

ABSTRACT

Exploring Primary Education in Tobago: The Story of Three Small Schools

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The purpose of this study was to explore the processes and practices of three small primary schools vis-à-vis critical factors related to academic achievement. These factors were curriculum enactment/implementation, human resource development, school and classroom organisation, student engagement, principal leadership, and school culture. The study employed a qualitative methodology with a case study design. Data were collected over a two-year period, using a purposefully selected sample of three principals and nine teachers. Three information gathering strategies were used with a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument. Data garnered from observations and review of documents were used to corroborate and triangulate data elicited through interviews.

Findings from this study reveal that some teachers lack the requisite professional competence and pedagogical skills to teach in a small primary school. These deficiencies lead to another key finding – the dire need for continuous teacher professional development. Evidence from the study also suggests that principals recognised their role to promote cultures of teaching and learning for enhanced school improvement and specifically student academic achievement. Not surprising however, there was consensus among both principals and teachers that they are not adequately equipped to perform their respective leadership and pedagogical roles to effectively adapt and enact the curriculum that would redound to the benefit of all students in these small schools

Recommendations were offered to the Division of Education, Innovation and Energy to establish partnerships with post-secondary and tertiary level institutions to ensure that both teachers and principals are exposed to and benefit from rigorous pre-service and in-service training that would facilitate appropriate pedagogical and leadership strategies in small primary schools on the island. Also, it was suggested that the management role of the denominational school boards be enhanced to allow for more effective management of their schools. In addition, it was suggested that greater autonomy should be given to principals, and that principals and teachers should be held to a higher standard of accountability for their schools' performance. Finally, further research was suggested in the areas of culture and principal leadership of these small primary schools.

Keywords: Vernice Caruth-Blake; curriculum enactment/implementation; human resource development; school and classroom organisation; student engagement; principal leadership; school culture.