

***Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project***

**CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT AT JAMAICA'S TEACHER TRAINING  
COLLEGES FOR PRIMARY TEACHERS: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

***IEQ undertaken by:***

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## INTRODUCTION

The new Revised Primary Curriculum for grades 1-6 is in the process of implementation at pilot schools throughout the country. It is expected that all schools in the country will be using the new curriculum by 2003.

Implementation will take place over a period of three years beginning in 2001 with Grades 1 and 4. The Revised Primary Curriculum has made some dramatic shifts in terms of teaching methodology, assessment, content arrangement, purposes and focus. With a focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills through integrated units that use the aesthetics as a vehicle for learning, the curriculum is expected to pose challenges for primary teachers. Although extensive training of in-service primary teachers has, and is taking place, pre-service training has only begun to address the needs of the new primary curriculum in its program.

One component of the Joint Board of Teacher Education's (JBTE) development plan is the revision of the curricula for four subjects of the Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTC). With the assistance of the Improving Educational Quality II (IEQ II) Project, PTC courses in Science, Mathematics, Language Arts, and Social Studies are being revised to include a greater emphasis on learner-centred and activity oriented teaching and learning, integration, numeracy, literacy, and continuous assessment.

Major changes in the area of assessment of student progress and achievements have taken place worldwide. The assessment policies and practices of the primary phase of education in Jamaica have responded to these global developments by revising assessment for primary schools. In the Revised Primary Curriculum teachers will be taking on a greater responsibility for assessing students at the classroom level. At the same time, tests and exams have shifted in their focus from summative instruments to formative and diagnostic tools. In keeping with the developments in the primary phase, it is expected that the new syllabi for colleges will cater for the preparation of primary teachers for these new roles and responsibilities. In order to support colleges in developing and implementing the new college curriculum, IEQII has been asked to assist the JBTE in the area of classroom assessment at colleges.

This report is based on visits to the six teacher training colleges that have Primary Teacher Education Diploma programs during the period 28 August – 1 September 2000. The purpose of the visits was to ascertain the level of support needed by colleges to implement classroom assessment that would be consistent with the revised college curriculum.

We acknowledge the time and efforts of those teacher educators, student teachers and administrators who willingly participated in our discussions when we know you would rather have been in class. Thank you.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The team was able to visit all six of the teachers' colleges that offer the primary diploma program. At each college we asked teacher educators to complete a one page survey which focused on the assessment techniques used in college classrooms, their beliefs about assessment policies, fairness, professional development in the area of assessment and constraints to successful implementation of a variety of classroom assessment techniques. The survey also asked teacher educators to suggest areas for professional development for improved assessment practices. The surveys were collected at the colleges during each visit.

In addition to the survey, at each college the team interviewed small groups of teacher educators to get a more in depth look at the issues that teacher educators face in the area of assessment as well as an understanding of the kinds of assessment methods teacher educators use in the present teaching. The total number of teacher educators who participated in the survey and discussions was eighty-six.

The team also interviewed small groups of student teachers at each college. We asked them about their issues regarding assessment practices and policies, whether they felt prepared to assess students in the field, how and what they have learned about classroom assessment strategies as well as their own participation in assessment at the college level. The estimated number of students participating in the discussions was 175. At each site, principals or other administrators were involved. The report presents the major findings of the study and lists recommendations.

## **FINDINGS**

### **1. There is a general concern about the negative influence external exams have on teaching and learning.**

One of the most pressing assessment concerns among the student teachers and teacher educators we talked to was the influence exam pressure has on teaching and learning. This was perhaps the single most powerful factor in the implementation of classroom assessment. Although most student teachers and teacher educators recognize the learning potential of exams and their standardizing function across colleges, most feel that the ubiquitous exams are a deterrent to learning. There is also an implicit acknowledgement of the

inappropriateness of the exam as a major instrument in the measurement of student teacher competency.

Student teachers described a number of aspects of the exam-heavy system they believed were deterrents to learning. They often felt reluctant to do assignments that they did not feel were directly related to exam content because they thought it would be a “waste of time”. They felt that teacher educators often rushed through material in class in order to “cover the syllabus” before the end of the year. In some cases this meant forfeiting the opportunity to participate in practical exercises designed to foster deep understanding. More commonly student teachers mentioned “swatting” or memorizing for exams to have the knowledge slip from their minds only hours after the exam paper was handed in.

