



EDUExchange E-DISCUSSION: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS

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The former Chief Education Inspector, Mrs. Elaine Foster Allen, launched an EduExchange e – discussion that examined how schools in challenging contexts could be transformed such that students’ performance improved. The aim of the e – discussion was to identify the issues, and suggest strategies for improvement of schools. The summary below reflects the contributions of members, including their suggestions and experiences.

SUMMARY

Transformation of underperforming schools in challenging contexts was seen as an achievable goal by all participants. Though students’ socioeconomic background and inadequate resources available to schools were viewed as factors that posed a challenge to school improvement, participants also identified the following key factors.

- School leadership,
- School improvement planning, monitoring and evaluation
- The development of a school vision and philosophy
- School community relations
- Teaching and learning practices
- Teacher expectations
- Teacher student relations
- Parental involvement in schools
- Community involvement in schools
- School home relations



School Leadership

All agreed that schools have within them the capacity to transform themselves into institutions of excellence and discussants believed that dynamic, effective leadership was the key to this transformation. Schools, participants felt, needed effective leadership at different levels to facilitate the process of school improvement. Instructional leadership was identified as a key to improving student performance in challenging contexts. Specifically, effective leadership will result in teachers being nurtured, coached and supported, staff being motivated, increased accountability regarding the quality of instructional and assessment practices, and effective use of resources.

Another important component of effective management is school development planning which was viewed as critical in ensuring improved performance of students in challenging contexts. This development planning is most effective when supported by sound management accompanied by ongoing internal and external monitoring where improvement targets and monitored.

Additionally, the development of a school vision and philosophy was considered important in the school improvement process as they are the framework for the beliefs that “underpins the attitudes of stakeholders involved in the process” of educating students and guide desired outcomes. The development of a philosophy may be an important first step towards “deciding how schools should define themselves in relation to the most disadvantaged groups” (Carol Watson Williams, September 21, 2010)

Teacher Expectation of Themselves and Their Students

Acknowledging that teaching and learning were also critical factors in school improvement, discussants noted that schools have successfully transformed schools through “focused, engaging, challenging and structured teaching” (Renee Rattray, September 21, 2010). Innovative teaching and learning strategies were seen as significantly influenced by teacher expectations. Discussants pointed out that teacher expectations should be understood to include teacher’s belief in themselves, and their students’ ability to achieve. These expectations, it was noted, are “transmitted” to students, influences teacher – student relations and the “psychosocial climate’ of the classroom. As a result, it is recommended that in order to improve students’ performance, teacher expectations- of self and student - would need to be raised. The related issue of “how teachers earn, establish and maintain their authority” was also highlighted.

Participants maintained that support from stakeholders is essential to facilitate the school improvement process. There was consensus that the involvement of parents and the community, which includes businesses, in schools was critical to transforming underperforming



schools. A “rich parental involvement programme” is viewed as key to ensuring that the expectations that parents have of schools and vice versa gets addressed. At the same time, involved parents support and contribute to the development of a culture of excellence by becoming “resource persons, mentors, disciplinarians and sponsors” (Steven Kerr, September 22, 2010). Participants felt strongly that the context of the home and community can influence the strategies used to improve student performance. Specifically, the discussion highlighted the need to support the community students come from and for teachers to be aware of students’ home circumstances as they can impinge student performance.

The following school improvement strategies were suggested:

- Focus on the improvement of teaching and learning
- Ensure that leadership training focuses on more than just administrative functions of principals and senior teachers.
- Develop vision and mission for schools
- Obtain the buy – in of teachers as they are leaders in the classroom and play a key role in school improvement plans.
- Create a standard format for developing and sharing school improvement plans
- Use common indicators to assess schools
- Establish a culture of reward for both students and teachers
- Engage students by recognizing that they as consumers whose interest must targeted.
- Build teacher’s awareness of the effect of teacher expectations on students’ outcomes and school climate through periodic training
- Help teachers to be develop an understanding of how the home circumstances of students affect their academic progress. Establish and facilitate the use of homework centres for an hour or two after school
- Develop a community of learning by “gaining the support of teachers, parents, and local businesses”
- Promote the value of education within the community via a local behaviour change and awareness campaign.

