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Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training: A Summit of the Americas Initiative

Caribbean Assessment

Summary of Major Findings

The Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

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LAC/RSD-EHR
US Agency for International Development

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

CARIBBEAN REGION

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Teacher Training Capacity in the English speaking Caribbean: Early childhood and primary levels

- **The Caribbean Region has a relatively high capacity to conduct research on a wide range of issues in education, design, implement and monitor teacher training programs, and is currently engaged in offering pre-service and in-service training in all territories through a network of colleges and universities.** Some effort is being made currently to revise curricula and implement new methodologies to meet changing societal needs and reform targets.
- **Caribbean universities and colleges, over the years, have collaborated with North American and British universities and colleges in the training of teacher educators and teachers and the conduct of research.**
- **Governments/Ministries of Education have sought external assistance in the reform of education,** which invariably has included teacher education, and training of teacher educators.
- **There have been several regional and sub-regional initiatives in the area of teacher training, as in other aspects of educational reform.**

Program development and Accreditation

Joint Board of Teacher Education: Jamaica, The Bahamas, Belize
Joint Board of Teacher Education for the Eastern Caribbean
University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
University of Guyana

Teaching and Research

University of the West Indies: Schools of Education- Mona. St. Augustine, Cave Hill
University of Guyana: Faculty of Education
Teacher training colleges/departments in all countries (except Anguilla and Montserrat)

Distance Education

University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Enterprise (UWIDITE)

Production of Materials

Joint Board of Teacher Education Enterprise

UWIDITE

To what extent are teacher training issues specifically regarded as contributors to underachievement in the Caribbean?

- **Teacher training is but one of a number of factors which contribute to underachievement of children in the school systems.** An inadequate learning environment characterized by a paucity of learning materials both at school and within the home and the larger society is also a major consideration. **Teacher training must therefore be assessed and implemented, taking into account the context of the school system and the wider society.**

- **Teacher training per se does not guarantee optimum teacher performance.**

Teacher Training Issues

- Provision of teacher training
- Adequacy/relevance/quality of training
- Recruitment and retention

Provision of teacher training

- Over the past forty years, **considerable progress has been made in the provision of pre-service and in- service teacher training for the primary level** of education in the Caribbean; however, in some countries, particularly the OECS countries, there is a backlog of approximately 25% of untrained teachers. At the pre-school and secondary levels, teacher training opportunities have been relatively limited, although effort is being made to address this need.
- The concept and implementation of professional development are embryonic. In-service training remains ad hoc, often project related and not part of a systematic professional development program.

Adequacy /relevance/quality of teacher training programs

- There continues to be debate regarding the adequacy of teacher training to meet the growing needs at the primary level. Concerns include:
    - **teacher training methodologies** which are **deemed too didactic and narrow in focus** for the advocated child centered approach to teaching at the primary level;

- **syllabi at teachers' colleges are often subject focused** giving rise to a fragmented approach to teacher preparation. Currently some countries are attempting a more integrated approach.
- insufficiencies with respect **to teaching/learning resources**, particularly modern technology at teachers' colleges;
- **limited time for practice teaching;**
- **inadequate attention to preparing teachers to detect early signs of learning difficulties;**
- **inadequate preparation in teaching slow learners, and children whose mother tongue is not standard English;**
- **inadequate supervision** from principals and staff within the cooperating schools;
- **no systematic monitoring after initial training**

Recruitment and Retention

- Throughout the Caribbean Region, it is acknowledged that **teacher trainees**, in general **lack the requisite academic skills**, hence much time is spent in providing content related material at training colleges.
- Terms and conditions of service, particularly **the context in which teachers' function**- crowded classrooms, inadequate teaching/learning materials, poor physical facilities, relatively low remuneration – **lead to teacher attrition.**
- There has been **active recruitment of trained teachers from the USA and Britain.**

To what extent is reading instruction perceived as being a critical problem in the Caribbean and by which group (s) of stakeholders? If so, what specific aspects of reading instruction are deemed problematic?