When asked whether they thought the exams were fair the majority of student teachers indicated that they were. When probed further, however, most indicated that exam anxiety, illness, social or family problems experienced prior to exams prevented many of the student teachers from performing at their peak. In addition, student teachers reported that exam questions often don't give them a chance to express what they know and the occasional appearance of new or unknown content on exams can throw off a student teacher's mark considerably.

Many student teachers expressed a belief in “real world” assessments of their knowledge and skills. They suggested performance-based and authentic assessment tasks such as those assigned as course work as more appropriate indicators of what they know and can do.

Student teachers' and teacher educators' attitudes towards course work are strongly influenced by exam pressure, according to the participants in the needs assessment. Teacher educators report that the pressure to teach to the test was overwhelming; particularly in those courses with high exam weightings (e.g. 60%). Many teacher educators see the value in including course work beyond those tasks prescribed in the curriculum but feel pressured not to assign additional tasks for assessment purposes. Teacher educators expressed feelings of restriction and frustration at not being able to involve student teachers in authentic learning tasks that could potentially be assessed. Pressure to “cover the syllabus” prevented many teacher educators from including relevant assessed tasks in their courses. One teacher educator expressed her sentiments this way:

*Teachers feel they have to stifle their creativity and those of their students because of the demands of the external exams.*

Another teacher educator described how there was little time in the exam driven curriculum for reflection. She felt that whenever classroom tasks were assigned,

it was done with the “external assessment tools hanging over our heads”. In other words, the teacher educator is usually weighing out whether to provide authentic learning experiences that require lengthy involvement of student teachers or to take the short cut and provide direct instruction of the content.

Another teacher educator expressed this sentiment about the influence of exams on course work:

*More performance assessment is needed and less focus on written course work pieces. Since exams form the basis for the final assessment, some students feel that performance assessment is a waste of time. The exam means of assessment needs to be revisited.*

Nevertheless there were some teacher educators who indicated that they do provide a number of assessed course assignments beyond those prescribed in the curriculum. Many indicated that if they did not provide tasks beyond those outlined in the courses, student teachers struggling with the content would have no route to success. By providing student teachers with alternatives to the prescribed curriculum assignments, teacher educators felt they were providing more opportunities for their student teachers to learn.

Student teachers struggled with the same dilemma. A few of them expressed the opinion that some of the course work is meaningless because it does not contribute to preparation for the exams. Other student teachers felt that the course work offered them some measure of control over the assessment. In course work, student teachers had the sense that they could spend an unlimited amount of time and energy on it if they chose, whereas exams were framed within a finite time and content area, some of which was likely to be unknown by the student teacher. Student teachers also noted that course work allowed them more chances to succeed than exams.

Student teachers and teacher educators both described the weighting of course work in relation to exams as problematic. The majority of teacher educators and student teachers favored a higher percentage of course work accounting for student grades. In courses where the weighting was 60%/40% (exams/course work) they generally suggested a reversal, although a few suggested 30%/70%.

While the overwhelming majority of both student teachers and teacher educators found the exam pressure problematic, only a few teacher educators (see table 2) and student teachers suggested elimination of the exams from the program. One teacher educator, calling for the elimination of exams, expressed this perspective:

*More autonomy should be allowed for lecturers to assess students i.e. the JBTE final common exam should be discontinued and more college-based assessment be employed. JBTE could assume a role of examining quality of assessment as well as professional development for lecturers. Different lecturers have different philosophies and backgrounds, and a common exam interferes with how and what a lecturer does in a course.*

It is clear that a major shift away from an emphasis on exam-oriented assessment toward more authentic and classroom-based assessment is vital toward improving teaching and learning.

## **2. There is a widely shared perception that the teacher educators are overworked.**

In addition to exam fervor experienced by faculty and student teachers, most teacher educators felt that their workloads prevented them from effectively implementing a variety of classroom assessment techniques. The refrain repeatedly heard during our discussions with teacher educators was “we don't have time”. With course loads of 18 hours/week, student rosters ranging from 50 – 450, and an average student load for a semester at roughly 110 (figures are only rough estimates as they were reported by teacher educators from memory) teachers feel overburdened. Most teacher educators also reported teaching more than one subject in more than one cohort (i.e. years one, two, three – and four at Mico). Most teacher educators reported having the additional responsibility of supervising practice teachers in the field while classes are ongoing at the college. Teacher educators feel that the heavy workloads influence their performance. One teacher educator commented:

*When there are more students to teach, there should be considerations about the number of hours the lecturer gets. Too many students and too many hours will affect the performance.*

Some courses were also described by teacher educators as overloaded with content. Many felt that science in particular contained too much to teach in the allotted time. This assertion was backed up by student teachers who indicated that science content was often not completely covered in a course prior to exams. Some student teachers indicated that the teacher educator reverted to direct instruction after initially involving them in lab work after she realized that she would not be able to finish the syllabus if she focused on practical work.