One strategy that has been advanced through this discussion is the accomplishment of an immediate, important, visible and attainable first goal (Michalak¹, n.d.). This “early success” will facilitate the promotion of the school vision and the school development plan and assist in securing the buy in of partners. By utilizing this strategy, school leaders can promote the vision of the school, improve expectations and strengthen the support to and from staff, parents and

¹ See Related Resources for reference of full article entitled ‘*Successful leadership in schools in challenging contexts*’



the community. Nonetheless, as one participant reminded us, school transformation requires “change in internal processes and structures, which demands effective leadership”. Hence, for sustained positive transformation, the second strategy, to develop people, redesign the organization and change the culture of the school, is also important (Michalak, n.d.). These investments refer to the change in structures, processes, and interventions that aim to improve the quality of the learning environment as well as the process of instruction and assessment.

CONTRIBUTIONS WERE RECEIVED, WITH THANKS, FROM:

We received 20 comments for the discussion on the role of the school in improving performance of students in challenging contexts.

1. Everlyn Miller-Bryan: Consultant Lead Inspector of Education
2. Dawn – Marie Lawson: Centres for Excellence
3. Steven Kerr: Planning Institute of Jamaica
4. Novelette McLean Francis, Jamaica Basic Education Project
5. Renee Rattray : Centres for Excellence
6. Garfield McDonald: Educator
7. Cecille Walden: Jamaica basic Education Project
8. Frederick Gordon : Planning Institute of Jamaica
9. Rebekah Levy
10. Darcia Samuels
11. Grace – Camille Munroe: Education Consultant

CONTRIBUTIONS IN FULL:

The Role of the School in Improving Student Performance in Challenging Contexts

By Elaine Foster Allen – 09/21/2010 - 10:53am

Welcome to this first EduExchange discussion on the Role of the School in Improving Student Performance in Challenging Contexts.’ As the former Chief Inspector of Education, I believe that schools play an ever expanding and important role in the social transformation of Jamaica. Schools are often expected in Jamaica to do so much more than impart knowledge; they are expected to mould and improve upon the children who enter their doors. Many families place a lasting faith in the ability of schools to ‘make something’ of their children and open doors to a better future for them.

We have started another academic year with our usual hopes and great expectations. The good news is that student performance seems to have improved at all levels during 2009/2010. But even while performance has improved, many are aware that the academic standards being



achieved by some groups of Jamaican children continue to pose a serious challenge to overall systems improvements. It seems most difficult to effect real and sustained improvements for children attending schools in the remote rural areas and in the inner cities. For those of us working in education policy and as teachers and school leaders, we know that we have seen a plethora of interventions to address the most stubborn problems of low literacy levels and overall poor academic performance. Some projects have intervened at the level of teacher training, others have provided resources for use in classrooms and yet others have focused on making instructional leaders of our Principals. Weaknesses in the culture of evaluation have left us unsure of what has helped.

This discussion is all about how we can engineer schools- reshape them- to finally break the back of the problem of student underperformance in challenging contexts. These challenges are generally posed by poverty, but we know that for too many of our children that is closely accompanied by violence. Deprivation has many consequences, several of them linked to low cognitive development.

We hope that our discussion in the next three days will help us understand how schools can help to break the cycle of underachievement of our most needy students. Where do we start? What issues have we ignored in all our work to provide support for children and their families in these environments?

Join us over the next three days as together we discuss (Day 1) Raising Teacher Expectation of children in high poverty schools; (Day 2) Curriculum Support for under-performing children and (Day 3) How schools can engage with families in difficult circumstances. As we share we hope our collective knowledge can move us closer to a solution for this problem.

Elaine Foster-Allen

One of the issues relevant

by Elaine Foster Allen- 09/21/2010 - 10:56am

One of the issues relevant to this discussion for which I solicit your views, is this: do you think that our schools have the capacity within them to transform themselves? If not, how do we go about building and sustaining this capacity? Where do we begin?

I believe that there is some

by dsamuels - 09/21/2010 - 12:04pm

I believe that there is some capacity within the schools to transform themselves. However, there need to be external interventions to improve the financial and human resources of schools to achieve targeted results for students in challenging circumstances. I believe that interventions should not only target the individual students but



the families at large so that the impact may be felt on a larger scale and the cycle of poverty and low educational output may be broken. For example, can schools facilitate adult learning where the parents are not in a position to assist with homework?

