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Advancing Educational Transformation in Jamaica

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Legacy: Transformation in Action is the official journal of The Worthy Educator, elevating the good work being done by leaders in education who are working to change the narrative on the profession and actively plan for impact that transforms its future to serve the needs of a diverse, decentralized, global society that is inclusive, equitable and open to all people as next generations adapt, evolve and contribute by solving problems and creating solutions that meet the needs of a world we have yet to envision.

We do not identify quarterly themes. Rather, we are open to the diversity of voice and thought that reflects the rich tapestry of humanity and represents the full range of stakeholders in education.

Submissions are accepted from educators implementing new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as well as education organizations sharing their work in dedicated showcase editions, and are planned and released on a rolling basis. See our guidelines at theworthyeducator.com/journal.

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Our Inaugural Showcase Edition

We are proud to share with you our first ever dedicated issue of our journal, showcasing the amazing work being done by educators across Jamaica!

Guest Editor [Shellon Samuels-White](#) has brought together a vibrant collection of voices expressing the work, hopes and dreams of children and the professionals who serve them, providing the executive organization skills to coordinate the entire effort and hand our staff action research and thought pieces ready for publishing. a member of the faculty of the [Mico University College](#) in Kingston, she proudly represents the profession and her colleagues in the field, and we are grateful for her leadership on this initiative.

You will find the full spectrum of educator experience in these pages, from young teachers pushing the envelope on what is possible, to seasoned veterans advocating for the future their children deserve, and everything in between. It is my sincere hope that it opens our readers' eyes to all the good things happening in the classrooms of this proud nation, and that it expands everyone's thinking on what is possible in our own classrooms, wherever we live and work around the globe. Each of these articles sends the message that the window for the transformation of education is now open, and we each play a seminal role in reclaiming the narrative of our profession, moving forward intentionally with purpose.

As we launch our third year at The Worthy Educator, we are honored to elevate and amplify these outstanding educators, leading from across Jamaica to make education best meet the needs of children and their future. If you would like to explore the possibilities for an issue of our journal showcasing your school, district or organization and the good work you are doing to serve your community, let us know and we can begin the conversation. We already have three more dedicated issues in the pipeline, and we are looking to 2027 for future editions. Let's talk!

Walter McKenzie



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2 PANELS OF EXPERT DISCUSSIONS



PANEL 1:
**REIMAGINING TEACHING
AND LEARNING**
*Authentic, Inclusive and
Responsive Practices for a
Changing Educational Landscape*



PANEL 2:
**LEADING TRANSFORMATIONAL
CHANGE**
*Building People, Partnerships and
Systems for Sustainable Educational
Transformation*



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Transformation in Action: Advancing Educational Transformation in Jamaica

Shellon Samuels-White
Student Assessment Officer and Learning
Facilitator The Mico University College,
Kingston, Jamaica Guest Editor-in-Chief



Educational transformation is often associated with ambitious reforms and new policies. While these are important, meaningful and sustainable change rarely occurs through policy mandates alone. Rather, it emerges when educators continuously reflect on practice, learn from evidence, collaborate with others, and refine the systems within which they work. This understanding underpins this volume of *Legacy: Transformation in Action*. Across the seventeen contributions, a common message emerges: Educational transformation is not presented as a single initiative but as an ongoing process of reflection, adaptation, and continuous improvement.

As Hinnant-Crawford (2025) argues, improvement begins when educators adopt a “wide-angle lens” that allows them to see not only individual challenges but also “the entire system that produces the results.” This perspective shifts attention from assigning blame to understanding how policies, practices, relationships, and organizational culture shape educational outcomes. The articles explore practical ways of improving teaching, learning, leadership, and institutional practice. Four interconnected themes emerge from these contributions.

The first theme highlights teacher well-being. For too long, educational discourse has focused almost exclusively on student outcomes while paying comparatively little attention to the well-being of those entrusted with facilitating learning. The contributions by Debbie Hutchinson-Edwards and Monique Jackson-Reynolds remind us that effective education cannot be separated from the health, agency, and professional capacity of educators. They challenge institutions to recognize that excessive workloads and work intensification not only affect teachers personally but ultimately influence the quality of learning experienced by students. These articles position teacher wellness as a systemic concern requiring intentional leadership, supportive policies, and institutional commitment. Their message is timely: educational transformation is unsustainable if the professionals leading that transformation are themselves exhausted.



A second theme focuses on reimagining higher education and teacher preparation. As educational contexts continue to evolve, so too must the institutions responsible for preparing future educators. The contributions by Shellon Samuels-White, Cheryl Lue-Simpson, Nicolía Nelson, and Dujean Edwards argue that teacher preparation must extend beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge. Future educators require authentic learning experiences that foster critical thinking, creativity and professional competence. Whether through inclusive assessment, project-based learning, authentic mathematics experiences, or competency-based approaches to addressing academic integrity, these articles encourage higher education institutions to rethink traditional practices and prepare graduates who are capable of responding to increasingly complex educational realities. In many respects, these contributions exemplify Hinnant-Crawford’s assertion that improvement requires educators to first ask, “What is the exact problem we are trying to solve?” before introducing change.

The third theme emerging across this volume is inclusive, equitable, and responsive teaching in a changing world. Although the contexts differ- primary classrooms, secondary schools and teacher education programmes, the contributors collectively reject the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning. Instead, they advocate educational practices that recognize learner diversity as an asset rather than a challenge. Gillian Campbell calls for culturally responsive differentiation that values learners' identities, language, and lived experiences. Judene Williams reminds us that meaningful learning cannot occur when students' affective needs are ignored, while Lennovia Clarke demonstrates how gamified collaborative learning can transform students' confidence and participation in mathematics. Alphadine Dennis illustrates how creativity, innovation, and STEAM education can remove barriers to learning by making science accessible for all students. Similarly, Jody Brown argues that addressing boys' educational outcomes requires early intervention, mentorship, positive masculinity, and sustained community engagement.

The final and perhaps most pervasive theme is human-centred leadership for educational transformation. Whether discussing servant leadership, emotional intelligence, curriculum leadership, implementation stewardship, community partnerships, or quality culture, these contributions redefine educational leadership as a fundamentally relational endeavour. Leadership is presented not merely as positional authority or managerial competence, but as the capacity to build trust, nurture people, foster collaboration, and create environments where continuous improvement becomes part of the institutional culture.

