, facilitating a strong Home/School Connection, and seeking to eliminate the Challenges that affect teaching and learning. A huge financial investment was made in the new school building and physical environment. However, notions of quality, excellence, effectiveness, and school improvement as being comprehensive and integrative elements that should be included in a

systems approach to culture formation were not considered. What happened was that the school shifted from an old to a new venue. As a result, the model school envisioned where teaching and learning would be at an optimum was not achieved.

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