

MUSTER

Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project

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Discussion Paper

15

New Qualified Teachers:
Impact On/Interaction with
the System
(Trinidad & Tobago)

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Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER)

MUSTER is a collaborative research project co-ordinated from the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex Institute of Education. It has been developed in partnership with:

- The Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.
- The Institute of Education, The National University of Lesotho.
- The Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi.
- The Faculty of Education, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.
- The School of Education, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine's Campus, Trinidad.

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MUSTER is focused on generating new understandings of teacher education before, during and after the point of initial qualification as a teacher. Its concerns include exploring how new teachers are identified and selected for training programmes, how they acquire the skills they need to teach effectively, and how they experience training and induction into the teaching profession. The research includes analytical concerns with the structure and organisation of teacher education, the form and substance of teacher education curriculum, the identity, roles and cultural experience of trainee teachers, and the costs and probable benefits of different types of initial teacher training.

MUSTER is designed to provide opportunities to build research and evaluation capacity in teacher education in developing countries through active engagement with the research process from design, through data collection, to analysis and joint publication. Principal researchers lead teams in each country and are supported by three Sussex faculty and three graduate researchers.

This series of discussion papers has been created to provide an early opportunity to share output from sub-studies generated within MUSTER for comment and constructive criticism. Each paper takes a theme within or across countries and offers a view of work in progress.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined newly trained teachers' impact on and interaction with the educational system using qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews and classroom observations. The research questions were as follows: what are experienced teachers' perceptions of the value of the present Teachers' College programme; how are newly trained teachers socialised into school working cultures; and what happens to the knowledge and skills acquired at the Teachers' College. In general, it was found that the Teachers' College programme did not prepare them adequately for work in the school setting. Once they began work in their first post, their main interest was surviving the experience and doing what worked, so sometimes this led them to revert to traditional methods. Many held the belief that teachers were "born" rather than "made". However, despite these perceptions, it was possible to note the impact of training in systematic approaches to lesson planning, varied teaching styles, and an informed professional approach to the job. Many teachers expressed concern for the individual need of pupils and encouraging different talents in them, which could be partially attributed to training. Overall, the paper concludes that training had only a limited impact and many newly trained teachers maintained beliefs that they had held before they had entered training.

1. BACKGROUND

Research on beginning teachers and how they experience the process of beginning to teach has focused on the prior beliefs of beginning teachers, the teacher education experience and the first years of practice (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Most of these studies, however, have focused on pre-service teachers who enter teacher education programs with no prior classroom experience and whose first year as newly qualified teachers is their first year in the classroom except for their teaching practice.

In Trinidad and Tobago this is not usually the case. The recruitment and selection process for primary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago require applicants to possess at least five passes at the General Certificate Examination (GCE) O-level or Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) examinations at the General Proficiency Level, in at least three subject groups: mathematics, English language and a science subject. It is not compulsory for recruits to be professionally trained before they begin their teaching careers. In many instances, recruits are assigned to schools before having had the benefit of professional teacher training. Over the last five to eight years, therefore, most of the teachers who entered Teachers' College in Trinidad and Tobago would have had at least two years experience as assistant teachers at the primary school level. In this study, all the newly qualified teachers had been in the classroom as assistant teachers for at least two years prior to being trained. They may have been given a short induction course, placed with an experienced teacher or have been involved in the On the Job Training programme before going into the classroom.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study looked at the impact on and the interaction with the educational system of the newly qualified teachers. The research questions were the following:

- What are experienced teachers' perceptions of the value of the present Teachers' College programme?
- How are newly trained teachers socialised into the school working culture?
- What happens to the knowledge and skills acquired at the Teachers' College?

3. METHODOLOGY

Newly qualified teachers were identified as those teachers who had graduated from the Teachers' Colleges in the last three years. Eight such teachers were interviewed, six females and two males from five schools in the eastern part of the island. The schools were chosen because they were easily accessible and included both denominational and government primary schools. There were two government schools, one Roman Catholic, one Hindu and one Muslim.

Three principals were interviewed and data were also obtained from a focus group interview with principals. Classroom observation was also carried out with seven teachers, as the eighth teacher did not wish to be observed.