The articles by Devmarie Brown, Joel Gray, Lorna and Lowel Morgan, Kay Dunkley, and Amanda Berry, Natoya Bogle-Carty, and Jody Brown illustrate this perspective from complementary angles. While each author focuses on a different aspect of leadership, together they argue that sustainable transformation is achieved when leaders intentionally build relationships, empower others, and create systems that enable both educators and learners to thrive. This represents a significant departure from traditional views of leadership that emphasize control, compliance, and hierarchy. Instead, these authors position leadership as an ongoing process of service, collaboration, reflection, and shared responsibility. Meaningful change rarely occurs because of a single charismatic leader or one innovative programme. Rather, it emerges when leaders understand the interconnectedness of people, policies, structures, and practices and intentionally create the conditions that enable improvement to flourish.

The seventeen contributions in this volume offers a different perspective on this journey, yet all converge around a common aspiration: creating educational experiences that are more equitable, more responsive, more innovative, and more humane. As Editor-in-Chief, I am encouraged by the quality of the scholarship presented in this volume. While the articles span diverse disciplines and educational contexts, they collectively remind us that transformation is not the responsibility of policymakers alone. Legacy: Transformation in Action therefore represents more than a collection of articles. It is an invitation to engage in an ongoing conversation about how Jamaican education can continue to evolve. It is our hope that these contributions will not only stimulate scholarly dialogue but also inspire educators, leaders, researchers, and policymakers to continue reimagining what is possible for Jamaican education. Transformation, after all, is not a destination. It is a continuous journey - one thoughtful decision, one improved practice, and one learner and educator at a time.



Shellon

Shellon Samuels-White
Guest Editor-in Chief

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Additional Resources

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Emotional Intelligence in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services: Reflections on Human-Centred Leadership from Lecturers at The Mico University College

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Abstract

This practice article considers emotional intelligence from the collective perspective of lecturers in the Department of Human Ecology and Hospitality Services at The Mico University College. Because our disciplines combine knowledge, practical performance, service, creativity and human wellbeing, the emotional climate of classrooms, laboratories, studios, meetings and supervisory relationships directly affects learning, safety and professional formation. Drawing on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, we connect emotional intelligence to teaching, assessment, mentoring, departmental collaboration and institutional change. We argue that emotional intelligence does not replace expertise, standards or accountability; it enables these to be exercised with fairness, clarity and respect. The article concludes with a concise departmental agenda and a relational practice cycle for translating emotionally intelligent leadership into everyday action.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; Human Ecology and Hospitality Services; human-centred leadership; higher education; Jamaica

Introduction

As lecturers in the Department of Human Ecology and Hospitality Services at The Mico University College, we teach in a field where education is inseparable from human wellbeing, service, culture, creativity and work. Our classrooms extend into food laboratories, textile and apparel studios, demonstration spaces, teaching-practice sites, community projects and professional settings. In these environments, people must collaborate and feedback is often immediate. The quality of human interaction therefore influences not only morale, but also safety, confidence, learning and professional identity.

This reality shapes our understanding of leadership. Leadership is often measured by qualifications, authority, productivity and the ability to secure results. These matter, but they are incomplete. Leadership is also revealed in how people are treated while the work is being done. A technically competent leader may enforce procedures and meet deadlines while creating a climate in which colleagues fear questions and students are ashamed of mistakes. By contrast, a leader who listens, communicates respectfully can preserve standards while strengthening trust and responsibility.

Emotional intelligence helps make this difference. It enables us to recognise emotion, regulate our responses, understand context and manage relationships so that work can be completed with dignity. It does not require us to avoid difficult conversations, excuse poor performance or solve every personal problem. This article is a scholarly reflection grounded in our experience as lecturers, mentors and educators, supported by research on emotional intelligence, leadership and educational transformation. It is not presented as an empirical study of our department; rather, it offers a practice-informed perspective on how we teach, correct, collaborate and care within higher education.

Why Emotional Intelligence Matters in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services

Human Ecology and Hospitality Services provide an ideal context for examining emotional intelligence. These disciplines focus on people, relationships, health, resources, service, and everyday living. Students are expected not only to acquire knowledge but also to demonstrate skills, create, serve, organise, evaluate, and reflect. Because learning is highly practical and involves continuous practice, feedback, and collaboration, it can also leave students feeling exposed and vulnerable. A student presenting a food product, garment, lesson demonstration or service plan is presenting evidence of personal effort. Feedback that is vague, sarcastic or publicly humiliating may be remembered long after the technical lesson is forgotten. The same correction, delivered specifically and respectfully, can help the learner separate performance from identity: the product has not yet met the standard, but the learner can identify the gap, practise and improve. The standard remains intact; what changes is the learner's capacity to hear it without believing that one mistake defines personal worth.

Our work also involves emotional labour. Lecturers may teach, supervise practical sessions, assess portfolios, prepare laboratories, monitor safety, advise students, serve on committees and meet institutional deadlines within the same period. Students may arrive carrying financial pressure, family responsibilities, grief, anxiety or uncertainty about their future. Emotional intelligence does not remove these realities, but it helps us distinguish unwillingness from uncertainty, defiance from embarrassment and a genuine need for support from an attempt to avoid responsibility. It is also central to hospitality-related professional readiness, because service requires communication, composure, empathy, teamwork and constructive responses when expectations are not met.



Emotional Intelligence and Human-Centred Leadership

Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2005) describe emotional intelligence as an ability involving the perception, use, understanding and management of emotion. In our work, this becomes practical when a lecturer notices tension before a group task deteriorates, when a programme coordinator recognises that frustration is affecting tone or when a leader asks for the context behind a missed deadline before assigning blame. Human-centred leadership applies these capacities to authority while recognising that staff members and students are both accountable participants and human beings.

Human-centred leadership does not mean lowering standards or granting every request. A leader may be pleasant yet unclear, sympathetic yet inconsistent or supportive yet unwilling to confront repeated underperformance. Effective emotional intelligence combines empathy with judgment, courage, fairness and follow-through. Its value is shown when communication becomes more truthful, decisions become more proportionate and relationships remain strong enough to support improvement.