Transformation and Sustainability at the School Level

by knownow10 - 09/21/2010 - 1:13pm

Schools have the ability to transform themselves but this change must begin with strong and committed leadership at the said level. Strong leadership at the school level will help to motivate staff, as well as ensure a high level of accountability regarding the quality of instruction, assessment practices and the effective utilisation of resources. Strong leadership is sometimes automatic based on personalities and their motivation. However, in many cases leadership needs to be shaped by ongoing training and monitoring. The Ministry of Education has recognised this area of need and has commenced work on same. Credit must be given for this effort. However, the training must supersede general administrative areas. Matters, for example, the effective monitoring of the curriculum implementation process and overseeing the entire assessment policy of the school must come up for bigger focus. Nothing must be taken for granted - the manager of a hotel must have a good knowledge of how the kitchen is run. A principal must have an in-depth knowledge of curriculum standards and of the curriculum itself, among other areas.

Sustainability will not be automatic. It must begin with policies regarding school operations and must be supported by careful on-going monitoring. The more practices are regularized, the more they will become routine.

Transformation

by Elaine Foster Allen - 09/21/2010 - 2:54pm

Transformation and sustainability ...

Particularly interested in how we can a) make our practices reliable; b) sustain these effective practices; c) share these practices. Thank you for beginning to outline what can be done and indeed is being done in some of our schools.

Further thoughts on this aspect of the topic could be gleaned from our bibliography. Please see this on the site. But be kind enough to add other resources too.

Johnson, B. & Ezenne, A. (2008). *Principals' and teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership roles in selected primary schools in central Jamaica*. In A. Ezenne (Ed.), *Leadership for School Improvement in the Caribbean* (pp.181 - 212). Jamaica: Department of Educational Studies.



Addressing student

by Carol Williams - 09/21/2010 - 4:40pm

Addressing student underperformance through whole family interventions is a very unorthodox approach which may not be widely contemplated by schools. Even where it is seen as an option, many schools and teachers may not have the skills to do so. Can schools realistically be expected to drive that process on their own?

Schools can be helped to cultivate the capacity to change, but change to what? Transformation must be driven by a philosophy or goal and it may be the most important first step is deciding how schools should define themselves in relation to the most disadvantaged groups. Do schools exist to facilitate academic pursuits or do they also have a role to play in creating a more inclusive society?

Schools and their teachers need support to help them support

by Cecile Walden - 09/21/2010 - 5:53pm

Schools do have the potential if not the capacity to transform themselves. But there are real steps to be considered.

Schools and their teachers need support to help them support the communities whose children they teach. The issue of diversity extends to culture and social class. We have begun to pay attention to the ways in which children learn. We need to remind ourselves that some of those strategies can be influenced and/or impacted by the everyday context of home and community and culture. So how do we help teachers to be aware of the circumstances of the child and so create another way of getting children to practice what they learnt in class (homework) when there is no light at home for example? The school as a homework center for an hour or two after hours helps. At a rural high school where many children are bused in to school, there is at the end of the formal day prep/Homework hour, where children do their studies before getting on the bus to go home. In another area children went home and did their chores and then went to a centre to do their assignment under the guidance of volunteers.

Teachers' self expectation also needs to be considered to get them to maintain high expectations of all children. So teacher disposition is important. This can be done through networking and sharing. So the school leader has a role to play in motivating staff especially those who have been there for a while.

The school community relationship is key. How many teachers do live in the communities in which they teach? Not many these days. We need to find quality time and quality occasions for the teacher parent and student and the other community groups to share with each other.



Absolutely schools have the capacity

by Renee_Ratray - 09/21/2010 - 7:04pm

Absolutely schools have the capacity within them to transform themselves!!! The more I observe and work in schools, I recognize that many of the things that will bring about radical change in students and in schools, do not require endless sums of money and resources. There are numerous examples of schools that have simply been transformed through focused, engaging, challenging and structured teaching that is engineered by leaders who nurture, coach and support their teachers to ensure their growth and ultimately the success of students. In answer to the question about where to start, I think that it must start with improving teaching and learning. After all, that is the core business of schools.