4. EXPERIENCED TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF THE PRESENT TEACHERS' COLLEGE PROGRAMMES.

Based on their assessment of the performance of the newly qualified teachers in their schools, principals had both positive and negative perceptions of the Teachers' College programme. Most of the principals had very positive comments about the attitude of the newly qualified teachers to their work. They found them to be enthusiastic, energetic, hard working, committed, "willing to go the extra mile", as one principal put it:

The newly qualified teachers seem to want to put everything into what they do. That is my view of the newly qualified teacher. Fresh out of college they have all the ideas, they want to get things done. They want to get a lot of things done overnight...

Another had very complimentary remarks about the two newly trained teachers at his school:

Mr. R.... was sent here in September so he has been with us just a few weeks from September to November and he has demonstrated competence in all areas. He is enthusiastic, bright, he is dynamic and I am very satisfied with the work he is doing. The other newly trained teacher, she graduated from Teachers' College in 1998 and therefore she has been teaching with us for more than a year. I am very impressed. I am particularly impressed with the way she goes about her duties, the relationship she has with the children and generally her teaching skills. In fact I look at her as one of the bright stars in the teaching profession.

However, two of the principals in the focus group, while they agreed that the majority of the newly qualified teachers were positive in their approach, cited two exceptions to this rule. Both teachers had taught in the secondary school prior to their training and were unhappy with their placement at a primary school. Their dissatisfaction was seen in their lack of enthusiasm and even frequent absenteeism in one case.

Apart from their attitude to work the principals commented favourably on the newly qualified teachers' attitude to and relationship with the children in their class:

She is a good teacher. She has that kind of attitude. She cares about the children under her and to me that is one of the most important things. You could see the caring about every child. Every child is important in her class.

In terms of teaching skills, the principals found that the newly qualified teachers were not as well prepared as they expected. While the new teachers had the potential to be good teachers they had some problems, which, in the principals' view, pointed to the need for the Teachers' College to pay more attention to this area:

I think looking at teachers who have come out of college within the past couple of years I would say methodology at college needs to be done more, in the areas of maths and numeracy and literacy. I have detected a slant in that area where teachers need a little more of that. They come to you, I wouldn't say without any, but without sufficient, as it were, methodologies...

The principals felt that the emphasis in the Teachers' College programme was on the acquisition of content knowledge to the detriment of methodology. One principal said:

I always feel that a Teachers' College should be a place where people will learn how to teach. The methodology, that is important. I have discerned a marked difference between the work that is done at Teachers' College and the work that is done by the curriculum facilitators as they come to the school. And therefore I say there needs to be a greater concentration on methodology, how to teach the particular subjects.

Another said that teachers come to the primary school from Teachers' College lacking basic teaching methodologies and felt that this showed that "something is not right with the teacher training".

Yet despite the flaws, they recognise in the newly qualified teachers the positive impact of what they have learnt in the Teachers' College with respect to curriculum delivery:

What I have also found with some of the new teachers on the positive side there is a tendency to use a lot of concrete ideas. I have seen one or two years ago in the infant department, she used a lot of concrete material. This is a positive aspect of teachers coming out of college.

Another principal felt that the newly qualified teachers came out with an understanding of the new approaches to the teaching of mathematics and language. She also felt that based on their teaching practice experience they continued to use charts and manipulatives to make their lessons exciting.

Another principal noted a change in the institution because of the influence of a newly trained teacher who was implementing some of the new methods that he had learnt:

I have found that his delivery methods are really different, and I mean in a positive way. When we were trying to implement the new language arts syllabus he was very helpful because he had been exposed to it and there was a change in the institution because of his methods. We were able to change those big heavy benches and have a setting that incorporated a kind of group work. He was instrumental in getting the other teachers to do it as well.

This was not the experience of all principals however. Another principal lamented the fact that the newly qualified teachers did not maintain the kind of teaching that they displayed on teaching practice:

What you see when teachers come to teaching practice and what you see when you come out of college is [sic] two different things. At college they will go out of their way a hundred miles to get their charts and everything necessary to gain that extra mark. When they come out of college you don't see that same kind of enthusiasm in terms of their teaching, in terms of their preparation and in terms of their delivery.

One of the reasons put forward to account for this was the difference between what the newly qualified teachers learn at College and the reality of the classroom situation:

At times though some of the things, applying some of the psychology and some of the methods they get for classroom control, the things they get from training college, it [sic] is not applicable to our situation lots of times...I get the impression talking to the newly trained teachers that what they learn in college and what they come here and find are entirely different.