Four Capabilities Through Our Departmental Lens

Self-Awareness: Understanding the Educator Behind the Role

Self-awareness is the capacity to recognise our emotions, triggers, assumptions, strengths and limitations. In practical disciplines, where time, safety and quality standards matter, urgency can be mistaken for permission to speak harshly. A lecturer may be anxious because equipment is malfunctioning or an assessment is behind schedule, then displace that anxiety on students or colleagues. Self-awareness creates a pause in which the educator can restate the requirement, examine what support or consequence is appropriate and respond without allowing frustration to control the interaction.

Self-awareness also requires us to examine bias. We may interpret confidence differently among students, assume that quietness means disengagement, favour communication styles similar to our own or become defensive when a colleague challenges an established approach. Emotionally secure educators can receive feedback, acknowledge gaps and value the expertise of others. Authority is strengthened, not weakened, when it is exercised reflectively.

Self-Management: Responding Rather Than Reacting

Self-management is the ability to regulate emotion and choose a proportionate response under pressure. Higher education presents missed deadlines, student appeals, staffing constraints, policy changes and unexpected disruptions. When materials are unavailable before a practical session, a reactive response may involve blame or unsafe improvisation. A self-managed response stabilises the situation, determines what can proceed safely, communicates the adjustment and addresses responsibility once the facts are clear. Calmness is not passivity; it is disciplined leadership.

The same principle applies to supervision. When a deadline is missed, emotionally intelligent leadership names the requirement, asks for relevant context, determines permissible flexibility, agrees on the next action and follows up. It avoids permanent judgments based on temporary emotion. Compassion does not require unlimited extensions, and firmness does not require humiliation.

Social Awareness: Seeing Context Before Assigning Character

Social awareness includes empathy, sensitivity to context and attention to the emotional climate of a group. Observable behaviour rarely tells the whole story. A student who avoids a practical task may be unprepared but may also fear public failure. A colleague who becomes unusually quiet may be disengaged, but may also be overwhelmed by health, caregiving or workload pressures. Social awareness asks us to investigate before we label.

Understanding context does not excuse every difficulty; it supports fairer decisions. A lecturer can identify a change in participation or performance, invite relevant explanation and state what must happen next. Social awareness is also cultural and relational. Students and colleagues differ in age, background, faith, personality and professional experience, and power affects their willingness to speak. Silence may indicate agreement, but it may also signal uncertainty or the belief that speaking will make no difference.

Relationship Management: Building Trust Through the Work

Relationship management is the capacity to communicate clearly, resolve conflict, influence constructively and repair relationships. Within a department, disagreement about assessment, practical requirements, workload or innovation is inevitable. An emotionally unintelligent response treats questions as disloyalty and uses authority to end discussion. A relationally skilled leader clarifies the shared goal, invites evidence, explains constraints, records decisions and communicates the basis for them. People may not receive their preferred outcome, but they are more likely to trust a transparent and respectful process.

Relationship management also includes repair. Educators and leaders will sometimes speak too quickly, misunderstand a concern or decide without adequate consultation. An appropriate apology does not diminish authority; it demonstrates accountability. Trust is not built by pretending conflict never occurs, but by handling it in ways that preserve truth, dignity and continued collaboration.

Teaching, Assessment and Professional Formation

Lecturers exercise leadership whenever we organise learning, give feedback, interpret behaviour or respond to difficulty. Practical assessment is especially important. Students need clear standards, accurate judgments and feedback that identifies the criterion, the evidence of the gap and the next action. Comments such as "This is poor" communicate disapproval without teaching improvement. A more useful response explains why the work has not met the standard and what practice, revision or resubmission is required. Such feedback is demanding, but also fair and developmental.

Emotionally intelligent teaching contributes to professional identity. Our students are preparing for roles in homes, schools, businesses, communities and service environments. They must learn to manage pressure, receive correction, work with diverse people, respond to complaints and exercise ethical judgment. We teach these abilities not only through course content, but through modelling. The way we manage a delayed practical, address a mistake or resolve conflict becomes part of the curriculum students experience.



Collegial Relationships and Departmental Leadership

A department can possess strong individual expertise and still struggle when relationships are characterised by fear, poor communication or unresolved conflict. Classes may continue and reports may be submitted, yet colleagues stop volunteering ideas, avoid collaboration and contribute only what is formally required. The department remains functional on paper while losing creativity, generosity and institutional memory.

Research supports the connection between emotional intelligence and workplace outcomes. Doğru's (2022) meta-analysis linked emotional intelligence with organisational commitment, job satisfaction, citizenship behaviour and performance, and with lower job stress. Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) similarly found that emotional intelligence influences leadership, team behaviour and organisational outcomes. Pirsoul et al. (2023) associated it with career adaptability and satisfaction, while Sasere and Matashu (2025) identified self-awareness, empathy and relationship management as recurring competencies connected to teacher wellbeing, school climate and leadership effectiveness.

These findings must be interpreted responsibly. Emotional intelligence cannot correct inadequate staffing, inequitable workload, unclear policy, limited resources or poor compensation. It should not be reduced to a personality test or used to make employees quietly absorb unhealthy systems. It must operate alongside competent management, fair procedures and adequate institutional support. Empathy without structural action becomes empty reassurance; structure without empathy can become dehumanizing administration.

From Principle to Practice: A Departmental Agenda

Emotional intelligence should not depend only on individual personality. It can be strengthened through ordinary departmental systems and professional habits:

1. Model the expected behaviour. Leaders should communicate calmly, correct privately where possible, explain decisions, receive feedback, apologise appropriately and follow through consistently.
2. Create safer meetings and decisions. Circulate agendas, record decisions, allow evidence-based disagreement and distinguish clearly between consultation and final authority.
3. Strengthen feedback and mentoring. Assessment and supervision should make standards, gaps, required actions and timelines clear. Structured mentoring and referral pathways should support students and early-career educators without ignoring professional boundaries.
4. Plan for predictable pressure. Practical examinations, teaching practice, accreditation, major events and end-of-semester grading require advance attention to workload, equipment, deadlines and staff support.
5. Develop and evaluate relational practice. Case discussions, role-play, peer observation and coaching can strengthen difficult-conversation skills. Anonymous feedback, participation patterns, grievances, retention and perceptions of fairness can help departments identify strengths and concerns without punishing candour.

Conclusion

From our perspective as lecturers in Human Ecology and Hospitality Services, emotional intelligence is not an optional addition to professional competence. It is part of the relational infrastructure that allows competence to benefit people. It shapes the safety of practical sessions, the usefulness of feedback, the honesty of meetings, the repair of conflict, and the confidence with which students enter professional life.