## **3. Teacher educators expressed a need for training in a variety of student teacher assessment techniques.**

The table below is a summary of the usage of assessment techniques over the past year as reported by teacher educators. Teacher educators were asked to tick all the assessments in the list below that they have used in the past year. 86 Teacher educators teaching at the six teacher training colleges in primary education programs participated in the survey.

**Table 1. Assessment Techniques Used by Teacher Educators**

Technique	Number of Teachers Using Technique	Percentage
Open ended story problems	10	11.6 %
Assessing pairs of learners	10	11.6 %
Invented dialogue	11	12.8 %
Concept maps	14	16.3 %
Flow charts	15	17.4 %
Assessment schemes	16	18.6 %
Checklists	20	23.3 %
Pretests	23	26.7 %
Rubrics	26	30.2 %
Journals	29	33.7 %
Models	31	36.0 %
Interviews	31	36.0 %
Student assessment of teacher educator lesson	31	36.0 %
Student assessment of course	32	37.2 %
Cases	35	40.7 %
Student self assessment	36	41.9 %
Portfolios	37	43.0 %
Peer assessment	39	45.3 %
Speech/debate/drama	42	48.9 %
Research report	56	67.5 %
Role plays	56	65.1 %
Practical tests	60	69.8 %

The most commonly used assessment techniques were practical tests, role plays, research reports and speech/drama/debate. Teacher educators mentioned that they used rubrics but in most cases we were unable to examine rubrics used in assessing student teacher work. Through the focus group discussion we ascertained that there are a number of different uses and forms of rubrics. Some referred to rubrics as rating scales while others differentiated between holistic and analytic rubrics. Only one teacher educator reported asking for student input in developing rubric criteria.

It is informative to note that teacher educators interpret some of the assessments listed in the table above widely. Even though an item was checked as having been used in the past year, follow up discussions in focus groups with teacher educators indicated very few teacher educators used a systemic tool for gathering feedback from student teachers about individual lessons. For example, *student assessment of teacher educator lesson* was used by 31 of the teacher educators in the past year. Student teachers in the focus group interviews, however, indicated little or no participation in lesson evaluation that provide direct feedback to the instructor.

While college teachers exhibit a wide range of knowledge of assessment, the need for more professional development in the area of assessment techniques was recognized by many of the teacher educators. They also acknowledged that they could benefit by sharing ideas among themselves. No college had in place professional development programmes aimed specifically at assessment although some of the colleges had opportunities for professional exchange through seminars and report back sessions by faculty who have attended workshops.

The areas in which teacher educators requested support are:

- use and assessment of portfolios
- “crafting” assessment tasks
- developing and using rubrics and other scales
- assessment methods for large classes
- item construction on multiple choice tests for a range of cognitive skills
- use and assessment of journals
- use of software and CDs
- concept mapping and other graphic organizers
- assessing attitudes

#### **4. Student teacher participation in assessment is limited to course evaluations, some input on criteria development for assessment tasks, and informal discussions.**

There is evidence of some student teacher participation in assessments of courses at the end of the semester and year but there are fewer opportunities for student participation in self-assessment, peer assessment, and in the construction of criteria for grading assessments. Only one teacher educator indicated that student teachers were asked to participate in developing assessments or determining an assessment scheme for the course.

Two colleges have developed a system whereby student teachers evaluate courses at the end of the semester. Information from the evaluations goes to teacher educators to inform future developments in the course. Student teachers were critical of this approach to lesson evaluation since evaluation

results tended to benefit the next group of student teachers who will be enrolled in the course. Furthermore, student teachers did not have confidence in the effectiveness of the course evaluations because they were often asked to complete the assessment forms at the end of long examination sessions when they had little interest in completing the forms.

