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**On-the-Job Training  
Pre-Service Teacher Training in Trinidad and Tobago**

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School of Education  
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The ideas and opinions expressed in this work are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the School of Education.

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## **PREFACE**

This monograph is one of the products of a Primary Teacher Education Research Project conducted by the School of Education, The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, as part of a much larger project organized by the Centre for International Education (CIE), University of Sussex Institute of Education, United Kingdom. The Sussex initiative, the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research (MUSTER) Project, involved research work in five countries--Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago. The project was funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID).

The School of Education gratefully acknowledges the contributions made by the CIE, DFID, and other stakeholders in the execution of the Trinidad and Tobago component of the MUSTER Project.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

APC	Assistant Programme Coordinator
CAP	Continuous Assessment Programme
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CXC	Caribbean Examinations Council
DCs	District Coordinators
DCD	Director of Curriculum Development
DES	Director of Educational Services
GCE	General Certificate of Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
MUSTER	Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project
OJT	On-the-Job Training
PC	Programme Coordinator
SIP	School Improvement Programme
SSs	School Supervisors
TTUTA	Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association
UWI	The University of the West Indies

# **On-the Job Training**

## **Pre-Service Teacher Training in Trinidad and Tobago**

### **1. Introduction**

The Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) focused on the quality of education provided in one sector of the basic education level in Trinidad and Tobago, the primary sector. Specifically, it was designed to generate understandings and explanations of the teacher education process in this sector in order to inform policy formulation, particularly with respect to teacher training. The study reported on in this paper was a sub-study of the MUSTER Project, and it focused on the Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there is no longer any full-blown pre-service teacher education programme for the primary school system. This type of programme ended in 1974 with the closure of the Mausica Teachers' College, which was the only institution designed to provide this type of pre-service training. Potential primary school teachers have typically taught for two or three years in primary schools before being admitted to the teacher education programme in one of the two government teachers' colleges, Valsayn Teachers' College and Corinth Teachers' College, or in the privately operated Caribbean Union College.

Since 1993, a specially designed On-the-Job (OJT) Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme has been used as the vehicle for providing some measure of pre-service training for prospective primary school teachers. This study explores this special programme.

### **2. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the OJT Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme in order to comprehend its origin, goals, programme design, curriculum, and organization. The following research questions guided the investigation:

- Who are recruited to be teacher trainees in the On-the-Job Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme?
- Is the programme a good filter for the teachers' college programme?
- What is the organizational culture of the programme?
- What are the stated philosophies underpinning the curriculum?
- What is the nature of the curriculum?
- How is the delivery of the curriculum organized?

### 3. Methodology

The investigative techniques used were primarily qualitative in nature, consisting of interviews of trainees and personnel involved in the organization and design of the programme, analysis of documents, and limited field observations.

In-depth interviews were conducted with personnel from the Ministry of Education who were involved in the design and conduct of the programme. These included present and past administrators and their assistants, three District Coordinators (DCs), four tutors, eight mentor teachers, and three principals. Interviews were also held with five primary school trainees, three secondary school trainees, and three graduates of the programme.

Curriculum booklets, graduation reports, reports on interviews and trainee selection, students' records, and correspondence files were the major documents used for analysis. These documents were subjected to content analysis procedures.

- The curriculum reports outlined the course content and scheduling over the year.
- The graduation reports contained information on the programme rationale, an outline of the curriculum, the procedure for selection, developments in the programme, and a synopsis of the problems affecting the trainees and the programme.
- There were files containing students' records which included the following: application forms and related application documents; evaluation forms and other certification information; claim forms (for stipends due); attendance forms; and information on the appointment of trainees in schools.
- There were also incoming and outgoing correspondence files. The incoming files contained letters from students to the administration concerning matters such as payments of stipends, reasons for absence, and so on. These incoming files also contained correspondence to the Programme Coordinator (PC) from the Chief Education Officer (CEO) and the Assistant Programme Coordinator (APC).
- The outgoing files held mainly responses to the incoming mail, the programme's proposed budgets, and directives to the DCs of the programme regarding the structure of the programme and processes for its administration.

There are eight Education Districts in Trinidad and Tobago. Limited field observations of Saturday classes (described later) were done at one centre in each of three randomly selected Education Districts. The tutors, principals, mentor teachers, and trainees who were interviewed belonged to these three Districts.

The data collected from analysis of documents, interviews, and field notes were thoroughly scrutinized in an attempt to discern any themes that would illuminate the nature and function of the programme.



There were some limitations to the data collection process. Time did not always allow for follow-up interviews. Also, not all persons targeted for interviews were in fact interviewed because of industrial action being taken by some teachers at the time of the investigation. In addition, the Tobago Education District was not included in the investigation because of the limitations of time and funding.

#### **4. Background of the Programme**

This section of the report deals with the origin of the programme, its goals and objectives, and its structure.

##### **4.1. The origin of the OJT Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme**

A "National Symposium on Employment Generation and Job Creation" was held in Trinidad and Tobago in 1992. This symposium, organized by the government, was a response to the high level of unemployment in the country at the time. One of the outcomes of the symposium was the creation of the OJT Programme; a national apprenticeship programme designed to provide working experience for young persons in various fields.

The Ministry of Education saw the creation of the OJT programme as an opportunity to sensitize young people with Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Level, and GCE A Level qualifications about the teaching profession, and to begin to groom them for possible employment in that sphere. The system of employment in the teaching service was at that time, and still is, one in which secondary school, technical college, or university graduates were often appointed without any training in pedagogy. Primary school teachers are required to have a minimum of five CXC/GCE O Level passes, inclusive of English language, mathematics, and a science subject. The secondary school teacher is typically required to have a university degree or a diploma from a technical college. However, a limited number of A Level graduates can also secure teaching positions in the secondary sector. Training in pedagogy has never been a prerequisite for employment at either the primary or secondary school level.