Another reason put forward for newly qualified teachers not performing as they did on teaching practice was the fact that most schools were strapped for funds and could not provide the necessary resources for the teachers to put into practice what they had learnt in the Teachers' College. As a result, teachers got frustrated and fell back.

Principals felt that as a general rule the newly qualified teachers had the requisite content knowledge to deliver the syllabus. The only deficiencies noted were in the core areas of mathematics and language:

In the two teachers in question who have just come out of teachers' college I would say I have not found any deficiencies except in the case of the mathematics that the teacher mentioned to me. And I would not call that a deficiency. But in teachers previous to these teachers I have found that their own language sometimes indicated that we may have a population of young people who are leaving school and eventually Teachers' College with everything not strongly in place. Like for example concord and sometimes spelling and sometimes the agreement of subject and verb.

While the sample of principals was small and their views of the Teachers' College programme were based by and large on the performance of the individual teachers who came to their school, there was consensus on some issues. They noted some positive outcomes of the training experience, such as a positive attitude to work, a good relationship with the children and some use of new methods. However the general feeling was that not enough attention was being paid to methodology and that too much time was spent on content knowledge. They felt that this should not be so, and that the function of a Teachers' College was to teach students how to teach.

5. THE SOCIALISATION OF NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS INTO THE SCHOOL WORKING CULTURE

The working culture of a school, like any other organisation, may be defined in many different ways. For example Ouchi (1981) defines working organisational culture as all those symbols, ceremonies and myths that communicate the values and beliefs of that organisation to its employees. Robbins (1991) defines organisational culture as a common perception held by the organisation's members, a system of shared meanings. Mintzberg (1989) on the other hand, regards organisational culture as a pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organisation's members which produce norms that powerfully shape the behaviour of individuals and groups and which determines the way things are done in the organisation. The common thread that links all these definitions is the notion that organisational culture has a socialising effect on the members of the organisation through the shared beliefs, myths, norms, ceremonies, tacit assumptions, values and customs. It is generally accepted therefore, that socialisation is the manner in which employees are transformed from organisational outsiders to participating and effective group members. This concept is important for schools because the way teachers are assigned and inducted into schools impacts significantly on the type of teacher they become.

The newly trained teachers met a range of socialising forces from principals, teachers, students and the school environment. The most common strategy used by principals to induct the newly qualified teachers into the working culture of the school was a system of mentoring. As a rule the newly qualified teacher would be attached to a senior teacher who would monitor their teaching and provide assistance and support when needed. In most cases the principal also did some monitoring. One principal described the process in her school:

I try as far as possible to attach the newly trained teacher to a senior teacher who is in a classroom nearby who would serve as a mentor as it were to them and help them with lesson preparation, preparation of units of work, introduce them to all the aspects of the tasks they have to carry out and listen to their lessons and also have them listen to the senior teacher teach a lesson.

This principal did not use seniority alone as the criterion for choosing her mentors but observed the senior teachers' style of teaching and chose those who would be the best role models. Other principals assigned the mentoring role to the heads of departments or the vice-principal. None of the principals provided any training or additional support for these mentors to help them carry out this function. Other members of staff including the principal, who were not specifically assigned to the newly qualified teachers also provided professional, emotional and material support. This comment from one of the newly trained teachers was echoed by a majority of the interviewees:

Oh my principal is very supportive, my colleagues are very supportive, if you are not familiar with the content or something like that it is not a problem. You have a number of people who are willing to assist you. And my principal she is very open, she is willing to listen to the problems you are encountering. It is a very open environment; we have a lot of support from the other teachers.

While the majority of the teachers indicated that they received a great deal of support from their colleagues, this was not the case for all of the teachers interviewed. One reported that she got no help from her colleagues nor from the principal who was afraid of offending the senior teachers:

Well support here has not been very good. You do not get the support of the senior staff as you should in terms of taking into consideration...I have a standard five class and we have to correct all our compositions ourselves, nobody volunteers. Nobody comes in to help you teach anything. It is just you are thrust into a classroom and you have to deal with it as a younger teacher on staff. So I would not say I have been helped much.

This lack of help from colleagues was attributed by another newly trained teacher to the heavy workload of the primary school teacher. He said:

The principal gives a lot of support. But the staff relationship here is so busy. Each teacher has so much responsibility that teacher socialisation is very very hard.