Administrators in one college reported using the evaluations as a check on course implementation. Neither student teachers nor teacher educators reported systematic assessment of lessons or mid course reviews by student teachers. Ongoing discussions among student teachers and teacher educators and other indicators of student teacher performance were the main modes of gathering information on student reactions to lessons.

Student self-assessment was used very infrequently. Student teachers indicated that in some unusual cases they were asked to give themselves a grade and justify it. Only a small minority of teacher educators asked student teachers to self-grade. Subjects where self-grading was evident are arts and crafts and social studies.

Peer assessment was commonly mentioned for subjects such as mathematics and language arts, but seemed to be limited in scope to marking essays and compositions, and maths problems. It was also common for student teachers to assess each other when giving oral presentations in language arts and during microteaching. Few teacher educators, and no student teachers were able to explain in depth how the marks contributed to a student's overall grade. It was suggested that much of the peer assessment is not for purposes of assigning marks and does not contribute to another student teacher's course work.

In general, assessment practices were found to limit student teacher participation and self-directed learning. One teacher educator echoes other teacher educators' sentiments:

*Assessment practices of teacher educators can be improved if students are given more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Too much emphasis is placed on prescribed examinations and so students are not allowed enough time for self-directed learning. If they are allowed more time to explore, experiment and discover through the trial and error method, they would achieve more and assessment would be more meaningful. Many times students have ideas and are not given the time to express them as teachers feel constrained to complete the prescribed syllabus in preparation for **prescribed** [author's emphasis] examinations and so the student ideas and opinions are hardly recognized or used.*

## **5. Opportunities for teaching about assessment by reflection on the assessment methods used in teaching in the subject areas are lost because teaching about assessment is limited to methods courses.**

Most teacher educators in subject content areas said they did not discuss assessment with their student teachers beyond explaining criteria for a particular topic, and the weighting of course work and exam work. Although some teacher educators said that there is not enough time to do this reflection-on-practice with student teachers, most said it would be useful for student teachers. Most teacher educators agreed that modeling good assessment practice by teacher educators is helpful to student teachers but they did not make their assessment practices and theories explicit to their students.

## **6. Feedback**

In general, student teachers described teacher educators as supportive, committed and knowledgeable teachers. There were concerns, however, that some teacher educators did not provide sufficient or appropriate feedback to them about their work. General comments on student teacher work were usually positive but most student teachers expressed a need for more explicit comments both written and oral. The student teachers valued constructive and specific comments directing improvement. Student teachers indicated that they received insufficient and sometimes inappropriate feedback from teacher educators. An entire three-page essay was reportedly returned to one student teacher with nothing more than a grade. The student teacher was unclear as to how the grade was derived since the criteria for coming up with the grade was not shared with the student teacher prior to the task being assigned. Another student teacher described how a report for which she received a C+ grade was given back to make the corrections suggested by teacher educator. The student teacher handed in the report after hours spent rewriting the report according to those suggestions. Upon receiving back her report the second time, the student teacher was told that the report had improved significantly but that her grade would remain a C+.

Another concern regarding the timeliness of feedback expressed by student teachers was in regard to course work handed in for moderation to the Joint Board. Second year student teachers in one college reported handing in work for moderation in the first year only to be told they would not receive it back until the end of their third year. In another college, third year student teachers were sorting out stacks of science reports (or projects) from second year to distribute to their peers in their cohort. Although the reports had been marked by the teacher educators at the college and gone through the Joint Board, very few comments were written on the reports. Graphs drawn incorrectly for

example contained no instructions to the student about how it might be improved.

Timeliness of receiving exam results was also an issue for many student teachers. Some student teachers awaiting financial aid were unable to make tuition payments without the exam results to allow the release of funds. Other student teachers complained that exams for one-year courses contain too much content. They suggested that these exams be “chunked” by unit or semester to make studying (and implicitly, learning) more manageable. For those student teachers that needed to resit an exam, the timing of the release of the results is such that they are unable to take the second exam until a year after completing the course. Student teachers felt that this was unfair since they would be further from the course work when trying to prepare for the exam the second time.

## **7. Transparency of Assessments**

18.6 % of teacher educators reported using assessment schemes for their courses and many indicated that they inform student teachers of the criteria for assessing student work prior to its completion. In addition, 30.2 % of teacher educators reported using rubrics. Student teachers also reported that for some of their course assignments they knew what the criteria were for grading a particular piece. Often student teachers were made aware of the criteria through discussions with the teacher prior to the work on the task. Informing student teachers in writing of the criteria for assignments was less common. Many student teachers said they received written assessment schemes for a course, indicating how many assignments were included in the course and the weighting of each assignment toward the final course grade.