In May 1993, the then Director of Curriculum Development (DCD) designed a primary teacher preparation programme as part of the OJT scheme. The Permanent Secretary worked out the logistics of the pilot project for teaching assistants under the OJT apprenticeship scheme, and this was submitted to the Cabinet in a Departmental Note of the Ministry of Education on June 8, 1993. It was hoped that this programme would provide some basic training in pedagogy for participants, test their aptitude for teaching and, ultimately, eliminate those participants who were not suited to teaching. This programme was called the Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme (hereafter referred to simply as the OJT programme), and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Division of the Ministry of Education was assigned the task of administering the programme.

The recognized teachers' trade union, the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA), made some recommendations and then strongly supported the OJT plan. The Primary School Principals Association also approved the pilot project. The Denominational School Boards were asked to submit the names of prospective participants for the project. In addition, the School Supervisors (SSs) of the eight Education Districts met for two days in August 1993 and studied the structure and time frame of the plan, noting their involvement in management and administration. A team, which was made up of SSs I and II and the DCD, was formed to give direction to the programme, which began on August 3, 1993 and lasted for one year. An APC was hired in August 1993 to manage the programme. Much later during the course of the programme's implementation, in May 1994, a Steering Committee was formed, which comprised the DCD, the APC, a TTUTA representative, a primary school principal, and two SSs.

During the period February 1994 - December 1996, three subsequent programmes followed the pilot programme for potential primary school teachers. The programme was temporarily stopped in December 1996 when there was a change of government. It was revived in March 1997 and resumed in April 1997. The Cabinet Minute 662 of March 20, 1997, ordering the restarting of the programme stated:

Cabinet agreed:

To the re-instatement, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, of the 1996/1997 Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme which was discontinued with effect from January 1, 1997 when the National Apprenticeship System was terminated (Minute No. 3112 of December 5, 1996)

That the Pre-Service Training Programme be continued as part of the on-going teacher training activities of the Ministry of Education

That provision be made in the 1998 Draft Estimates of Expenditure of the Ministry of Education to meet the cost of continuing the Programme in 1998.

The OJT programme was originally designed for prospective primary school teachers, but by July 1994, a programme was prepared for prospective secondary school teachers. The committee for planning this secondary programme comprised the PC, the APC, and the coordinators of the North and South zones. There was no secondary programme in Tobago.

#### **4.2. The goals and purpose of the OJT programme**

The rationale of the programme, as it appears on all formal programme documents, is as follows:

The rationale of this scheme was to provide CXC and 'A' Level graduates with employment and training, with a view in the long term of enabling the Ministry to identify trainees with good potential for becoming teachers.

The organizers of the programme claimed that the programme was not intended to be a junior teachers' training college--it was simply meant to expose prospective teachers to

theories and practice in teaching. At the opening of the second apprenticeship primary programme in 1994, the aims of the programme were expanded further by the coordinator of the project in the Southern Division as follows:

It is hoped that trainees will:

- Develop a personal philosophy of teaching
- Value and practise exemplary teaching
- Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction
- Work collaboratively with supervisory personnel, colleagues, students and the school community, in a responsible and humane manner
- Be committed to self-improvement, life-long learning and reflective thinking
- Become agents of educational and social improvement and work with all students in an equitable, effective and caring manner, respecting diversity in relation to culture, ethnicity, gender and special needs.

The current APC, who was hired in August, 1999, summed up the goals as follows:

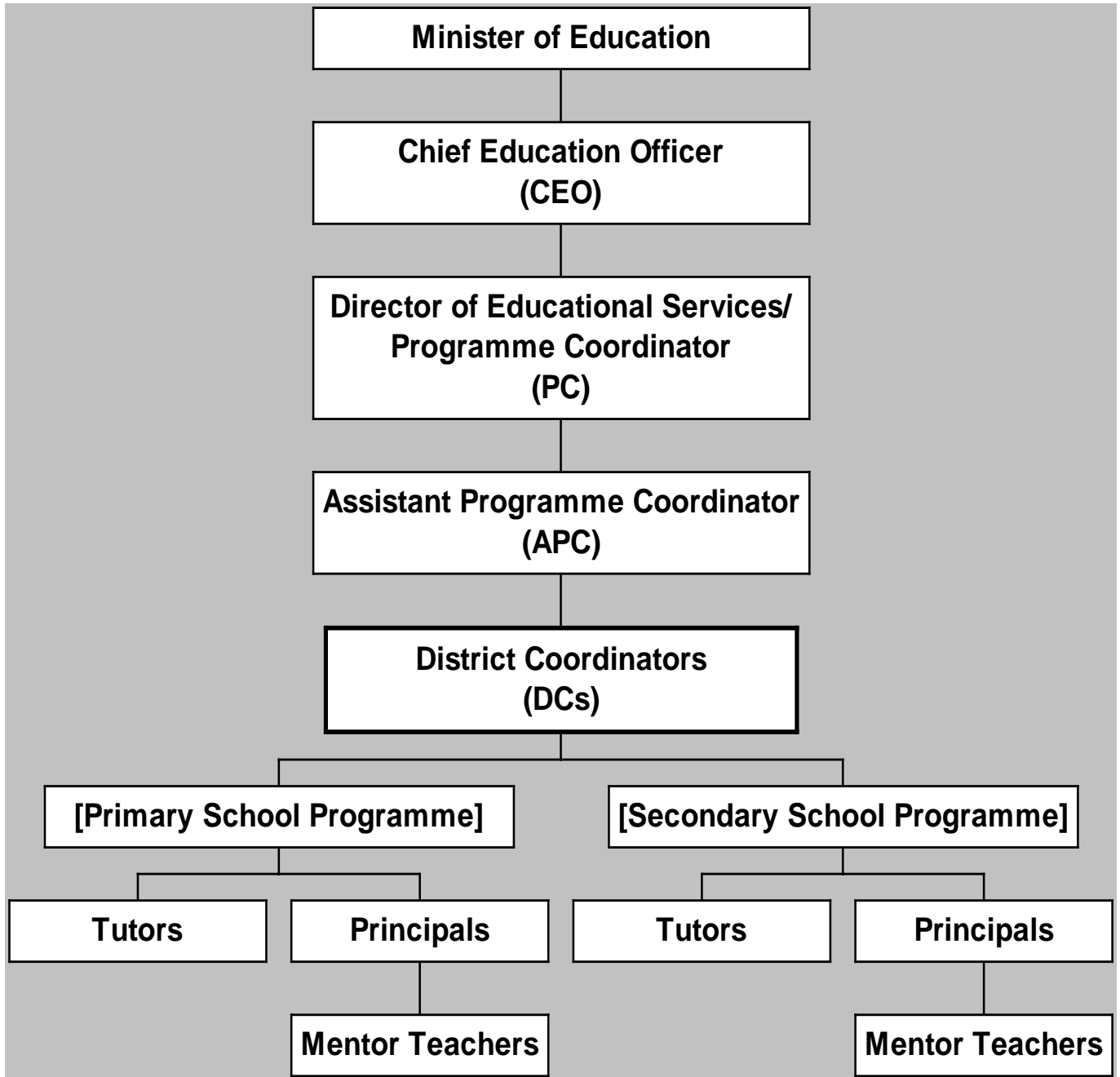
There are two global goals of the programme. First to empower young people to exercise their full potential as teachers in a controlled environment that is caring and provides them with practical and theoretical experiences. Second, it is intended to give would-be teachers the opportunity to test their vocation and to give administrators the opportunity to observe would-be teachers.

All of these views point to a system where training is provided with the understanding that future employment in the area is a possibility, though not guaranteed.

## **5. Programme Structure**

Figure 1 shows the macro-organizational structure of the OJT programme. The CEO has overall responsibility for the programme. The responsibility for the execution of the programme lies with the Director of Educational Services (DES) and the officers under his/her charge. These roles and functions are described next.

Figure 1. Macro-organizational structure of the OJT Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme.



### **5.1. The Programme Coordinator/Director of Educational Services**

The Programme Coordinator is the Director of Educational Services in the Ministry of Education. The role of the PC is to vet any correspondence to the CEO from the APC's office, and to make approaches for funding and resources to the CEO and Minister of Education. The PC is the one responsible for accessing the funds needed to execute the programme. This officer oversees all educational services in the Ministry of Education and does not function from the same office as the APC.

### **5.2. The Assistant Programme Coordinator**

The execution of the project is mainly the responsibility of the Assistant Programme Coordinator who answers to the PC. All duties of programme personnel are laid out by the APC's office, which is responsible for monitoring their performance. The APC and the receptionist undertake the public relations work related to the programme. For instance, they invite applications to the programme, they send official letters to schools formally requesting placement of trainees; and they keep track of trainees. The APC organizes the formal training sessions, monitors trainees at schools, updates the curriculum, prepares the budget estimates, approves stipend sheets for payment, plans graduation exercises, and liaises with the DCs. For the 1999/2000 session, a retired school supervisor and former DC was hired, on a part-time basis, to assist the APC, so that there could be some focus on the revision of the curriculum. This revision of the curriculum has led to some changes in the implementation of the programme.

### **5.3. District Coordinators**

The APC is assisted with the programme in primary schools by the District Coordinators for each Education District, and in North and South secondary schools by a zone coordinator. DCs are usually SSs but may include some school principals. The role of the DCs is multi-faceted: (a) their knowledge of the schools in their Education District helps with the placement of trainees; (b) they are responsible for recruiting tutors for the formal sessions, monitoring tutors' attendance and performance, and ensuring that the time sheets for stipend payments are filled out and returned to the APC's office; and (c) they are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that trainees are not treated as full-fledged, full-time teachers.

The monitoring of trainees' performance at school and during the formal training sessions is one of the major functions of the DCs. This is usually done through informal chats with the principal, since there is usually not enough time for direct classroom observations. If problems arise with the trainees at a particular school, the DCs are responsible for dealing with the matter. This may entail placement of the trainee in another school or removal of the trainee from the programme.

Official job commitments of the DCs sometimes affect their performance. DCs who are SSs are not always able to visit all the trainees in cases where there are about 25 to 35

trainees at different schools in a District. DCs who are principals are also hampered in the performance of their duties, since the workload at their own schools often prevents them from spending too much time at other schools. These principals also face issues of authority and credibility since they have no *official* authority to enter another school and give advice on how that school should be functioning in order to ensure adequate exposure for the trainee

#### **5.4. Tutors**

The tutors, who are university graduates, are specialist teachers in their respective fields. Typically, they are curriculum facilitators (curriculum support personnel who visit schools to assist teachers) who are employed by the Ministry of Education in their respective disciplines. Tutors are expected to prepare the units of work, which involves identifying the objectives for the package to be delivered, deciding on content and reading material, and preparing handouts. They deliver the units and evaluate trainees. There is no coordination among tutors, either in similar subject areas or in the general development of the programme, so that each tutor on the programme develops his/her own unit.