Even one of the principals noted the difficulty in finding time for sitting and talking to the newly qualified teachers to monitor their progress:

Well in addition to the mentoring I believe that the teacher now coming out of college needs time to sit with somebody and talk things over when problems arise. The way things are structured at present within the school system there is not much time for that except teaching time is taken.

The level of material support provided by both principal and colleagues for the newly qualified teachers was less than the emotional and professional support. The evidence from both newly trained teachers and principals indicated that in almost all schools little or no material resources or teaching aids were provided. Material resources were limited to very basic items such as markers, bristol board and in rare cases some books. The more experienced teachers had grown accustomed to providing for themselves most of the material resources and teaching aids needed to enhance their classroom practice. The newly qualified teachers quickly became aware of this situation. One newly trained teacher reported that:

Well, we get markers and we have access to bristol board. But other basic things like record books and forecast, they expect you to buy. I don't see why I should be

spending my money to buy notebooks for the record and forecast when they require the record and forecast, and I don't find it very helpful to me.

In some instances, the inadequate support both emotional and material from the principal and other colleagues contributed to some newly qualified teachers being uncomfortable and experiencing a low sense of efficacy. In a few cases the newly trained teachers expressed the desire to be transferred to other schools where they felt they might derive greater psychic rewards. One teacher expressed this sentiment in the following manner:

Eventually I will like to leave here maybe in a year or two. You don't get the support and I really want to do it and sometimes you are bursting and you cannot say...because people get offended.

The newly qualified teachers are not only inducted into the manner in which the school wants the curriculum delivered but are also introduced to the school's expectations for the teacher. This is done by making the new teachers aware of the school's policies with respect to certain matters e.g. discipline, dress and assembly. The principal or head of department usually assumes the responsibility for doing this. One principal makes her expectations quite explicit:

I wish to just again to call my new teachers in before the term is out and speak again about their manner of dress, of speech, of deportment, of themselves, how they speak to the children. I just want to remind them that they are role models.

She also pays a lot of attention to team building and to the social aspects that will help to build a team. The new teacher is made to feel welcome and other teachers make sure that the new teacher knows how things operate in the school so that she feels part of the institution very soon. Another principal mentioned that the promotion of staff togetherness was a matter of policy at her school. She therefore sought to provide opportunities for the staff to get together socially.

Overall, there was no structured programme for the induction of newly qualified teachers but rather an informal system of mentoring and help from other teachers in dealing with specific problems related to the syllabus, methodology or classroom management. Most principals made themselves available to the new teachers for advice and held regular meetings with them to monitor their progress and discuss syllabi, schemes of work and record keeping.

The staff also contributed to the socialisation of the new teacher by sharing information about the way things were done in the school to make the new teacher fit in more quickly. Principals also ensured that the new teachers were made aware of the school's policies and expectations.

6. THE USE MADE BY NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ACQUIRED AT THE TEACHERS' COLLEGE.

The newly qualified teachers were asked a variety of questions about their classroom practice in order to elicit from them whether they felt that the Teachers' College experience had been helpful. They were also asked whether, in their first years of teaching, they drew upon any knowledge and skills they had acquired during their training programme. They were also observed in the classroom. The responses ranged from those who said that their training had not helped them at all, to those who felt that it helped somewhat but not much, to those who felt that it had helped a great deal. The general consensus was that the Teachers' College programme was too academic, that the content of some subjects was not relevant to the content taught in the primary school, and most importantly, that they had not been exposed to enough methodology. However even those who said that their training had not helped much, when asked about specific aspects of their practice acknowledged the input of the training course. Cheryl was one such teacher.

Cheryl was teaching at a Roman Catholic girls' primary school. At the time of the interview and observation she was in her first term at the school. After leaving The Teachers' College she had spent one year at another Roman Catholic primary school. She herself was a Roman Catholic. She was teaching Standard four in which the average age of the student was ten. This was unusual as newly trained teachers were usually given the lower forms. Cheryl however had graduated from Teachers' College with ten distinctions. Despite her success she indicated that she did not think that the Teachers' College programme had affected her teaching in any significant way. Prior to attending College Cheryl had taught for three years in a primary school:

To be perfectly honest, I think I was a much more enthusiastic teacher before I went to College. But maybe I have benefited from some of the measures they have taught us with regard to discipline and how to deliver your content, I can't say I have benefited significantly or changed my methods vastly.