A concern was raised by a number of student teachers that the expectations or criteria for performance on particular tasks are not always explicit. They expressed a need for more explicit, written criteria for their work. Student teachers requested the assignments for courses be known in detail at the beginning of a course in order to plan ahead for completion of the tasks.

Many student teachers were aware of the grading system used by the JBTE. Few student teachers knew of the written policy of the JBTE, obtaining most of their knowledge through teacher educators “drilling it into us before exams and assignments”, according to one student teacher. No student teachers indicated knowledge of college level assessment policies being any different from the national policy.

## 8. Assessment as a neglected area of practice

Some teacher educators showed an extensive knowledge of assessment practices, and theories. And the majority felt confident in their abilities to implement assessment. 53 % of teacher educators agreed and 24.7 % of teachers strongly agreed with the statement: *I feel satisfied with my knowledge and abilities to use a variety of assessment methods in my classes* (see statement 9, Appendix A). Many teacher educators, however, exhibited a willingness to admit that assessment is a neglected area of practice and that there should be greater emphasis on it. One teacher educator stated:

*Training is necessary. We are an exam-oriented society and we rely too much on exams. We do not know enough about alternative types of assessment.*

Other comments from teacher educators include:

*Training in assessment techniques needed.*

*Courses in alternative assessments are needed.*

*Educate teacher educators on alternative assessment methods.*

From the discussions the team had with teacher educators and student teachers there was a sense that much of the assessment process at colleges is implicit and informal. Even though teacher educators felt seriously constrained to carry out classroom assessments beyond the requirements of the curriculum many expressed the need to be more confident in what the assessments say about student teacher performance and knowledge. One teacher educator, commenting after our visit said, "Looking at the checklist reminds me that we need to be more accountable".

Many teacher educators revealed that they had minimal training in the area of assessment. Major developments in assessment practices and theories seemed to have passed by some teacher educators.

Teacher educators felt they did not have adequate access to resources on assessment. Many complained of lack of reference materials in the library, lack of in-service training in the topic, and limited access to computers to gather information online. They did, however, acknowledge their peers as resources for information on assessment theory and practice.

## **9. There is minimal assessment of student teachers' prior knowledge and experience.**

Many of the student teachers in primary programme have extensive experience as classroom teachers prior to coming to the college. Mico students are actually practicing teachers (pre-trained) while attending the night courses. Apart from oral question and answers, writing samples and the assumption that entry requirements act as a gatekeeper ensuring a certain level of competency, little assessment of student teachers' prior knowledge and experience is carried out.

Teacher educators spoke of the need to do this but felt inhibited by time and course content. Assessments designed to assess student teacher prior knowledge that could be easily administered and analyzed could provide useful information on course design and content.

## **10. Most teacher educators showed interest in carrying out research but no one reported being engaged in it.**

No teacher educator we spoke with is presently engaged in research although most of them indicated that they had research ideas in mind and were interested in carrying it out. Most teacher educators indicated that there is no time for this aspect of their profession.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations described below are meant to be informative rather than authoritative. Suggestions presented here are based on our interviews, surveys, discussions, reviews of literature, and knowledge of a variety of contexts internationally. Much of what is described in the recommendations comes from teacher educator and student teacher input.

### **1. A more detailed analysis of the JBTE examination programme for primary teacher training colleges should be carried out.**

Serious consideration should be given to developing the examination programme to be more consistent with the goals of the Primary Teacher Training Colleges. Much of the input from teacher educators and student teachers regarding classroom assessment practices was directly related to the subject examinations. The influence of the exams on student teacher learning, and teacher educator teaching is profound. Without a shift in the examinations' orientation, and emphasis, however, training and development in classroom assessment will be seriously hampered. There is ample evidence that teacher educators are at present implementing a wide range of assessment methods that would be

considered consistent with the Revised Primary Curriculum. Many of them are eager to progress further professionally in this area.