Transformation

by fngord - 09/22/2010 - 6:55am

Schools have within them the capacity to transform. I believe that they do have enough capacity to realize the change. The philosophy of schools whether at the primary or secondary levels is of paramount importance in the process. This set of beliefs underpins attitudes of all stakeholders involved in the process of educating our children.

Businesses have Vision and Mission statements while our schools have Mottos. This I argue is limited and do not contributed wholly to a deeper understanding of the school being.

Emerging themes and ideas

by Elaine Foster Allen - 09/22/2010 - 9:09am

Partners,

Good morning and welcome to day 2 of this forum. Thank you for joining the conversation - groundbreaking!

I have noted the following issues/themes that have emerged during day 1 of our conversations: there is consensus that school leaders have the potential to change but need support to develop the capacity to change and lead change.

Suggestion that we need targeted, systematic and ongoing training and capacity development.

Recognised that the MoE [Ministry of Education] has plans for the training on school leaders through the development of the leadership college - NCEL [National College of Educational Leadership] - some of this work has started and has been going on for a while now. (Need to recognise the efforts of individual principals and organisations that have been working in this area).



Recognised that in schools where students are achieving, teaching is focused, engaging, challenging, structured. Financial resources, though important and necessary cannot outdo what visional, committed leaders and teacher do.

The context from which students come, parental involvement and teacher expectations are areas that we need to explore as significant variables in student outcomes. Carol and Cecile, I would like to refer you to the James Comer of the Yale University - came across this approach to SDP [School Development Programme] in the 1980s ... see:

<http://medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/comer>

Comer's SDP is premised 'on the principles of child, adolescent and adult development'!

Have a great day and keep this conversation going

Elaine FA

School

by DawnMarie - 09/22/2010 - 11:55am

School transformation requires two fundamental foci. Change in internal processes and structures, which demands effective leadership, is the first one. The other is recognizing that students are consumers and behave accordingly.

Many of our schools do not have established monitoring structures, there is no common goal and stakeholders including students appear not to be cognizant of their roles and responsibilities. This weakness has fostered poor school ethos, low expectations, poor leadership and a general negative school culture. This is more pronounced in the schools that have weak external support/management groups, such as the Alumni Associations.

A good place to begin or strengthen the process of school transformation is the establishment of internal processes and structures that support widespread involvement of all stakeholders, accountability, reward and sanctions. Some quick wins in this regard can be: a standard format for developing and sharing school improvement plans, the selection a few common indicators that is used to assess the progress of schools by term and annually (At CSEC time is way too late), a standard format for the visit of education officers, and an established culture of reward for both students and teachers.

In my work with the Daybreak Foundation which is an inner city community based group, I found that I had to restructure my thoughts about "teaching" from being capable of imparting knowledge to recognizing that my students were like any other consumer, they were selecting on what to spend their resource of time and interest. After struggling to maintain their interest in my effort to teach reading, by serendipity in one class a child wanted to recount something that had happened earlier in the day. That led to a class which heard a story which taught five new words. From then on our class began with a different student recounting or telling a story.



Each week we learnt five new words and each child would have written something, even one sentence. It worked, my students were more eager to participate, learning was now something they could relate to. I even used the stories to teach mathematics, and science. I learnt so much, the more profound of which was that if you take a child's interest in consideration when teaching him or her, half your battle is won.

Maybe there is a place for targeted streaming along this line....Something to think about. School transformation requires two fundamental foci. Change in internal processes and structures, which demands effective leadership, is the first one. The other is recognizing that students are consumers and behave accordingly.

Schools improving students' performance

by StevenG - 09/22/2010 - 10:54am

In some developed countries and in a number of quality schools in Jamaica, the solution to such issues has been centered around two important areas; 1) the involvement of parents and 2) the creation of a Culture of Excellence. At my alma mater, Cornwall College, the motto was Disce aut Discede, which means LEARN or LEAVE. What was celebrated in the school first and foremost was academic achievement and all others after.

Also in schools with a rich parental involvement programme, the expectations of parents of school and of school of the home gets addressed with the involvement of parents as resource persons, mentors, disciplinarians and sponsors. The schools activities are supported and parents are actively involved in creating that culture of excellence despite geographical and socio-economical contexts. It can be a reality with proper management structures in place in ALL schools.