#### **5.5. Principals**

Principals function as administrators in the programme. They are gatekeepers who decide whether or not their school should participate in the programme. In participating schools, it is the principal who identifies the mentor teacher(s) to whom the trainee(s) will be assigned. Upon acceptance of a trainee or trainees, a principal is committed to observing their progress and filling out a monthly evaluation form, in collaboration with the mentor teacher. The principal and the mentor teacher evaluate the teacher trainee's attitude to work, teaching competencies and skills, interest in teaching, habits and moral values, and general deportment.

The principal is one of six persons required to examine and sign the diary in which the trainees are expected to keep a record of their work and their reflections on their experiences. The mentor teacher is also expected to sign and date the diary once per week. The diary is viewed as an instrument for professional growth and accountability of trainees. The trainees are expected to use the diary to reflect on how they relate to their mentor teachers and pupils, and on teaching strategies they have observed.

#### **5.6. Mentor teachers**

The role of the mentor teacher is to encourage and guide the young trainee. The trainee is to be guided in making lesson plans, and the structuring of objectives in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains is seen as vital. Mentor teachers are expected to first model desirable teaching behaviours and then to allow the trainee to teach under their guidance. Specifically, the mentor teacher is expected to guide the trainee in the following:

- presentation of a lesson
- questioning techniques
- teaching of concepts
- interpersonal skills
- strategies in classroom management
- use of resource materials.
- methods and uses of evaluation

The mentor teacher is expected to be an exemplar and to encourage the trainee to be one as well. The mentor teacher also has the responsibility of examining and signing the trainee's diary and evaluating the trainee generally.

## **6. Recruitment, Certification, and Remuneration Policies**

### **6.1. Recruitment policy**

The main, official policy governing recruitment into the OJT programme is that the laws of the International Labour Organization (ILO) governing apprentices should be observed. These laws state that apprentices should not work full-time and should always be supervised by a professional. Another policy adopted in the programme is that all recruits must be registered as teachers with the Ministry of Education. Prospective trainees must have applied for a job as a teacher and scored well on an interview conducted by a team from the Ministry of Education.

Selection of trainees is also based on the date of application, so that prospective teachers who have been waiting longest for appointment to the teaching service are selected first. There is also a quota system to ensure that prospective teachers who are nominated by Denominational School Boards also have a fair chance of being selected (two thirds of the primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago are administered by Denominational Boards, with government assistance).

The method of selection of trainees has varied over the years of the execution of the programme. For the first programme in 1993-1994, all applicants who were registered as teachers and responded to the published advertisement in the daily newspapers were selected. All applicants whose names were submitted by the Denominational Boards were also selected, provided that they were registered as teachers. In all, 464 trainees were admitted to the programme. Ten months later, 342 trainees (73.7%) graduated from the programme. Some trainees had dropped out of the programme, and 89 of those entering (19.2%) had been appointed as untrained teachers in the schools, without having completed the OJT programme.

In the second phase of the programme (February to December, 1994), the number of trainees was reduced because of the limited amount of funding available. Applicants who responded to the published advertisement were interviewed by Ministry of Education personnel, who scrutinized applicants' department, knowledge of current issues in education, interest in teaching, and the suitability of their qualifications. Of the 470

applicants who responded to the advertisement, 300 (63.8%) were chosen. Of these, 257 (85.7%) completed the programme. Again, there were dropouts, and some appointments to the teaching service were made before the programme ended. In succeeding years, the number of trainees admitted to the programme has continued to be dictated by the funding available for the programme, and the numbers graduating have not exceeded the 300 mark.

Fairly high graduation rates are also evident in the secondary programme. Of the first batch of 111 trainees admitted in 1994, 82 (73.9%) graduated at the end of the programme.

## **6.2. Certification policy**

Trainees are certified at the end of the 10-month period of the programme on the basis of the following criteria:

- attendance and performance at the orientation sessions in the first segment of the programme;
- attendance and performance during the second segment of the programme when they are placed in schools;
- attendance and performance at the compulsory Saturday classes;
- attendance and performance at the Vacation School in the Arts which is also compulsory;
- attendance and performance in the computer literacy classes during the second term of the school year (January to April);
- performance on the end-of-term examinations. In the case of the secondary school trainee, portfolio assessment and an interview are used instead of the end-of-term examinations.

The examination for primary trainees is intended to relate to all aspects of work covered. Items covered in these examinations have included the design and justification of a lesson plan for a particular group of students; comments on general educational issues; a discourse on subject integration--its strengths and weaknesses; a discussion of issues pertaining to assessment and evaluation; and so on. In the case of the secondary school trainees, items that should form part of the portfolio include schemes of work, lesson plans, a review of six articles found in educational journals, audiovisual aids, trainee-made tests, and so on. Apparently, there are few failures; the emphasis seems to be on assessing suitability for teaching rather than on academic achievement.

Graduation from the OJT programme is not a prerequisite for appointment in the teaching service, although there is evidence that the list of graduates is consulted when appointments are to be made. However, there are many appointed teachers who were never exposed to the OJT programme, and there are graduates of the programme who have not been appointed to teaching jobs. A former DC has emphasized that appointment of trainees to the teaching service has no relationship to OJT training and graduation; it is more related to the individual's position on the waiting list of aspiring teachers. He (and



others) claims that Denominational Boards process applications much faster than the government and, therefore, Board-recommended trainees tend to get their appointments faster. The current PC and APC are preparing proposals for submission to the Ministry of Education, which seek to make this initial training a prerequisite for entry into the teaching service.