- There is **widespread concern regarding the weak reading skills** demonstrated by about 30% of students who complete primary education.
- The problem is perceived as **children having failed to learn to read, rather than poor instruction in reading.**
- Both the literature and interviews revealed that educators, parents and the wider society **recognize that poor reading skills contribute significantly to underperformance of a large number of students, weaken chances for educational advancement, and engender low self esteem.**
- While decoding is not a major problem for most students, **comprehension, and inferential skills are particularly weak at all levels of the system.**

What are the major teacher training needs in disadvantaged/poorer communities? How do these differ from other communities?

- There are two broad types of disadvantaged communities: the urban poor and the rural poor. **Schools in these communities have needs beyond teacher training,** although training is an imperative.
- Both urban and rural communities have relatively **limited teaching/learning resources at schools and at home. Physical conditions are generally not conducive to teaching and learning**. In general, different classes are in a hall with inadequate partitioning, giving rise to high levels of distraction. Urban classrooms are crowded, sometimes over 70 children at tightly packed desks, with little space for either children or the teacher to manoeuver. Rural schools have multigrade classes since enrolment is generally low.
- **Children are often less prepared for school and lack the necessary home support for learning.**
- **Access to training is more problematic for teachers in remote areas than those in urban areas, hence fewer persons may attend professional development sessions except special arrangements are made for transportation, and board and lodge.**
- Teachers in disadvantaged urban communities will require ***inter alia*** **training in utilizing readily available materials for teaching/leaning, methods for achieving higher levels of interaction in crowded classrooms, and working with parents/guardians.** In addition, **teachers in rural areas will require methodologies for multigrade teaching, and scheduling of in-service training closer to their schools.**

Are there special programs to address the learning/reading needs of children whose mother tongue is Creole or another indigenous language?

- All countries are faced with the challenge of teaching reading of standard English to children whose mother tongue is Creole or another native language. The problem is compounded in countries such as Belize, The Bahamas, Guyana where there are multiple languages. Several studies have highlighted their peculiar needs and advocated **national policies regarding the use of native languages in the classroom**. As yet there is no such policy.

- Some teachers recognize **the need to bridge the gap between standard English and the child's mother tongue** and use various methods they deem appropriate.

- Colleges and universities make mention of the issue but **trainees do not receive adequate grounding to tackle the problem adequately.**

To what extent is the current network of teacher training institutions headed by the Schools of Education, University of the West Indies, addressing the teacher training needs of the disadvantaged communities? What are the major gaps in service? How might these be addressed?

- Teacher training at the primary level is by and large the responsibility of teachers' training colleges which generally fall under the Ministries of Education. A small percentage of teachers pursue degree programs at the University of the West Indies, Schools of Education. Only a few of these graduates teach at the primary level. **Neither the teachers colleges nor UWI offers courses for meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities**. Needs of these communities will be subsumed under topics related to societal context..
- **In general, there is little targeting of teacher training interventions for disadvantaged communities**. Ministries of Education have recognized that in the interest of equity in the education system, there is need to make special provision for under performing schools. This takes the form of increases in the supply of learning materials, school feeding programs, and school uniforms. The Jamaica/USAID New Horizons Project, a comprehensive intervention for low performing schools, does provide training for teachers within the project schools.
- **There is need for more in depth analysis of the broad needs of disadvantaged and under performing schools, diagnosis of student learning needs, identification of those which teachers can address and those which require other interventions, design and implementation of in-service training which takes into account the realities of disadvantaged schools in urban and rural areas.**

To what extent is the private sector willing to support teacher training through the vehicle of a Center of Excellence for Teacher Training?

It is **premature to determine the extent to which the private sector will support a Center of Excellence for Teacher Training given the fact that the concept has not been fully defined;** however, suffice it to say that:

- **The private sector has been a willing partner in the process of educational development in most countries, and expressed interest in the issue of improving reading/comprehension**. Private sector initiatives in education include financial support for the EDUTECH program in Barbados, sponsoring Junior Achievement programs, scholarships, enrichment and leadership programs and contributions of computer equipment, books and supplies.
- **Caribbean governments have been promoting public/private sector partnership in education.**
- **Future contributions will depend on the viability of the private sector in the Caribbean.** For example, a number of private sector companies in Jamaica which made significant contributions to education have folded during the most recent economic down-turn.