

ABSTRACT

Beliefs and Classroom Practice: A Study of Primary Teacher Trainees in Trinidad and Tobago

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This study examined the beliefs and classroom practice of primary level teacher trainees who were enrolled at a teachers' training college in Trinidad and Tobago. The purpose of the inquiry was to gain an understanding of teacher trainees' beliefs about teaching and learning, and the nature of the relationship (if any) between their beliefs and practice in the classroom.

A qualitative case study methodology was used to explore the beliefs and classroom practice of three primary teacher trainees. The inquiry integrated key principles from ethnographic and phenomenological traditions, and utilized classroom observations as well as in-depth interviews. A purposive sampling

strategy was used in selecting the participants for the study. The trainees were studied during their two-year teacher training programme and in the year after the completion of their training.

The trainees seemed to hold well established beliefs about teaching, learning and schooling in general. These beliefs were apparently influenced by their experiences in school and in the home, as teachers in primary schools, and to a lesser extent, their on-the-job training (OJT). The findings revealed variations in the extent to which the trainees' stated beliefs about teaching and learning were enacted in classroom practice. A number of situational and personal factors seemed to impact the trainees' ability to enact their stated beliefs about teaching and learning in the classroom.

The study highlights the importance of understanding the interface between teacher trainees' beliefs and classroom practice, and identifies some issues that should be given consideration in further research and development work in teacher training.

Key words: Margaret Cain; beliefs; teacher trainees' beliefs; beliefs and classroom practice; primary teacher trainees.