### **6.3. Remuneration policy**

All participants in the OJT programme, except the principals and mentor teachers, receive a stipend as indicated below: (Payments are quoted in Trinidad and Tobago dollars – US \$1.00 = TT \$6.30)

DCs are paid \$30.00 per hour less 20% government tax.

Tutors are paid \$27.00 per hour less 20% government tax.

Trainees for the primary school are paid \$42.00 per day less 20% government tax.

Trainees for the secondary school who are university graduates are paid \$68.18 per day, and the non-graduates are paid \$42.00 per day, less 20% government tax.

In the case of the trainees, the stipend is paid for attendance during the induction period and the period when they are placed in the school. No stipend is given for days absent from school, including public holidays and school holidays, and for attendance at the compulsory Saturday classes. Trainees have complained bitterly about the late payment of stipends.

## **7. The Curriculum**

### **7.1. The underlying philosophy**

The main architect of the OJT curriculum (the then DCD) explained that, from its inception, the philosophy that guided the development of the curriculum was that it is important to sensitize young people to the theory and practice of teaching. This took place within approximately nine months for primary school teaching apprentices and one year (July to July) for secondary school teaching apprentices. He elaborated: “We perceived of the programme itself as having a theoretical base and rooted in the practice of schools.” Emphasis was placed on values, attitudes, and the manner in which the trainees conducted themselves. These social attributes, he argued, are the most important aspect of being a teacher. He stressed the philosophy that education is more about teaching people than it is a subject. These, then, were the philosophical bases on which the curriculum was grounded.

## **7.2. Programme components - primary**

The programme consists of several components--the induction segment, the in-school mentoring period, the Saturday classes, the Vacation School in the Arts, and the more recently added computer literacy course. These components are described next.

### **7.2.1. *The 3-week induction segment***

During this segment of the primary programme, trainees are exposed to theoretical work dealing with concepts in education, teaching and learning, classroom management, motivation, and school culture and organization. In addition, trainees are introduced to the primary school reading and mathematics curricula, and they are sensitized to the aims and objectives, content, methodology, resources, and evaluation procedures in these two subject areas.

At the end of this segment, a comprehensive report is prepared on each trainee according to the following guidelines:

The trainee's diligence in keeping a diary	(5%)
The trainee's regularity and punctuality	(10%)
The Education tutor's report	(25%)
The Reading tutor's report	(25%)
The Mathematics tutor's report	(25%)

Trainees must receive favourable reports on this first segment before they are allowed to move on to the next segment.

### **7.2.2. *Placement with a mentor teacher in a primary school***

The first APC of the programme described mentoring as "the key to the success of the programme." Trainees are placed in primary schools by the DCs who take into account the proximity to home (to minimize travel expenses), religion, and quality of teachers in the receiving schools. Trainees are expected to spend two terms in the schools to which they have been assigned.

During the first phase of the programme, teachers were placed in the Infant, Junior, and Upper Junior/Post Primary Departments of the primary schools. Subsequently, they were placed only in the Infant and Junior Departments because of time constraints. Trainees first observe the mentor teacher for a period of six weeks. After this, they should be allowed to teach two lessons per week with the guidance of the mentor teacher. It is stipulated that the principal and mentor teacher should provide trainees with the opportunity to teach one lesson in mathematics and one in reading on a weekly basis. Both the principal and the mentor teacher are expected to evaluate the trainee.

### *7.2.3. Compulsory Saturday classes*

These classes are organised by the SSS for the Education District. The programme of work is determined by a committee of SSS and tutors in consultation with the PC, and focuses on the following:

- preparing notes of lessons
- preparing useful aids
- teaching a lesson
- role of TTUTA as a professional organization
- nature of teaching in the infant classes
- nature of teaching and learning in the lower junior classes, Standards 1-3
- some issues in education
  - Teacher creativity
  - Parental support
  - Literacy
- School-based management initiatives: the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) and the School Improvement Programme (SIP).

Friday classes are organized to facilitate teachers who are members of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and who are unable to attend classes on Saturdays.

### *7.2.4. A Vacation School in the Arts*

During the Easter/August vacation, trainees attend an intense course on the theory and practical aspects of physical education, art/craft, music, and drama as they relate to the development of children. The role of creativity in children's development is highlighted.

### *7.2.5. Computer literacy course*

A compulsory computer literacy course was recently added to the curriculum. These classes are scheduled for one day a week from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. during the second term of the school year.

## **7.3. Programme components – secondary**

The secondary programme has a similar structure to that of the primary programme. The overall objectives of the secondary programme are as follows:

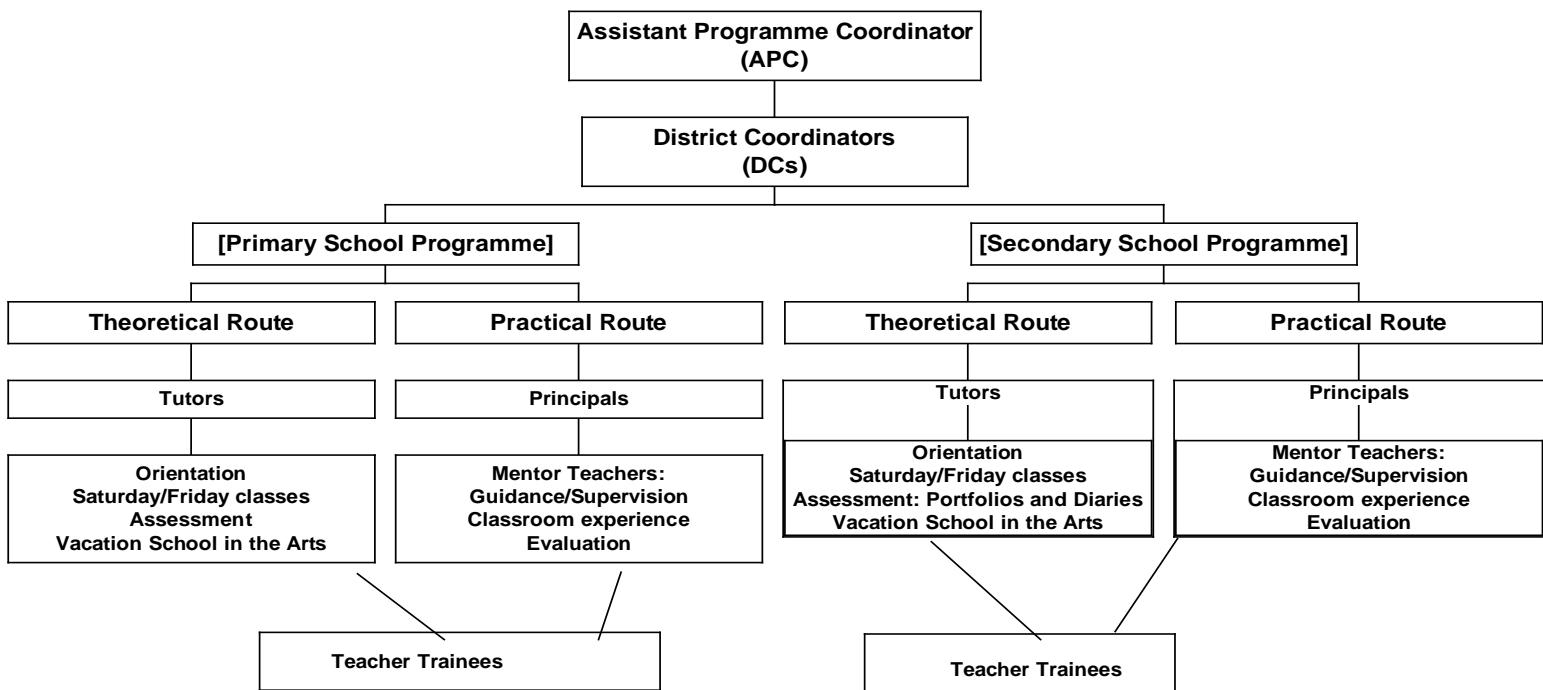
- to analyze the characteristics of the adolescent
- to understand the diversity of the school environment
- to discuss goals of secondary education
- to develop an understanding of the process of learning
- to develop an understanding of the nature and characteristics of teaching
- to explain/demonstrate selected teaching strategies

- to appreciate the importance of co-curricular activities and the aesthetics
- to discuss educational policy
- to develop an understanding of the teacher/educator as a reflective practitioner.

#### 7.4. The relationship between theory and practice

Figure 2 illustrates how the practical and theoretical components of the programme are presented.

Figure 2. Practical and theoretical components of the OJT Teacher Training Programme.



While trainees are exposed to both the theory and practice of education, these two aspects of their training are compartmentalized. Training in theory is the responsibility of the tutors while training in practice is the responsibility of the principal and the mentor teachers. The tutors interviewed claimed that they never visit the schools and do not know who the mentor teachers are. They operate with the hope that the mentor teachers' strategies are consistent with what is being taught in the induction programme and at the Saturday classes. In the same vein, the mentor teachers claim that they do not know what is being taught in the formal sessions, except for what the trainees relay to them. The mentor teachers have found that the trainees' method of writing lesson plans differs from what they were taught at teachers' training college, albeit many years ago, and this results in some measure of conflict.

#### 7.5. New developments in the programme

During 1999, the programme experienced some basic changes. An assistant coordinator was employed to work full-time with the programme, and this led to changes in the curriculum and to some of the procedures.

Previously, the curriculum was basically a framework and tutors were free to develop and formulate their coursework as they saw fit. There was no collaboration among tutors in the various Districts. However, a more structured curriculum has been developed, which has been vetted by Curriculum Officers of the Ministry of Education and some staff from the teachers' colleges. Workshops were organized for tutors and discussions preceded the implementation of the programme. Teaching sessions are now supervised by the APC who intends to have first-hand knowledge of the teaching/learning process. Persons who have worked as science and social studies facilitators in the Ministry of Education have been given first preference as tutors in the Districts, because of their knowledge of the primary school curriculum and their involvement in the schools in their areas.

There is now one standard examination for all the trainees. Previously, there were eight different examinations with each District being responsible for its own examination. The only commonality was the day on which the examination was written. The primary school trainee continues to write two examinations, and a written examination has been introduced for the secondary school trainee. The portfolio and its contents, and criteria for marking have also been adjusted and organized in such a way that the secondary school trainee will have an opportunity to demonstrate both the theoretical and practical knowledge gained from the training programmes.

The examination questions have now been standardized and the examination scripts are team-marked by a group of tutors. As a result of the new approach to examinations, the APC has found that there is a tendency for tutors to be more vigilant and to pay closer attention to trainee preparation.

A consideration of spiritual values has been included in the programme, and the Denominational Boards have been invited to play a lead role in the formulation and implementation of this aspect of the programme. This has been identified as an important component of the curriculum, and efforts have been made to ensure that it is properly planned and implemented.