Yet she admits that she has tried to implement some of the things she learnt although she questions how relevant they are in the real life situation:

I think maybe I am more competent with regards to how I diagnose the children and assess them and stuff like that. But what I did at College writing notes of lessons for every lesson and so on. I no longer do that. That is just not very practical.

As far as methods were concerned she admitted that she had been trying to use the approach to reading that she had been exposed to at College. She was selective however in the aspects she chose to employ:

Some of the reading methods are very helpful. But again like some of the things like in composition, that although I find the writing process very helpful I can't go into as much detail as they advocated in college. It's just not possible I don't have that kind of time to spare.

She reiterated several times that her teaching had not really changed because of the College experience and that "I just continued teaching the way I know how to before I went to College".

Concerning the content of the subject area courses, Cheryl found that some of the material covered was not relevant to the work done in the primary school. With reference to the content of the language arts syllabus at College she expressed the view that while it was useful to know how language evolved the details were not helpful:

But some of the things I don't see how learning about phonemes and graphemes and stuff is doing much to me right now, not really.

She also indicated that some of the content that was taught was not useful since the schools lacked the resources needed for teaching:

As I said some of the content is just not relevant. And you know things with regard to PE and stuff, they teach you all those things knowing well you don't have the equipment and stuff to apply it when you come here.

Cheryl believed that she was already a good teacher before she went to College and that classroom experience is superior to the College experience:

I think I was a good teacher before I went to Training College. Maybe I have learnt some things that I have applied along the way but I think teaching is...a good teacher basically learns from her experience. I think had I stayed in class I would have learnt just as much as I learnt from Training College. Because I am not teaching the way I started when I first came to school. I think teaching is practice and experience. And I think that is where I have got most of my learning from, in the class.

Cheryl had a small class, only 14 students, which she taught as a whole class during the lessons observed. The classes were teacher-centred as the main teaching strategy used was exposition by the teacher using the chalkboard, followed by teacher questioning of the students. Students were evaluated orally and in writing. Cheryl explained that she used a whole group strategy since the class was small and this facilitated interaction. During the three lessons observed a chart was used only once in a mathematics class. Based on the results of the lesson evaluations Cheryl felt that all the lessons were successful, as the students had achieved the objectives set out, were attentive and responded well.

While Cheryl was an effective teacher her methods were traditional and did not reflect a creative and innovative approach to student learning which supported her own view that her practice had not been significantly changed by the Teachers' College experience.

Shalini's experience was different from Cheryl's. She had a very positive view of her Teachers' College programme and how it had helped her and was continuing to help her teach more effectively. Shalini was teaching at a Hindu school. She herself was Indo-Trinidadian and Hindu. She had graduated from Teachers' College with six distinctions a year before. Prior to entering College she had been teaching for three years. Like Cheryl she too had been given a senior class to teach, Standard Five, the eleven year olds who would be taking the Common Entrance examination for entry into secondary school. Since leaving the Teachers' College Shalini has started a degree programme at the university as a part-time student.

Shalini said that she had learnt a lot at Teachers' College, which had helped her become a more effective and focused teacher:

Well training for me, while there were some things that were not applicable, it did a lot for me in terms of delivering the curriculum and actually getting methods to bring out what I want to teach. You become more focused. You know now objectives what you wanted to achieve in each lesson. Well it has helped me immensely in terms of time management, getting my point across in a specific time frame, seeing about the readiness of the children, making sure they are ready for the lesson.

Shalini also credited the Teachers' College with giving her skills in classroom management, assessment, record keeping and specific teaching skills such as questioning. Regarding the content of the subject areas, Shalini found that the material covered in the College courses was very relevant to the work done in the primary school:

Yes. Especially in social studies, things that we covered on our social studies syllabus in College is [sic] very relevant to Standard five. So I have used that. In terms of science the experiments like electricity what we did there, you bring it back to the classroom because it is relevant. The materials, for comprehension, all the comprehension skills, study skills. The writing process in comprehension has been very effective.

The content, particularly the psychology component, was also very helpful to Shalini who saw its relevance to every aspect of her teaching:

Where you might have dealt with a problem before, now after training and dealing with the psychology aspect of everything, I think it brings a new dimension to what I'm doing. I am able to deal with students in (sic) a more individualistic level. I am getting through to them in that way. Now my teaching is not more instruction anymore it is facilitating.