Comer SDP

by Everlyn_Miller-Bryan - 09/22/2010 - 12:26pm

Dr. Comer's SDP has achieved a high level of success in transforming low income, failing schools that have adopted it in the USA. I have had the privilege of teaching in a Comer School that was once classified as a failing school and participated in some of his school development seminars at the Child Study Center at Yale. Adoption of the Comer SDP and keen monitoring by the Local Education Authority (LEA) transformed the school.

Comer addresses three main areas of development for successful schools: Six Pathways to Healthy Child Development and Academic Success, Dynamic Instructional Leadership to Support Student Learning and Development and Transforming School Leadership and Management to



Support Student Learning and Development. Everything in the school must be focused on student learning and development.

Schools can transform themselves by adopting aspects of this model. However, effort must be placed into helping our teachers, administrators, parents and students to understand, accept and address student issues they are faced with. It involves commitment of all stakeholders, total dedication and consistency on the part of all involved. A workable plan must be in place, yearly improvement targets must be set and the plan must be closely monitored by internal and external administrators.

Educating on the importance of education

by Rebekah - 09/22/2010 - 1:50pm

I agree with the above posts about the importance of community involvement and that schools (and principals), while I do believe they absolutely have the ability to transform themselves, cannot be expected to successfully create drastic change without support from a number of stakeholders. First, there must be teacher buy-in. Principals can push for change, but teachers are the leaders in the classrooms working with students day in and day out. Another important issue that exists in many countries is a lack of valuing education. Yes schools' primary duty is to educate the students which is a huge effort, however, as many have mentioned, support from the community can help ease the burden. A local campaign to educate and inform the immediate community (including parents, local businesses, etc) of the importance of education and the tools and benefits education provides both students and the community at large can go a long way in generating support. Spreading awareness on the returns of education is too often not a part of the message schools send out to parents and the local communities. Gaining the support of teachers, parents, local businesses, and others to help foster a community of learning as an intervention approach is becoming more and more popular. A strong principal and strong leadership is key, however the principal does not run every classroom nor teach every lesson, and learning does not stop the moment students leave the doors of the school.

Inside the Classroom

by Carol Williams - 09/22/2010 - 3:30pm

In her book *Inside Jamaican Schools*, Professor Hyacinth Evans does a fascinating examination of 'the school as a social institution that exists for specific aims and functions, not all of which are educational'. The book raises some important questions which can lead us to understand chronic under-performance by some groups of children.



She focuses on the relationship in the classroom between the teacher and the students and how that relationship affects the overall academic outcomes of the children. The book does not argue that this is the **only** thing affecting outcomes, but makes the case that it may be a major factor. It provides a really insightful look at how teachers earn, establish and maintain their authority and how this authority can be eroded 'especially in low stream classes'.

I think that understanding this relationship, what happens in classrooms daily, is perhaps one of the keys in understanding under-achievement. What are some of the things which drive this teacher-student relationship; how is it shaped and how can it be re-shaped?

Re: Inside the Classroom

by knownow10 - 09/22/2010 - 5:20pm

The above post examines a critical element in children's achievement - the person of the teacher. Teachers unconsciously transmit their expectations of their students, as well as their personal levels of motivation to their students. Students know whether we value them or not and as a result are often impacted by the feelings and attitudes which are directly or indirectly conveyed to them. If students, for example, get the feeling or idea that they are a 'dunce' set and capable of very little, they often live up to this expectation. Teacher attitudes and expectations while conveyed through the levels and quality of instructional and assessment tasks given, are strongly transmitted through the psychosocial climate of the classroom. The psychosocial climate is a big piece of the overall picture - it speaks to how relaxed students are the classroom environment, the level of respect shown to them, and generally the kind of consideration which is given to the different needs of the learner.

Personalities differ and not all teachers are fully aware of their effect on students' learning outside of a purely academic context. This reality therefore means that teacher training must include as a major element, the shaping of positive teacher attitudes in the classroom. There must be greater sensitivity to students as persons with real feelings and whose academic performance may be strongly influenced by what is conveyed to them about themselves. A single training experience may not be enough; periodic refresher training in this powerful area will be critical.