An examination system that is supportive of the goals and approaches of teacher training institutions has the potential to play a powerful role in educational change. Changes in classroom assessment must be concurrent with shifts in the examinations' orientation, approaches and methods. As Resnick and Resnick (1992) state:

*...if we put many multiple-choice tests into the testing system, we must expect children to practice answering multiple-choice questions... In contrast if we put debates, discussions, essays and problem-solving into the testing system, children will spend time practicing those activities.<sup>1</sup>*

## **2. Support in reducing structural constraints to implementing effective classroom assessment.**

Creative ways must be found to reduce some of the structural constraints to effective classroom assessment. Reducing class size, reducing the number of students a teacher educator teaches in a term, and limiting the number of preparations a teacher has per term as well as the number of cohorts in which a teacher educator teaches (affecting practice teaching supervision) could all contribute to improved assessment practices.

The colleges should explore creative timetabling that includes modular teaching, blocking, selection from a menu of courses, and reorganization of cohorts. An examination of class contact time could also reveal appropriate ways to reduce student/teacher contact time and increase student-directed learning without sacrificing quality. This may involve developing new methods of student collaboration, supporting students in dealing with self-directed learning, and developing meaningful and creative out of class assignments.

## **3. Support in reducing professional constraints to implementing effective classroom assessment.**

In addition to the professional development recommendations made above, we recommend professional support in the following areas:

- 1) Training in all areas of continuous assessment
- 2) Increased access to resources on assessment

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<sup>1</sup> Resnick, L. B. and Resnick, D. P. (1992). Assessing the Thinking Curriculum: New Tools for Educational Reform. In B. R. Gifford & M. C. O'Connor (Eds.), Changing Assessments: Alternative Views of Aptitude, Achievement and Instruction. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

### 3) The development of a Jamaican Teachers College assessment guide

Each area of training is described in more detail below.

1) Our findings indicated that many teacher educators used a variety of assessment techniques and felt confident in their knowledge of assessment. Not surprisingly, however, they indicated the need for further professional development in the area of assessment.

The areas in which teacher educators requested support are repeated here from the findings section above:

- use and assessment of portfolios
- “crafting” assessment tasks
- developing and using rubrics and other scales
- assessment methods for large classes
- item construction on multiple choice tests for a range of cognitive skills
- use and assessment of journals
- use of software and CDs
- concept mapping and other graphic organizers
- assessing attitudes

We suggest the following additional topics for training:

- assessment theory and global trends
- ways of assessing student teachers’ prior knowledge and experience and how to use those assessments
- increasing student teacher participation in assessment appropriate for the Jamaican context
- authentic and performance assessment
- scoring and providing feedback
- teaching assessment methods for the primary grades

Many teacher educators could benefit from training in these neglected areas. Training could take on a number of forms including college-based seminars, inter- and cross college workshops as well as national and international seminars. Presenters could come from the colleges, schools, University, Ministry and abroad.

2) Through Internet access, college teachers would be able to access a wealth of information on assessment theory and practices. A number of studies are published online in addition to classroom assessment techniques posted on school district, university and government web sites.

Online journals in assessment and evaluation also are available on the Internet. Other resources on assessment such as books, videos and journals should be purchased for staff reference libraries.

3) Working with adults requires specialized techniques that differ (sometimes only slightly) from classroom assessment at the primary and secondary level. In addition, techniques for assessment used in North America, Europe and elsewhere may not be appropriate for the Jamaican context. A teacher educators' guide to assessment should be developed for use by college teachers. The guide could draw on the extensive knowledge and experience of the teacher educators in the field, Jamaican experts in classroom assessment and testing and measurement, as well as international literature and resources. Suggested chapters in the guide could include:

- theories and trends in classroom assessment
- the primary assessment policy for Jamaican schools and expectations for practice
- validity
- training methods for primary teachers in the area of assessment
- assessing prior knowledge and experience
- assessing the integrated curriculum
- strategies for classroom assessment at the college level
- scoring, setting criteria, developing rubrics and rating scales
- test item construction
- providing feedback to students
- student participation in assessment

#### **4. Development of college level assessment policies.**

Policies developed at the college level would provide teacher educators and student teachers with guidelines for classroom implementation of assessment. The policies would not be in conflict with the JBTE assessment policy but would help to support the policy at the local college level. The policy may suggest an orientation for assessment practices as well as specific guidelines on the number and type of assessments, ways to assess integrated assignments, non-graded and graded assignments, passing and failing criteria, the role of teaching practice in student teacher assessment, making up assignments due to absences, etc.

An assessment panel composed of teacher educators, administrators, student teachers and local primary teachers could develop the policy with input from all stakeholders. Including student teachers in the development of such a policy will not only allow their perspectives to be represented but it will also provide an

additional opportunity for professional growth for student teachers. Primary teachers may add a dimension of relevance to assessment at the primary level.

