

ABSTRACT

The Experiences of Four Foreign Language Teachers on a Teacher Education Programme

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Secondary school teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago has been primarily of a part-time, in-service nature and therefore has involved high levels of stress and many challenges for the participants. The literature showed that initial teacher education often took place before teachers were put into the classroom. However, it still involved demanding elements with which candidates found issue. This study considered the experiences and perceptions of four foreign language teachers on an in-service programme, with specific reference to the challenges which they faced in implementing general elements advocated and their opinions on the relevance of the foreign language specific factors to their situations. Their personal histories and beliefs and how these might impact on their experiences were considered by many other researchers as crucial in determining their experiences of this type of programme. Since reflective practice also played a major role in this programme, and provided most of the data, their experiences and perceptions of this element were examined closely.

This is a qualitative case study and involved my spending a year in the field primarily as a participant observer. This allowed me to collect data from a questionnaire, their written reflections, observations, assignments, interviews, and discussions with the participants. The data were coded initially and then further analysed using Dey's (1993) methods of data analysis, along with interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002).

The findings revealed that these teachers experienced challenges, both general and specific, in implementing elements and in their application of foreign language specific strategies advocated. These experiences were often influenced by their past experiences of teaching and learning, their beliefs and their personal situations in and out of the institutions in which they functioned. The foreign language elements which were dominant in the data were the use of form or context as an organising factor, target language and authentic materials. It was concluded that the design of certain pertinent elements, like preparation for reflection, observation and classroom research, and the time frame of the programme should be reconsidered and that these factors should be addressed in a more comprehensive manner.

Keywords: teacher education; experiences; perceptions; challenges; teaching practice; personal histories; reflective practice; classroom research; foreign language elements; stages.