

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Critical Issues in Educating Prospective Teachers for Primary Level Schools in Jamaica**

**Phylcia Hermina Marshall**

All nations are facing increasing demands for universal and quality education, especially at the primary level. Teachers stand at the center of the developmental process, since it is on them that the responsibility rests for fostering children's creative potential. The teacher training programme must alert teachers to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and must provide opportunities for them to improve their teaching methods in this new millennium.

This dissertation investigated the extent to which the teacher education programme equipped primary level teacher trainees with the essential understandings (knowledge, skills and attitudes) they need to effectively perform in the classroom. It also sought to determine the instructional methods utilized by lecturers and how these techniques ultimately influence the strategies used by beginning teachers.

The sample consisted of 26 lecturers, 108 student teachers involved in the final year of the three-year diploma programme and 28 neophytes, from four teachers' colleges in Jamaica. Sixteen of these trainees and four of the neophytes were chosen for a case study. In the second phase of the study, 20 principals who had employed recently graduated teachers and ten of these new teachers were interviewed.

Information was obtained by means of questionnaires, interviews, journals and

field notes gathered through observations in the case study. The data were analyzed using primarily mean scores and standard deviations. Analysis of Variance and Chi Square Tests were undertaken to determine if significant differences existed in the participants' responses.

Some commendable aspects of the student teachers' performance were highlighted. However, incidents of good practice were too few and far between to acknowledge that the programme is adequately meeting the needs of prospective teachers in large numbers. On the whole, several weaknesses were identified in the programme. Among these were: the exclusion of trainees from decision making processes concerning their learning needs, the inability of the programme to ascertain and challenge trainees' beliefs, expectations, attitudes and assumptions; and poor preparation of trainees to adequately plan, instruct and manage classroom procedures. In addition, the programme was considered to be too theoretical and examination oriented rather than focusing on practical issues to prepare trainees for actual classroom situations. It was also evident that the traditional transmission modes which do not encourage reflective and critical thinking were the dominant methods of delivery in both the lecturers' and beginning teachers' classrooms.

The contention throughout this study is that initial teacher training programmes are not meeting the needs of teachers. It is suggested that teacher training programmes should be viewed as the beginning of a continuous developmental process which extends into the schools where supervision and guidance are provided by teachers of good practice. It is only when continuous training of the highest calibre is offered to teachers that their professional development will be facilitated, thus enabling them to become effective teachers who can meet the needs of a rapidly changing society.