### **5. Find ways that are appropriate to the Jamaican context to increase student participation in assessment.**

An area of assessment practice that is particularly needy in terms of support is that of student teacher participation in assessment. Primary teacher training colleges are responsible for developing the professional practices of student teachers that are consistent with the goals and aims of the grades in which they will teach. The use of self-reports in the primary grades is an important element of the new assessment strategies.

As adult learners, many of whom have a wealth of experience in classrooms, the process of self-assessment is ongoing if only at a level slightly above the subconscious. By making self-assessment more explicit and systematic student teachers become deeply engaged in the assessment process. Concern over inflated or deflated grades given by student teachers is part of the process of dealing with student teacher input. Valid strategies for including student teacher assessment in grades should be developed where appropriate.

As student teachers, they should be actively engaged in ongoing dialogue about assessment. Including them in developing assessment criteria and assessing peers and courses gives them opportunities to learn by doing rather than to be passive receivers of knowledge about assessment. By not including student teachers in assessment practices and policy development, important opportunities for professional development of the student teachers are missed.

Finally, student teacher participation in assessment should be seen as a component of a participatory and democratic curriculum. How that participation plays out varies from one context to another. It is important that teacher training colleges find ways of increasing student teacher participation that are appropriate for Jamaica.

### **6. Foster professional development through research and professional exchange at the college, national and international level.**

Jamaica has a talented pool of primary teacher educators with strong interests in professional development. The development of a Jamaican knowledge base on teaching and learning would be an important aspect of sustainable professional development for teacher educators, and Jamaica in general. Action research, case studies, longitudinal studies of cohorts and other forms of research could be carried out at the college and national level by teacher educators who had access

to resources, appropriate technical support and professional work loads that included research time.

As tertiary institutions with the responsibility of training primary teachers for the country, teacher educators have a vital role to play in knowledge production. The potential to enhance curriculum content, teaching methodology and a greater understanding of the educational issues in Jamaica through research at the college level is immense.

Opportunities for professional exchange through participation in college-based, national and international seminars, workshops and conferences should be promoted. In the context of scarce resources, pooling methods could be developed to allow teacher educators to compete for grants to carry out research and attend international conferences. Funding sources could include college budgets, teacher educator contributions, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses. Selection committees composed of college, Joint Board and Ministry representatives could review proposals anonymously by an approved selection process.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The needs assessment carried out in this activity was meant to find areas of strengths and weakness in the classroom assessment of student teachers. It was not meant to be an exhaustive study of the assessment of student teachers. We did not, for example research the exam component nor did we delve into practice teaching assessment in detail. The aim was to find out how best to support the development of assessment at the college level. We hope that the information provide here will be useful to those involved in teacher education and education in general.

**Appendix A**  
**Summary of Section C of Classroom Assessment Survey**

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	UNCERTAIN	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. The college has an assessment policy.	2.3 %	2.3%	17.4%	56.5%	22.1%
2. The college assessment policy is clear.	2.4%	8.2%	18.8%	54.0%	16.5%
3. The national assessment policy for teacher education is clear.	1.2%	2.4%	26.2%	54.8%	15.3%
4. The national assessment policy is fair.	3.8%	8.9%	43.0%	43.0%	1.3%
5. As a teacher educator I expect to have professional development input in the area of assessment from the national level.	2.4%	1.2%	1.2%	61.4%	34.9%
6. As a teacher educator I expect to have professional development input in the area of assessment from the college.	3.6%	0%	0%	54.8%	41.7%
7. I feel satisfied with my knowledge and abilities to use a variety of assessment methods in my classes.	0%	10.6%	11.8%	53.0%	24.7%
8. The guidelines for coming up with grades or scores from assessment tasks are clear to me.	1.2%	6.0%	7.1%	64.3%	21.4%
9. Classroom assessments are not as effective as exams in determining what a student knows.	24.4%	58.1%	5.8%	7.0%	5.4%
10. Exams should be eliminated from the courses I teach.	23.5%	62.8%	3.5%	5.9%	3.5%
11. Classroom assessments should be eliminated from the course I teach.	57.6%	40.0%	0%	0%	2.4%
12. Classroom assessment is too time-intensive for the information it provides.	19.0%	68.4%	6.3%	6.3%	0%