Overall, Shalini, unlike Cheryl, felt that her teaching had improved significantly after being exposed to the Teachers' College programme:

[My teaching] has changed in terms of the way I approach the class. I am no longer getting flustered about problems that arise. For every problem that I have seen so far I have been able to find a way to deal with it, a method. Even the weakest child, there is some method that I have used from my training college years to try to deal with the problem. Before training college, it would have been getting flustered, calling the child, doing my way, not knowing the proper method of doing it and the child still not understanding what I was doing. I had no training in the processes and the psychology behind it.

Shalini's classroom was a less traditional one. Instead of a whole class approach, Shalini varied the strategy according to the task. In a composition class she started with a whole class strategy where she elicited from the students ideas to develop the composition and showed them how to develop these ideas. Then she walked around monitoring and helping individual students as they wrote their compositions. In a comprehension lesson she used small groups as well as a whole class group using handouts and a variety of activities such as questioning, reading aloud, writing answers to questions, doing exercises in the workbook.

Shalini's classes were student-centred. Rather than being the transmitter of knowledge Shalini tried to involve the students in generating ideas and building on their own experiences. She tried to apply some of the new methods and approaches that she had been exposed to at College and was clearly using all the knowledge and skills acquired during training.

Gender did not seem to be a factor in the newly qualified teachers' perception of the value of the knowledge and skills acquired at the Teachers' College and the use they made of these since leaving College. The two male teachers in the sample, like the female teachers, had different views.

Ray felt that he had gained a great deal from Teachers' College which was useful to him in doing his job. He singled out the methodology, particularly in the core areas of mathematics and English:

[My teaching has changed] in terms of the different methods in some of the subject areas I have been using, especially maths and the reading. I have learnt more in terms of the reading...Now I have gone to College because of the lecturers I know how to do like Direct Reading Approach, Direct Reading and Thinking Approach and the Language Experience Approach. So all these things I have learnt have prepared me for the classroom.

He also indicated that he had benefited from learning to use specific strategies for delivering instruction more effectively such as how to get children's attention and to interest and excite them by the way in which the content was presented. Like all the

teachers he singled out the psychology learnt at College as helping him to understand children better.

Ray also felt that the College experience was extremely valuable for the opportunity it presented for interaction with other students and with the lecturers:

Well, interacting with other teachers. I think that was very [good]. You know you getting different ideas, really the socialisation, and you know there are some lecturers will inspire you to do good.

In spite of his positive experiences, however, there were some drawbacks, which were related to the lack of resources at the College. This impacted on the quality of the preparation which the teachers received:

I guess the problem with the College in terms of the resource materials they don't have enough in terms of finance to give you the resource material. For example I was doing educational technology at the College and you will find we are supposed to be dealing with computers. But the thing is there were computers but they were not working. So that is why also in terms of them providing the resources for you to be properly trained as a teacher...that was lacking, the resources, the materials.

Ray's classroom teaching reflected his positive attitude. In a Standard One class he aroused students' interest by the way he introduced the story, eliciting from the students their own experiences of birthday parties. Students were exposed to a variety of activities, they listened to the story then answered questions, sang the birthday song and wrote their own story. The class was small so the activities were done as whole class activities. He used cutouts as teaching aids in this lesson and sentence strips in another lesson on grammar. It was clear that he was trying to implement some of the things he had learnt at College and was having success.

Imran, unlike Ray did not feel that College had helped his teaching. Like Cheryl, Imran seemed to feel that he was as good a teacher before he went to College as when he left. Particularly in the area of methodology he felt that the College had not helped. When asked if he was helped in teaching by what he had been exposed to in College he said:

Well as far as lessons go what I learn from College, I find that is like totally the opposite. I don't think College actually help me with actually teaching the lessons. You know the lesson planning, the objectives...when I was teaching [before] it wasn't say written down but I knew what I was doing.

Imran seems to feel like Cheryl that teachers are born not made. He feels that he was destined to teach.

Because I had loved this thing [teaching] from the first day I started. I had the love for it and to me I did it with a certain amount of class.

He also felt that the academic content of most of the subject areas was not relevant to teaching in the primary school and recommends that the content be cut down and more time allotted to methodology, different ways of putting things across to children. Like others he also felt that many of the recommended strategies did not work in the real world of the classroom. He gave the example of classroom control where the suggestions made by the College lecturers did not work with the children in his class.

There were some positive aspects however. Like most teachers he found the psychology courses useful in helping him to deal with children's individual differences and making him more aware of the relationship that the teacher should have with the students. Yet he qualifies this by saying that he was always conscious of these things even before coming to College. Overall, Imran does not feel that his teaching has been affected in any real way by his College preparation.