The computer programme has also been restructured and standardized in terms of the course content and the system of marking. Tutors have been trained and marking has been standardized. Previously, there was some level of discrepancy in that tutors used varying marking systems.

The APC has begun field visits to the schools in all the Districts, including Tobago. This has allowed the officer to evaluate the lessons taught and to communicate with the trainees and the school administration. He has also met the mentor teachers and the principals in small District groups and updated them on the aims and objectives of the programme. This involvement of all the stakeholders is intended to improve the quality of

the programme, and to ensure that the goals and objectives are being met. An instrument for school visits has been designed and developed, and is being used by the APC who is being assisted by an officer who has been involved in the programme over a long period of time, and who has acted unofficially when there was no appointed APC.

The final marking system has been changed to ensure that certificates display the levels of competence in the three areas: professional development, theory, and practice teaching. Certificates of excellence have been introduced into the certification process. The three students who gain the highest marks overall are now being rewarded with certificates of excellence. There are also plans to award certificates to students for excellence in terms of regularity and punctuality, and involvement in the programme.

The lack of funds still continues to plague the programme and, recently, the amount allocated was further reduced. The shortage of programme personnel and the low stipend paid to the tutors are two factors that have been, and continue to be, of concern to the PC.

## **8. Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Organization and Functioning of the Programme**

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of interview data from the major stakeholders. These were:

- Perceptions of the nature of the trainees
- The importance of the mentor teacher
- Lack of continuity between what is taught in theory classes and what the trainees learn from the mentor teacher
- The important role of the OJT programme in the preparation of teacher trainees.

### **8.1. Perceptions of the nature of the trainees**

The stipulated age range for trainees is 19-25 years. Yet, the evidence suggests that trainees are not regarded as mature students. The former APC, in his 1994 graduation report, referred to the trainees as “boys and girls.” Earlier, in a memo to all staff and trainees, the APC had described trainees as being like “fresh wax on which anything can be engraved, docile saplings whose growth can be guided and the potential as yet untouched by any form of reality.” The expectation, then, seemed to be that the OJT programme would train students who brought little that was of significance to the programme, but who could be moulded as the trainers saw fit.

### **8.2. The mentor teacher**

In the interviews with the various stakeholders, the importance of the mentor teacher emerged as the most significant theme. The mentor teacher is expected to be the exemplar who guides and evaluates the trainee in lesson planning, delivery of lessons, and both direct and indirect classroom management and control. The mentor teacher also allows the trainee access to a classroom. This would not otherwise be possible, given the laws for apprentices stipulated by the ILO.

It is striking that there are no official criteria for determining who should qualify as a mentor teacher. The assumption seems to be that the mentor teacher is a master teacher (also undefined officially) who would know precisely how to mentor. There is no formal *training* for mentor teachers. In the first three years of the primary programme, there were meetings at which mentor teachers, principals, and tutors were briefed on their roles. After the 1995 meeting, a publication entitled *Guidelines for Principals and Mentor Teachers* was produced. This is now the only official communication on what is expected of mentors.

In some cases, DCs identify the mentor teachers and recommend that the trainees be sent to those schools. However, it is primarily the role of the principal to do so. Principals, it is believed, work closely with their teaching staff and would have a good idea of who was performing well and would meet the unofficial criteria to be mentor teachers. Principals seem to take into account the personality of the teachers and their experience in determining whether or not those teachers would make suitable mentor teachers.

Principals, and the teachers themselves, view mentor teachers as persons who have many years of teaching experience. Indeed, many of the primary school mentor teachers are teachers' college graduates of more than 17 years standing, but few have attended any professional courses in more than 10 years. Sometimes, compromises are made in the selection of mentor teachers, in that teachers who do not meet the unofficial criteria are chosen in an effort to deal with other constraints such as the trainee's religion and the distance of the cooperating school from the trainee's residence.

### **8.3. The theory/practice interface**

There was concern that there is no bridge between what is taught in the theory classes by the tutors and what obtains in the schools with the mentor teachers. The lack of communication between tutors and mentor teachers could result in confusion for the trainees. The mentor teachers depend on the trainees for information on what they are taught in the theory classes. It was initially assumed that since DCs were also SSs, they would be able to supervise the trainees at formal theory sessions and at school. However, the heavy official workload of the DCs does not permit this. Mentor teachers interviewed reported that they had never seen a supervisor. The zone coordinators for secondary schools found it impossible to visit trainees at school, therefore, the principals and mentor teachers provided the only monitoring that occurred.

The recently appointed APC is trying to bridge this gap by single-handedly visiting all the schools to which trainees are assigned, and supervising their performances on the job. In addition, the APC has begun monitoring Saturday classes and vacation training sessions to get an idea of what is happening at all levels of the programme. It seems a mammoth task for one person.

### **8.4. Trainees' and graduates' experiences of the programme**

Views of their OJT experience were sought from trainees and recent graduates as outlined earlier. The views of older graduates who are currently registered as students at the teachers' colleges were also sought through interviews conducted in other sub-components of the MUSTER project. These views are detailed below.

The trainees admitted that the experiences gained in the formal theory sessions and the classroom situation were mainly good. However, they placed a higher premium on the exposure in the classroom than on the theory sessions. Trainees admitted that they felt more confident to teach after some exposure to a classroom. There was consensus among the trainees and the recent graduates that classroom management was a most useful skill learnt. It was put into practice immediately by the trainees as they practised their craft in the schools. There was also the common belief among recent graduates that classroom culture could not be simulated and, therefore, there was indeed a need for the hands-on experience which is provided in the classrooms and from which the lessons learnt were invaluable.