We summarise emotionally intelligent action as five interconnected steps: pause, attend, clarify, act, and follow through. Pause before emotion becomes reaction. Attend to the person, facts, and power dynamics. Clarify the standard, context, and limits of authority. Act in a fair, proportionate, and specific way. Follow through so that care does not become an empty promise and accountability does not become a one-time threat. This cycle can guide classrooms, practical laboratories, meetings, supervisory conversations, and conflict-resolution.

The strongest educational leader is neither the person who generates fear nor the one who avoids every difficult conversation. It is the leader who combines clarity with dignity, empathy with accountability, and authority with service. This approach does not lower standards; it makes them more teachable, credible, and sustainable.

Human Ecology and Hospitality Services is fundamentally concerned with the quality of human life. Our leadership and teaching should reflect that commitment. When lecturers, students, and staff are treated as people rather than instruments of output, they are better positioned to learn, create, serve, and carry transformation forward. Ultimately, this is the practical promise of emotional intelligence in higher education.



The Mico University College

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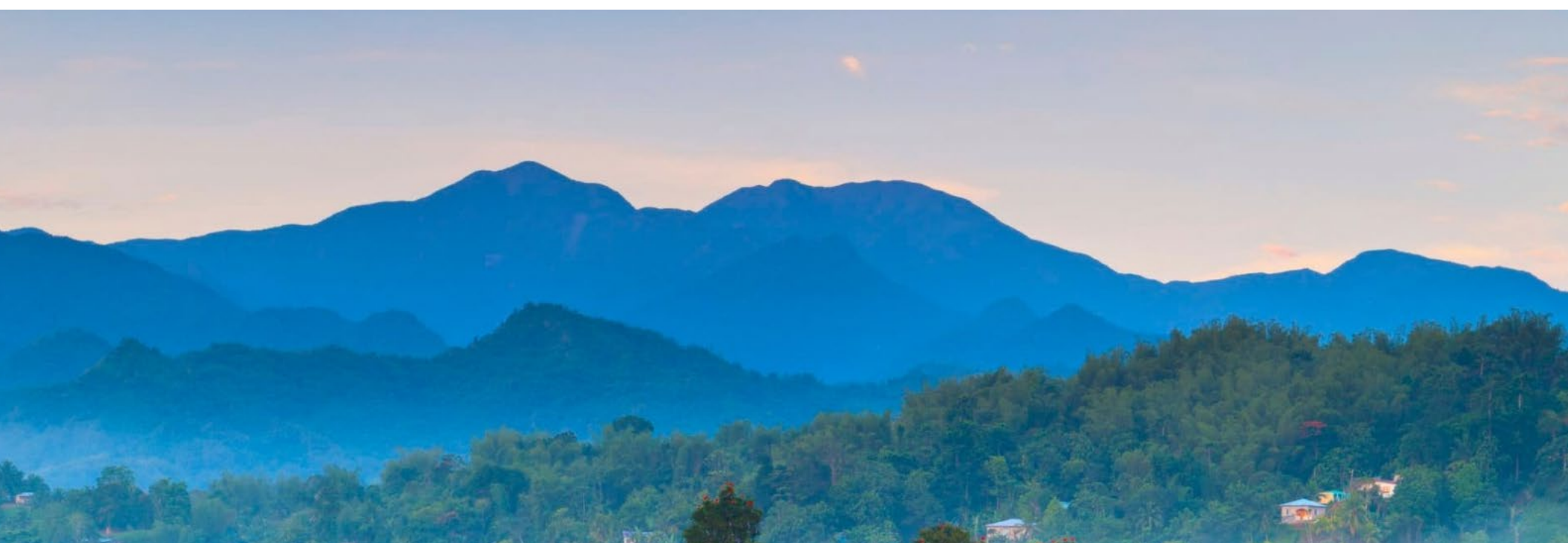
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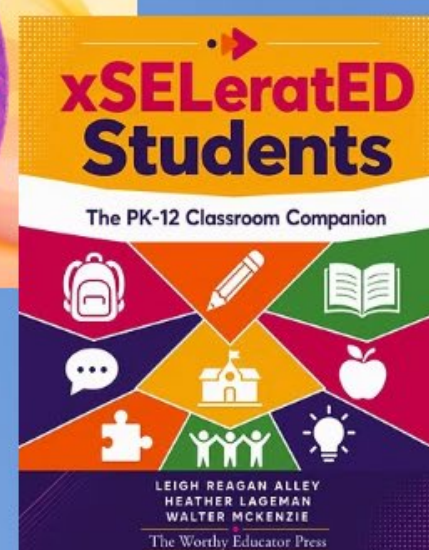
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xSEleratED Students is the companion to School Seasons xSEleratED: A Year of Community and Collective Growth for Educators, and wherever this book finds you—at the hopeful beginning of a school year, in the weary middle, or at the edge of a goodbye—we want you to know that you do not enter this work alone!

School is one of the places where young people learn what it feels like to be known, to contribute, to recover from mistakes, to honor boundaries, and to care for themselves and one another. Those lessons live in the words we choose, the routines we repeat, the people we notice, and the ways we respond when something goes wrong. They are being taught whether or not we name them.

xSEleratED Students is our attempt to make that learning more intentional. It is not another program to complete or a script to perform. It is a seasonal path—a way to notice what the year is asking of the people in the room and to meet that moment with language, reflection, relationship, and action.

We come to this work through three lenses: wholeness, community, and systems. Yet our shared conviction is simple. Learning becomes more possible when people are treated as whole, when belonging is built on purpose, and when structures are designed to carry care rather than depend upon individual heroics.

Begin where the season finds you. Use what serves your students. Adapt what does not. Move gently when the work is tender and courageously when the moment asks more of you. We are honored to walk beside you!



