

ABSTRACT

Students' Experiences of Secondary Schooling in Trinidad and Tobago: The First Three Years

Vena Jules

A representative random sample of 2,125 students (65 classroom groups) was selected from an intake year cohort of 19,513 students across Trinidad and Tobago. Aspects of the schooling experiences of these students were studied for the first three years of their secondary school life through annual, year-end, open-ended questionnaire responses, individual interviewing and classroom observation. Three classroom groups in three geographically clustered schools within the representative sample were observed and students and school personnel interviewed towards the end of years 2 and 3. The sampling by classroom groups allowed for multiple reporting of (an) event(s) by members of the classgroup and therefore reliability checking of these critical events by the researcher. The methodology used was phenomenography which aims for **variations**

rather than the essence of the experience. Results showed that most students liked coming to school at least sometimes. Other major findings were that boys in boys' schools where fear of punishment and shame, and interest and participation in violent acts were experienced, also experienced various types of negative emotions and the highest school attrition rates. Girls in girls' schools, who experienced feelings of belonging from the end of Year 1 had the highest survival rates and more positive social emotions. Students also experienced everywhere, long periods of teacherless time; they reported understandings that showed growing alienation from teachers and some resistance to practices that gave rise to negative feelings. Many, up to one third, liked schooling because of experiences associated with its promise, and another third, the school programme. Some watched themselves "changing from childish to mature and just trying to fit in" in classrooms layered by division - division in interaction levels, division between teachers and students and in students' levels of understanding and not knowing.