Although most of the trainees interviewed could not see immediate links between the theory and the practice, there were a few who could. One of the trainees continually drew reference to instances where she saw examples of the theories alive in the classroom. She observed that her mentor teacher applied adolescent psychological theory in her handling of the class and the planning of lessons. She also observed that other theories learnt in formal sessions were applicable.

All the principals interviewed claimed that the trainees receive a good initiation to teaching on the OJT programme. They have found that the trainees ask more intelligent and relevant questions about the job than do other teachers who have been appointed to the schools without exposure to the OJT programme.

Current teachers' college trainees made both positive and negative comments about their exposure to the OJT programme prior to entering college. They were particularly appreciative of their exposure to lesson planning on the OJT programme. Many explained that they were only able to function on their first teaching practice as trainees because of their OJT exposure, since they had received little training in this area in the college before being sent into the field. As one trainee put it:

If I didn't attend those OJTs, I wouldn't know where to start. I felt it did a whole lot of good for me in the sense that you have something to go with, something to start from in terms of how you would deliver your lesson, how you would go about preparing the lesson in the first place. If I didn't attend OJT, I would be lost.

Some were also appreciative of the training they received from tutors in specific subject areas, where they were exposed to teaching techniques for those subjects that they had hitherto never encountered, for example:

Some of the things we made, I haven't seen anybody down here [at teachers' college] do that. For mathematics, she taught us to do puzzles and things like



that. When we were teaching addition and subtraction, we made it more like a game--like Snakes and Ladders. We brought all the games that they [pupils] liked into mathematics.

Although there were some teachers' college trainees who valued the help given by their OJT mentor teachers, most of the trainees who expressed dissatisfaction with the OJT programme were dissatisfied with their interaction with mentor teachers. Some expressed a feeling of frustration when they had to sit and observe the mentor teacher for long periods, preferring instead to do the teaching themselves. A few felt that trainees were exploited and used as cheap labour in the mentor/mentee relationship. Yet others complained that mentor teachers gave unfair evaluation comments on trainees.

Interestingly, there were several teachers' college trainees who had not been exposed to the OJT programme who felt that they had missed out on something worthwhile.

## **9. Summary**

The national OJT Programme was initially set up to alleviate the unemployment problem among youth in the country. Yet, the teacher training component of the OJT Programme, designed to cater for secondary school graduates, focused on professional issues from the very beginning. This focus has been maintained over the years.

Although all indications are that the OJT Pre-Service Teacher Training Programme is making an impact on the preparedness of young, untrained teachers for the classroom, there are structural problems that have plagued the programme. One problem has been the insufficiency of funds needed to implement the programme. The lack of necessary staff to manage the programme affects the levels of efficiency. It appears that the programme was set up without adequate understandings of what it would require in terms of infrastructure, and staff training and preparation for its efficient and effective functioning.

Another problem has been the lack of coordination among the various components of the programme and also with the teachers' colleges that receive OJT graduates. There is the need for greater articulation between the theoretical component of the OJT programme and the school component in which trainees are assigned to mentor teachers in the schools. This would seem to be essential if trainees are to be assisted in using aspects of the theory learnt to inform their practice.

Mentoring and monitoring are key ingredients of the programme. If the programme is to achieve its full potential, standards must be set. Mentor teachers and monitors (principals and DCs) need to be properly trained, and tutors need to collaborate with each other in order to create a standard curriculum. Mentor teachers also need to work in closer collaboration with the tutors. The new ACP has begun involving personnel from the teachers' colleges in the design of the programme. This is a most welcome step since it can open the door for collaboration between OJT personnel and the teachers' colleges. But, for deeper collaboration to result, the links with the teachers' colleges should be also

made at the administrative level, and not simply at the level of individual college lecturers.

The original aim that the OJT programme should help to identify those young people who have the potential to become good teachers is perhaps not being met. This is so because, alarmingly, there is as yet no official link between the OJT programme and the teachers' college programme. Exposure to the OJT programme is not now a prerequisite for entry into the teachers' colleges, nor does students' performance affect their chances of being accepted for training. Furthermore, individuals who have not been exposed to the OJT programme continue to be appointed as untrained teachers in the schools and, apparently, this practice is most widespread among the Denominational Board schools. If the OJT programme is to serve its original purpose as a filter, the appropriate linkages must be established in the system. In addition, the programme would need to be expanded (rather than curtailed), since the annual intake into the teachers' colleges is at least 400 while the annual graduating class from the OJT programme is, typically, less than 300 in number.

The 1999/2000 programme benefited from the addition of a retired school supervisor who is assisting the APC on a part-time basis. The present ACP has begun supervising the trainees and doing school visits. This seems a most onerous task for one person. It also means that not very many visits can be made. There is, therefore, need for more, properly trained staff to monitor the trainees at the school level, as it is difficult for the SSs and principals, who already have a heavy workload, to perform this function.

One of the major, pressing needs of the programme is a computerized database to manage the wealth of information that is generated. Because of the absence of such a database, it is exceedingly difficult to obtain quantitative data on the programme. There is a need for accessible records on the trainees, principals, mentor teachers and tutors, and the costs of running the programme, so that policy decisions could be based on evaluation data and not merely on perceptions. Computerization and staffing would necessitate the provision of additional funds. The amount of money allocated to the programme is decreasing. It seems as though the aim of addressing the unemployment problem dominated the thinking at the inception of the programme, with the result that considerations of the requirements for sustained funding of a quality pre-service programme were not as prominent. The time is right for such considerations.