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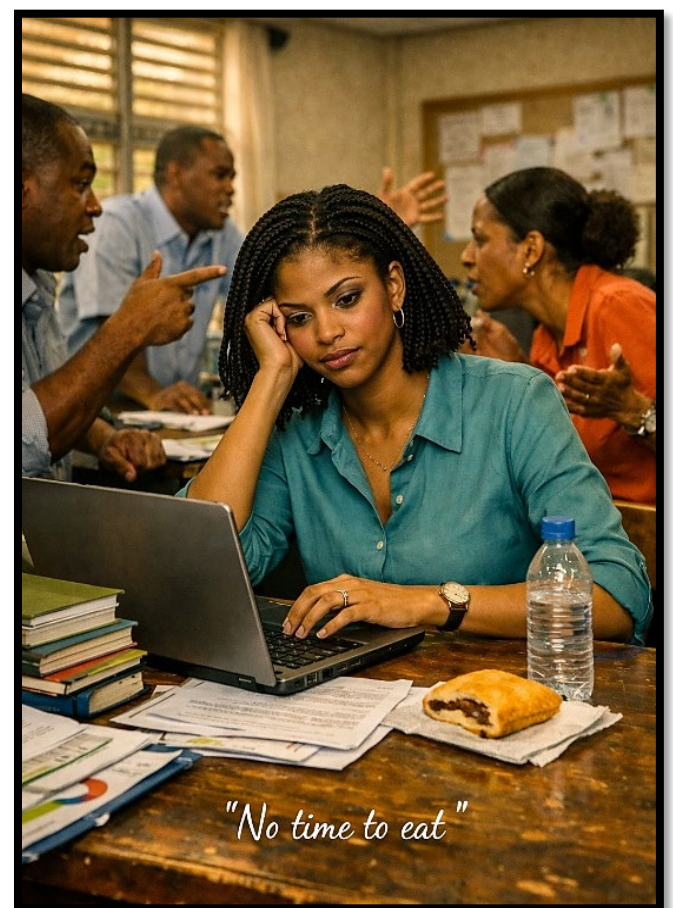


Promoting Educator Agency and Efficacy in Jamaica Protecting ‘Teacher Time’: A Day in a Jamaican Teacher's Life

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At the heart of Jamaica's education system are its teachers and lecturers, whose professional agency and self-efficacy are fundamental to student success. Yet increasing workloads and administrative demands continue to erode one of their most valuable resources—teacher time. As time for planning, reflection, collaboration, and professional learning diminishes, so too does educators' confidence in their ability to influence student learning and exercise professional judgment. How can protecting teacher time enhance educators' well-being, preserve their health, and strengthen their capacity to shape the nation's future?

Teacher self-efficacy refers to educators' confidence in their ability to positively influence student learning and behaviour. This confidence is strengthened when teachers have sufficient time to plan meaningful lessons, differentiate instruction, assess learning, and reflect on their practice. Similarly, educator agency - the capacity to make informed decisions about teaching and learning, depends on having the time and autonomy to innovate, collaborate, and respond to students' needs. When teacher time is consumed by excessive administrative demands, both self-efficacy and professional agency are diminished, limiting educators' ability to teach creatively, respond effectively to learners, and sustain meaningful educational improvement.



The Challenge: The Evidence of Work Intensification

A primary barrier to educator agency and self-efficacy in Jamaica is work intensification. Driven by technological and organizational changes, it is characterized by an increased volume of work, additional responsibilities, a faster pace, longer working hours, and limited resources. During regional conferences and national workshops, colleagues consistently voice similar concerns. One common refrain is, *“We receive at least twenty emails daily and struggle to stick to schedules amid constant requests for data from supervisors and governing organizations.”*

Research on Jamaican schools identifies inclusion training and a supportive school climate as key predictors of teacher self-efficacy. Educators who experience administrative collegiality and have access to adequate resources report greater confidence in their ability to support student learning. However, many teachers work in environments marked by limited resources. Principals and Grade Coordinators often engage in entrepreneurial leadership: organizing fundraisers to purchase basic supplies or support student welfare programmes. While commendable, these additional responsibilities consume valuable teacher time, contributing to exhaustion, frustration, and reduced confidence in their ability to positively influence student outcomes.

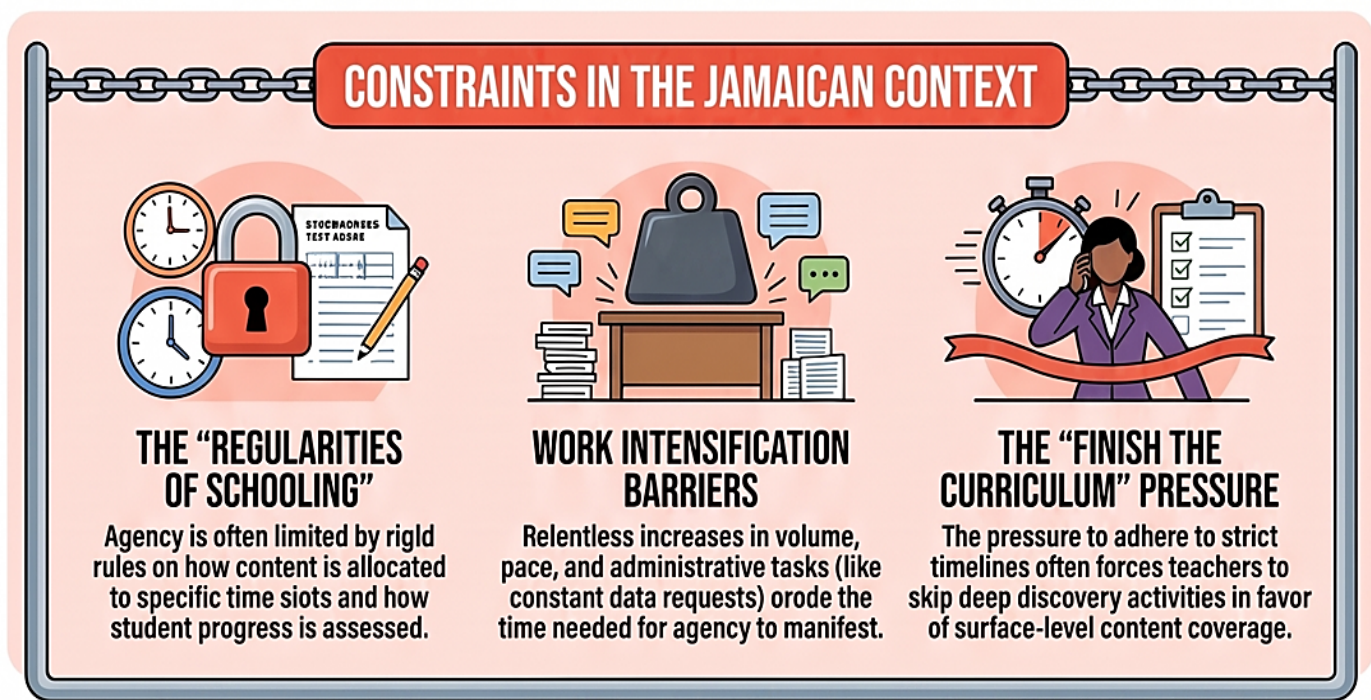
The struggle is real. One colleague called me late one evening and broke down in tears.