Imran used a whole class approach and traditional teaching aids, blackboard and chalk, during the class which was observed. The physical facilities were not conducive to individual or group work since he was in an extremely small and cramped classroom, which did not allow the teacher to move around the class. However, Imran got around this by having students come up to the teachers' table where he dealt with them on an individual basis. His concern for his students was evident and the class was an effective one where the students showed evidence of having grasped a difficult mathematical concept for seven year olds.

7. DISCUSSION

In the majority of cases, the newly qualified teachers in this study reported varying degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the programme offered at the training college in terms of its relevance and usefulness for the primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, all teachers reported that the foundation subjects (psychology, sociology and philosophy) were very beneficial. In all instances participants expressed the view that they were now better able to understand their students than before their College experience. They also indicated that they were better equipped to deal not only with their colleagues on a professional basis, but more pertinently with many of the learning difficulties of their students. A newly trained teacher, expressing the views of most participants, reported that:

I feel my role has expanded. Even though I may have been a good friend to the students before, now I am able to see it in a different light. Where you might have dealt with a problem before, now after training, and dealing with the psychology aspect of everything, I feel it brings a new dimension into what I am doing. I am able to deal with students in a more individualistic level. I am getting through to them in that way.

Another teacher indicated a number of areas which helped her to deal with her students more effectively.

Ok the Ed classes, psychology and sociology of education those classes helped as well as my physical education... It helps you understand children, it helps you adjust how you think and behave towards the children.

In spite of their perception that not enough emphasis was given to methodology, teachers gave examples of what they had learnt which was helpful, and these were related to methods, teaching strategies, curriculum delivery and classroom management. Some teachers focused on specific teaching skills which they had added to their repertoire such as lesson planning, introducing a lesson, questioning, giving examples, developing concepts, and correction strategies. Others indicated that they still used resource materials, such as charts, which they had made at College in their classes.

Specific subject areas were cited where the work done in college influenced how they taught the subject. Several teachers mentioned the approach to reading and writing. Another indicated that she was helped in all areas, in science because the process approach that she was exposed to is what she needed to bring out the processes in the classroom. In social studies she has learnt that teaching the subject requires using maps and other apparatus instead of giving notes. Two teachers cited the area of measurement

and evaluation, which helped them in assessing the students, as well as in constructing their tests.

With respect to the teaching methods learnt at the training college the newly qualified teachers varied somewhat in their assessment of the quality and applicability of those methods. On the one hand, most participants felt that their instructional practice had benefited in terms of their ability to prepare and deliver the curriculum. This aspect of the newly qualified teachers' professional competence was corroborated through the observational phase of data collection. Through the classroom observations it was clear that many areas including curriculum planning, delivery, and assessment were positively impacted by the training methods to which the newly qualified teachers were exposed. Similarly, the manner of their interaction both at the teacher-teacher and the teacher-student levels suggested some measure of internalisation of the skills, concepts, theories, and competencies learnt at the training college. For instance, a newly trained teacher stated that:

Before I left for training college I did not feel I was as effective in the classroom as I am now. I did not get any help in terms of teaching methods from looking at senior teachers teach and all that. I did not agree with what most of them were doing anyway. Then, going to training college I realised that there are methods and ways of doing things.

One constant theme was the difficulty in applying what they had been taught in College to the real life situation. The newly qualified teachers found that they had to modify what they had learnt in College to cope with the classroom reality. They found that there were constraints of time, resources and even of parents who did not understand what they were trying to do:

We don't have the resources to do the things that we are taught...So what you are taught there you cannot really apply all the things here unless you decide to go and get yourself in expense and that is a personal thing.

More than one teacher felt that children did not respond to the alternative methods suggested for classroom control and discipline in the College and went back to more traditional methods. Another felt that the College lecturers were too removed from the classroom situation:

I think some of those lecturers need to come and spend some time in a primary school classroom and see what it is really like and then try to apply what they are telling you and see if it is feasible. Because some of the things are not practical. And a lot of the things they teach you at college I am not sure if it helps you to be a more effective teacher.

The issue of College teachers' ability to demonstrate by their own practice, that the methods they advocated could work, was echoed by more than one teacher.

What I would like to see being done is the lecturers actually bringing in classes to the school and showing us exactly how to handle the situations and not just one day, over a period of time. Don't just preach it, show us what could be done.