Issues - Day 2

by Elaine Foster Allen - 09/23/2010 - 1:24am

Thank you for your thoughtful comments, for bringing clarity to the issues, for provoking thoughts and for sharing your experiences on the matter at hand.

Clearly there are parental involvement programmes that we could learn from, systematise and or appropriate for use in all our schools. School leaders would need to work with parents,



students and other stakeholders to define and agree on some principles and values that are non-negotiable from which they could work to develop their own programmes as they see fit. Can the involvement of parents in schools be legislated for?

The role of teachers in the students' educational and schooling experiences is emerging as a topic for further exploration. In particular how they *relate* to their students, the expectations they have of them - social achievements and academic attainment, for example, are things we often hear of; ...but expectations appear to be gendered too.

What types of interventions should initial teacher training and professional development activities focus on in regard to the relationship issue?

Teaching is as much an intellectual activity as it is relational!

It appears that teachers who reflect on their work combine a scholarly approach to their own learning and teaching activities, take risks, are serendipitous and care about the students they teach. How do we develop these and other such skills and aptitudes in our teachers?

What do, and what should, students expect from their teachers and school experiences? Does schooling empower students or does it 'domesticate' them?

Do we really use our knowledge of child and adolescent development to inform the curricula we offer our students?

Any views on the voice of the student and how to involve them in any discussion about our and their expectations, what motivates them? How do they really process schooling?

The Student Voice

by Carol Williams - 09/23/2010 - 9:49am

This is really an undervalued area when looking at the issue of under-performance. We have done so little empirical work on how students view their school experiences and how those experiences shape their performance. Much of the work on under-achievement has focused on the students as an inanimate independent variable which can be changed based upon 'inputs' from school and family. This may well be so, but how do we really know?

While working with the Moderator at the Education Inspectorate we did student surveys as part of the pre-inspection activities for each school selected for inspection. One of the main findings of these surveys was something we did not set out looking for. Wanting to be efficient, we had a simple Likert-type questionnaire for students to complete. We did not include space for their own thoughts or comments but they created the space, on the back of these instruments, to share with us how they really felt about what was happening in their schools.

They spoke about teachers who could, could not and would not 'teach'. They told us how they felt about the standards in their school and how they would like to maintain or improve those



standards, what they liked about individual teachers and their principal and how they felt about their peers and how these relationships affected their learning. The children who took the time to do this were clearly motivated students who felt strongly about their school environment and their education. It reinforced that students can point, in their articulate and inarticulate ways, to things that work and those that do not meet their needs in the classroom.

The questions therefore are:

1. How do we value and use the views and opinions of students to help schools address chronic under achievement?
2. Is there something to be learnt from them?

A day in the life of a teacher!

by Cecile Walden - 09/23/2010 - 6:25pm

Sorry I missed the conversation yesterday, this has so many sides to it! All that has been said has so much merit. Teacher expectations of their young learners can become so clouded by the myriad issues that pervade the classroom and school. Walter Doyle's paper on the "multidimensionality and simultaneity" of the classroom still resonates with me. And I think we need a caring practice of supervision that takes time out to be that critical friend to the teacher in those underperforming schools. And to share with each other our expectations of ourselves as teachers and as individuals as well as our expectations of those we teach. There needs to be more talking out and about the process and what we put into it. We need to break down the "walls of the classroom-world" that makes our profession a lonely one. Am I straying from the point? In other words we need to change the teacher's expectation of him/herself and then set about focusing on his/her expectations of his/her students in challenging situations and in good times.

Kozol's books of the children in Harlem (*Ordinary Resurrections*) are good reminders of the human side of growing up and learning, never to leave it behind amidst the academics. In short we must have hope in ourselves if we are to build or inspire hope in others. So let initial teacher training seek to create avenues for hope and a vision for a great future for all of our children within our student teachers by making the curriculum resonate with great expectations then achievement and "if they have done it for me, I can do it for them!!"