"Do you think it's too late for me to switch to law or nursing?"

"Do you think it's too late for me to switch to law or nursing?" she said. "I've been teaching for over 15 years, and it really seems like I'm not getting a chance to actually teach. After spending the midterm break to mark the test papers and prepare the lessons plans for the first week to submit by the deadline, I didn't get to teach the lessons the way I wanted at all. It's too much. I had to attend two 'emergency meetings' in one day, leaving my students to read through and complete the activities by themselves. Then I was asked to collate some data for the entire grade the following day because we got an e-mail that we needed to send the information the Ministry of Education by the end of the day. I didn't get to do the discovery activities and lead the class discussions to help my student to fully understand the concepts at all. I had to move on to the next topic with the other teachers in the grade, because we have to finish the curriculum. I have to be a committee meeting in my lunch time or I am schedules to sell ice cream so that we can buy a projector for our grade. I want to help with fundraisers, but when I suggest that we do some things early in the mornings or after school instead of our lunch time, I'm treated like I committed a crime".

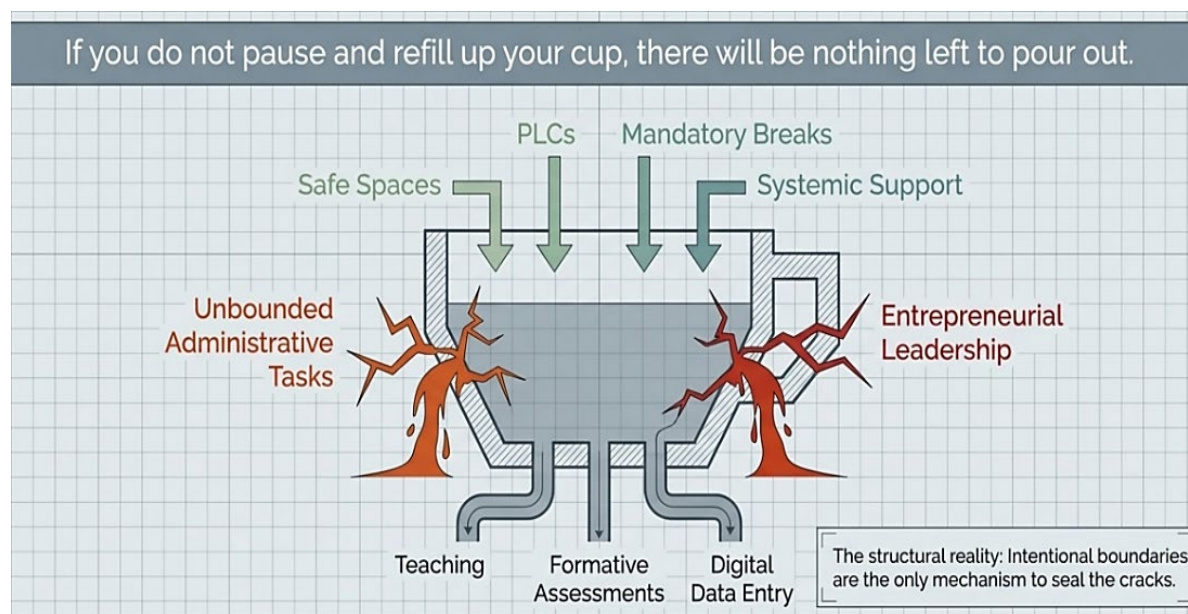
Her plight mirrored my own experiences. Despite more than 22 years in the teaching profession, I am embarrassed to admit that I collapsed at work on several occasions due to work-related stress. I also experienced frequent crying spells, even during professional meetings, as I often felt overwhelmed and hopeless. Over time, however, I learned that it is healthier to share feelings of anxiety than to bottle them up simply to “save face” or pretend that everything is manageable. The relentless nature of work intensification in Jamaica has contributed to fatigue, anxiety, hypertension, and other occupational well-being challenges. Many educators report having no downtime, working through lunch breaks, weekends, and even school holidays. This chronic stress often leads to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and diminished motivation. Compounding the problem is the persistent stigma surrounding mental health in Jamaica, which discourages many educators from seeking the support they need.



Lessons Learnt

In the last three years, eight of my colleagues have passed away—three at my current workplace and five from previous institutions. None had reached the age of 55; the youngest was just 44 and was a close friend. We had shared countless conversations about our concerns, professional goals, dreams, and aspirations. Some had young children and spouses, while others cared for elderly relatives. All died from illness. Some were too busy to eat properly or too stressed to sleep well. Three continued marking papers and completing report cards from their hospital beds because of a “cultured” mindset that being ill meant being “useless.” These losses shook me deeply and forced me to re-evaluate how I manage my teacher time.

I began reflecting on my health, life priorities, professional goals, and the dreams my husband and I shared when we first met. I realized that these deserved the same place in my schedule as my professional responsibilities if I wanted a sustainable and fulfilling teaching career. My mother once told me, “If you do not pause and refill up your cup, there will be nothing left to pour out.” Those words have stayed with me. Self-care does not mean we are selfish; it means teachers have the right to a wholesome life, just like anyone else.



We all have control over our own time. Yes, we are the ones who choose how to spend each second of each day. Whenever I find myself spending hours on tasks that leave me anxious, I now stop and ask: “To what end? What am I really achieving here? What is the actual return or outcome of all of this? Who will it really benefit? Is it worth my health, personal time with my family? How am I even treated when all this work is done?”

Systemic Mental Health Support

Protecting teacher time also requires creating “safe spaces” where educators can seek professional support without fear of social stigma. Many teachers hesitate to seek help for stress or anxiety because they fear being labelled “mad” or “head nuh good.” As a result, they often rely solely on individual coping strategies instead of accessing the systemic support available. Protecting teacher time must therefore include confidential mental health services that support the whole person, not just professional performance. Unfortunately, many school-based resources remain underutilized because of concerns about “confidentiality” and “how we will be perceived,” and the misconception that asking for help signals weakness or incompetence.