The relevance of the subject matter content of the academic subjects was also questioned. It was felt that the in-depth treatment of some areas was more relevant to teaching in the secondary school and that the time spent on these topics could have been devoted instead to the professional component of their training.

Another teacher expressed the view that the College experience was somewhat disappointing because of the emphasis on subject matter content:

Going to College for me was like going back to school. It wasn't so much about learning how to teach children. It was about learning things that I feel didn't have...wasn't that relevant to what we teaching in the primary school. Now if it was secondary school you were training for I probably would see the relevance.

This feeling of the teachers that much of the academic content of their Teachers' College programme was not relevant may account for the fact that for some teachers it was a question of learning the content to pass exams and then having no further use for it:

And like I said the focus was on passing exams rather than becoming a better teacher. We may have been equipped with the tools but after being so frustrated and being relieved that you were over with College you tended to burn those tools and not use them.

Some teachers did not even master the content:

Science was one of the most difficult subjects in Training College for me. I never like [sic] science. Some of it I really did not even understand.

I just remember having this bulk of notes to learn and to go through and I am not sure how much of it I am actually applying right now.

The teachers were divided in their assessment of whether the knowledge and skills acquired at the College were helping them in their teaching in the classroom. Of the eight teachers, three were very positive that the knowledge acquired was helping them to teach more effectively, to relate better to their students and to feel more confident of themselves as teachers. They were also aware that they had changed in the way they dealt with problems bringing to bear the knowledge acquired at College to find solutions.

The other five, while acknowledging that some of what they had learnt was helpful, felt that overall their teaching had not changed significantly because of the Training College experience. One of these teachers felt that she was doing now exactly what she did before going to College. For her nothing has changed. She feels that she was already a teacher prior to entering College and that she feels the same way now. The most that she

has gained from College is “the bit of knowledge”. This was also the view of another teacher who felt that prior to going to College he already knew what he was doing in the classroom but that College just put it in more theoretical terms. He also felt that what he had learnt at College was mainly subject matter knowledge, which was not relevant to what was taught at primary level.

In general, newly qualified teachers felt that the Teachers’ College programme did not prepare them adequately for work in the school setting. They were aware of the incongruity between their College experiences, including teaching practice, and the classroom reality. In such a situation they focused on survival strategies and in many cases replaced the recommended strategies they had learnt with practical solutions that provided results. They became more concerned with classroom management and control and in some cases reverted to traditional methods of achieving this.

There was a sense among these new teachers that the classroom situation provided the most valuable knowledge about teaching and that the lessons of experience were privileged over the theoretical knowledge provided by the Teachers’ College. This resonated with the prior beliefs of some of the teachers who seemed to feel that teachers were born not made and that good teachers improved their techniques by being in the classroom. For such teachers the College experience was not seen as changing their practice significantly.

Despite the perception of the newly qualified teachers that their teaching had not been significantly changed by the College experience, the evidence, both from the interviews and the classroom observations, seemed to indicate that through the professional training received by the newly qualified teachers, overwhelming benefits flowed to the schools. These benefits were demonstrated through the newly trained teachers’ concern for proper lesson planning, proper and systematic development of the curriculum, concern for students’ varying learning styles and, therefore, the need to focus on different forms of assessment. This level of consciousness appeared to have been kindled at the training college, even though some teachers did not fully implement all the necessary strategies. For example, many teachers did not take too kindly to having to prepare lesson plans on a daily basis. They were, nevertheless, very conscious of their obligations to plan their lessons even if those plans were not in a very detailed form. Also, all newly trained teachers were very much aware of the individual differences among students. They were conscious of the necessity to treat each student as an individual bearing in mind the notion of multiple intelligences and their obligations to develop each student to his/her full potential.

The findings are similar to findings of other research studies on pre-service teachers which suggest that beginning teachers learn to teach during their first year in the classroom and that their growth as teachers had little to do with the knowledge given them in their teacher education programme (Hollingsworth, 1993 #213 cited in (Wideen et al., 1998)).

The findings also suggest that teacher education programmes do little to change the prior beliefs of most teachers who feel that what is learnt while it seems feasible often does not work in the classroom. However there were teachers within the sample who felt that they had changed and so the challenge is to find out which aspects of the teacher education programme makes the most difference in the continuing development and the practice of the beginning teacher.

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