RELATED RESOURCES

De Lisle, J. Smith, P. Lewis, Y. Keller, C. David, P. Jules, Lochan, Hackett, Pierre and Seunarinesingh, K.(2007). In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, How do we identify schools that are succeeding or failing amidst exceptionally challenging circumstances? In L. Quamina-Aiyejina (Ed.), *Reconceptualising the agenda for education in the*



Caribbean: Proceedings of the 2007 Biennial Cross-Campus Conference in Education, April 23-26, 2007, School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago (pp. 547-562). St. Augustine, Trinidad: School of Education, UWI.

De Lisle, Smith, Lewis, Keller, David, Jules, Lochan, Hackett, Pierre and Seunarin Singh (2007) explored the process and variables to be considered when utilizing national assessments to enhance school improvement capabilities. The paper considers the context of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, school contexts that can be considered 'complex and challenging'. The paper maintains that though Trinidad and Tobago has a system for national achievement testing; there was a need for a national educational quality evaluation system. The paper references two policy frameworks: accountability and compensatory education policy. It also explores factors to consider when developing an index to measure school performance, the academic performance index (API) developed by California's Department of Education and analyzed the results of implementing a variation of the API. The authors maintained that "helping schools improve requires a vision of school improvement that is context dependent – one that acknowledges reality and the need to compensate for the circumstances faced".

Cooke, L.D. (2008). Characteristics of an effective school: A theoretical perspective. In A. Ezenne (Ed.), *Leadership for School Improvement in the Caribbean (pp.3 - 32)*. Kinston, Jamaica: Department of Educational Studies.

Cooke reviewed conducted a literature review on the characteristics of effective schools. The article maintains that apart from student performance on standardized tests, criteria for effective schools include achievement orientation of the school, teachers' expectation level, educational leadership, consensus and cohesion among the staff, and school climate. This paper posits that school leaders must "get others to work toward a shared vision; and to work with teachers to accomplish the instructional goals of the school or to modify the goals and plans to maximize outcomes". The noted characteristics of effective schools include: 1) a safe and orderly environment, 2) a clear school mission, 3) instructional leadership, 4) a climate of high expectations, 5) high time on task, 6) monitoring of students progress, and 7) home school relationship. Eight domains for rating effective school involves an examination of the following: curriculum and assessment, accountability mechanisms and processes, teacher training supply and professional development support, the well being attendance and motivation of all pupils, development of links and partnerships with parents and the community, quality assurance systems, the school's physical environment including adequacy of resources and whether leadership can be considered effective. The article maintains that though an effective leader



may be restricted by the context, being team oriented facilitate effectiveness. A case study that shows the positive effect of 'teamwork leadership' on transforming a school in the United States was presented.

Johnson, B. & Ezenne, A. (2008). Principals' and teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership roles in selected primary schools in central Jamaica. In A. Ezenne (Ed.), *Leadership for School Improvement in the Caribbean* (pp.181 - 212). Jamaica: Department of Educational Studies.

Johnson and Ezenne (2008) advance the perspective that apart from their managerial role, which is often emphasized, principals play a critical role in instructional development and supervision. It is noted that though many principals do not devote enough time to instructional leadership, it positively correlates with quality teaching and learning and indirectly impact on students' performance. Pre-observation conferencing, classroom observation and post observation conference is posited as the method by which strengths can be capitalized on and weaknesses can be corrected, and consequently, reinforce effective teaching, identify emerging problems and monitor curriculum implementation. To investigate the perception of teachers and principals concerning the latter's role in instructional leadership, the authors distributed the questionnaires to 39 principals and 332 teachers from 40 primary schools. The questionnaire as respondents to indicate their agreement concerning whether 10 activities that indicate instructional leadership is being carried out by principals. The results revealed a significant difference in the perception of teachers and principals regarding the principals' involvement in instructional leadership. Specifically, teachers and principals disagree on the extent to which principals promote programmes to meet individual differences, monitor procedures on reporting students' progress to parents and stakeholders, visit classroom regularly, hold post observation conference to provide feedback, ensure major portion of contact time is spent on formal teaching/ learning activities and provide up-to-date teaching and learning materials for instruction.

Additional Resources

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Michalak, J. (n.d.) *Successful leadership in schools in challenging contexts*. Retrieved from www.aare.edu.au/08pap/mic08064.pdf

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Donated Resources

Three documents were donated by Dr. Grace – Camille Munroe.

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