My experience has shown the opposite. A few years ago, I accepted a recommendation to participate in mediation with a professional counsellor to address recurring conflicts with colleagues. The situation had left me with sleepless nights, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. The counsellor was both caring and objective, helping those involved reflect on our actions, rebuild relationships, and work toward solution-focused outcomes. I later continued with individual counselling sessions, where I was able to release pent-up anger and confusion while receiving evidence-based guidance on my mental well-being. That experience became a turning point, allowing me to develop a realistic plan to gradually release both real and perceived burdens. It marked the beginning of my journey toward intentionally protecting my teacher time.

Practical Ways to Protect your Teacher Time

To protect our time and maintain professional efficacy, we must employ a combination of systemic structural shifts, collaborative practices, and intentional personal boundaries.

➔ Reconfiguring Administrative Roles

If we truly assess the volume of paperwork teachers are often drowned in, we will unanimously agree that it is another full-time job. Seriously—from reviewing current educational research, designing instructional activities, aligning 8 to 15 lesson plans weekly with the NSC and 21st-century requirements, creating tests and authentic assessments, to providing meaningful feedback. There is simply not enough time. The expectation of giving individual feedback to every one of 20 to 45 students is, quite honestly, impossible.

The 4Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—are not only for our students; they should also help us become more efficient, innovative, and wholesome educators. The key is to tap into the resources we already have, use the legal frameworks that protect us, and give ourselves room to actually enjoy the process of moulding young innovators.

Structural changes, such as assigning more managerial responsibilities to vice-principals and department heads, would allow lead educators to focus on instructional leadership rather than administrative compliance. Likewise, middle managers need protected time to support teacher development, monitor implementation, and engage in meaningful evaluation that informs impactful, data-driven decisions.

➔ Tailor Your Support System

Protecting teacher time also means making better use of the support around you. Find out to what extent your administrative staff can assist. Then look beyond the school. Do you have one or two parents, past students, relatives, community members, or even your own students who have the skills and are willing to help within their capacity? Reach out to them. You may be pleasantly surprised by the positive responses and the wealth of resources you can tap into. Likewise, when projects or professional deadlines arise, don't try to do everything alone. Reach out to former classmates, colleagues from other schools, or educators you have met along the way. They may offer advice, lend a helping hand, or simply point you in the right direction.

➔ Capitalize on the Power of Partnerships

Collaboration is one of the most effective ways to reduce workload and prevent burnout. Through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers can share ideas, co-develop lesson plans, and create assessment tools together. Problem-solving is always easier when shared than when carried by one person. One experience that stayed with me came from a school where my Grade Coordinator introduced a delegated lesson-planning system. Teachers with greater expertise prepared lesson plans for specific subject areas and shared them at least three days before submission. The rest of us reviewed the plans, adapted them to meet the needs of our classes, and added our own creativity.

This approach significantly reduced our workload while allowing us to learn from one another. Although some plans were not always shared on time, tools such as Google Docs now make collaboration much easier by allowing teachers to work on shared drafts simultaneously. The same approach can be used for assessment planning. Saving these shared resources also provides valuable references for future use, especially for teachers who are new to a grade level.



➔ Advocate for Transparency of Workload Distribution

Each staff member should have a clear description of the core tasks for which they are responsible. In schools, workloads are often interconnected, with one person's output becoming another person's input. When deadlines are missed, it creates a ripple effect of frustration and delays for everyone else. Unfortunately, many teachers end up completing administrative tasks that should be handled by other staff members, often without realizing it. Adding these responsibilities to an already full workload is a dangerous pathway to burnout and staff demoralization. Greater transparency about roles, responsibilities, and timelines would make it easier to identify where support or reconfiguration is needed. It would also encourage professional accountability, constructive dialogue, and the co-creation of systems that help everyone achieve both individual and collective goals.

➔ Create a Burnout Prevention Formula with your Required Workload

First, become familiar with the education regulations and policies that govern your institution, whether at the early childhood, primary, secondary, or tertiary level. Teachers should also be aware of the broader labour laws that protect them. According to the National Labour Standards, the standard maximum workweek for a full-time employee in Jamaica is 40 hours before overtime applies (National Minimum Wage Amendment Order, 2026). While teachers may fall within this limit on paper, the reality is often very different.

c

All Jamaican teachers should also be familiar with The Education Regulations (1980), particularly Regulation 9, which defines teaching hours, the school day, mandatory breaks, and excludes Saturdays and Sundays from the school week. Educators in post-secondary institutions should likewise review the workload guidelines that govern their specific roles. For example, the JBTE (2024) prescribes different weekly contact hours based on academic rank, recognizing that leadership and research responsibilities require additional time.

One strategy I have found helpful is drafting a personal estimated workload timetable within a healthy 40-hour workweek. Schedule your core responsibilities first, using your required contact hours as the foundation. Then add additional tasks assigned by your supervisor. Colour-coding contact hours and task categories makes it much easier to monitor how your time is being used and to identify when your workload has become unrealistic. For example:

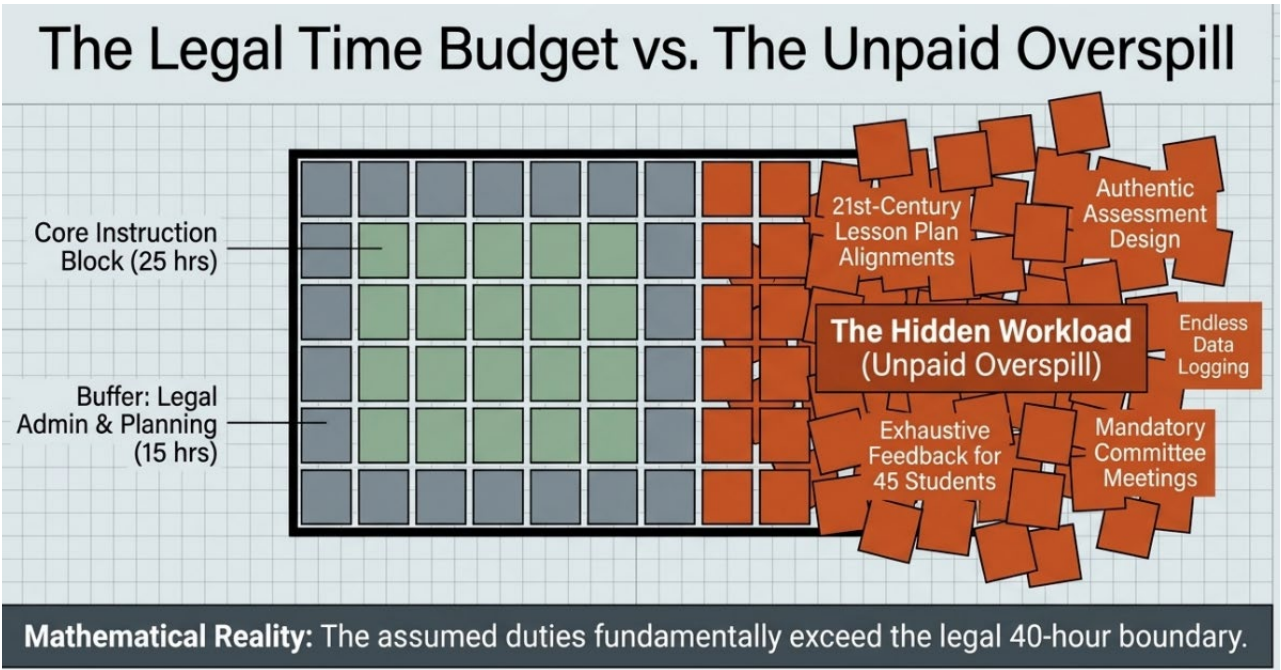
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00: 9:00	Course 1	Emails Digital Data Entry/ Practicum Supervision Duties	Research Related Activities Meetings and Coaching Sessions	Student Advisement	Course 5
9:00– 10:00				Meetings Department/ Faculty/Staff	
10:00 – 11:00					
11:00 – 12:00	Emails Digital Data Entry/ Student Consultation	Special Committee Meetings/Events			Emails Digital Data Entry/ Practicum Supervision Duties
12:00 – 1:00	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1:00 –2:00	Grading Assessments	Course 3	Grading Assessments	Clubs Special Committee Meetings/Events	Grading Assessments
2:00 – 3:00					Planning
3:00 – 4:00	Planning		Planning	Planning	
Evening Classes 5:00– 8:00 p.m.	Course 2		Course 4		

Figure 1 Ideal Distribution of Estimated Workload – Post- Secondary/Tertiary

Action Plan: How to Execute your Estimated Workload Formula

Cap Your Contact Time (Target: 18-22 Hours): Stick to the legal limits: Ensure your schedule does not exceed the legal hours without fair compensation.

Guard your breaks:
Avoid filling your lunch breaks with meetings and consultations on a regular basis. Where you are required to supervise students, ensure that your supervisors make arrangements for you to be relieved. Treat this time as a *mandatory cognitive reset*.



Streamline Lesson Planning (Target: 5 Hours)

Embrace the 80/20 rule: Spend 80% of your time tailoring delivery and only 20% creating materials.

Leverage digital tools: Use trusted educational platforms and basic AI assistants to draft your initial lesson outlines, syllabus breakdowns, and content ideas. This can save you up to 5 hours per week.

Share resources: Build a shared folder with department peers to pool lesson plans and worksheets instead of starting from a blank template every term/semester.

Grade Smarter (Target: 5 Hours):

You do not need to assign a heavy grade to every single piece of paper. Use quick, non-graded formative checks (like exit tickets) to gauge learning.

Implement peer-marking: Have students swap papers to check objective answers during class. This offers them immediate feedback while clearing your desk.

Use Single-Point Rubrics:

Avoid writing lengthy individual comments. Use a simple rubric to highlight strengths and areas for improvement quickly.

Manage Administrative Tasks (Target: 6-8 Hours):

Timebox your paperwork: Set a strict timer for logging marks or completing register work. When the timer goes off, step away.

Optimize interactions:

Focus parent/student queries and staff conversations to address priority points.

Ask for time to consider new tasks:

Before accepting new tasks, analyse your workload draft. There may be times where you may have to decline additional duties to prevent 'burn out'. In some cases, you may also have to defend the reason you are declining by sharing your workload draft with your supervisors.

Choose additional tasks that align with your professional objectives. This allows you to develop individual goals while contributing to department/faculty/institutional priority targets.



Managing Digital Boundaries

Technological advancement has created a state of constant accessibility via email and WhatsApp, blurring the lines between personal and professional life. To protect professional space, educators should:

Designate Specific Email Times:

Instead of checking messages continuously, assign limited, specific time blocks during your workday for email correspondence.

Silence Work Notifications:

Turn off work-related notifications, such as those from WhatsApp or email, after a certain hour in the evening to maintain a clear line between your professional and personal life.

Implement the 42% Recovery Rule:

Preventing physical and mental burnout requires dedicating roughly 42% of the day or about 10 hours to physiological rest and decompression (Nagaski & Nagoski, 2019). Ensure you are spending approximately 10 hours a day (including sleep) completely away from work to rest, disconnect, and pursue hobbies. True protection of teacher time requires acknowledging that downtime periods without physical or mental work, is an inherent necessity for restoring energy and recovering from daily stress. Educators must proactively monitor their own energy and listen to physical signals of fatigue to prevent the chronic stress that leads to hypertension and burnout.

Promoting educator agency and efficacy in Jamaica is not merely a pedagogical concern but a national imperative for sustainable development. The current "innovation deficit" in the education system is symptomatic of a reaching workforce that is overworked, under-resourced, unhealthy and demoralized. Protecting 'teacher time' is the essential first step in reversing this trend. By creating an enabling environment that prioritizes the occupational well-being of educators and grants them the autonomy to act as facilitators of deep learning, Jamaica can cultivate a generation of reflective, innovative, and adaptable citizens. Success will require a synergistic effort from the governing bodies, school boards, and the educators themselves to reclaim the professional space necessary for transformative education. Ultimately, protecting 'teacher time' is achieved when we exercise professional agency, translating our situational power into strategies that prioritize deep, reflective learning while decreasing administrative and "entrepreneurial" distractions.

Are you enjoying being a teacher? Have you been balancing your health, sleep and happiness, amidst the academic and administrative demands of being an educator? What about those personal professional goals? Have you completed that book, that course, that community project? OR. Have you been asking yourself....where does the time go? How am I to accomplish my goals with all these deadlines, lesson plans, meetings and reports?

BUT...you CAN. By protecting your 'Teacher Time'.



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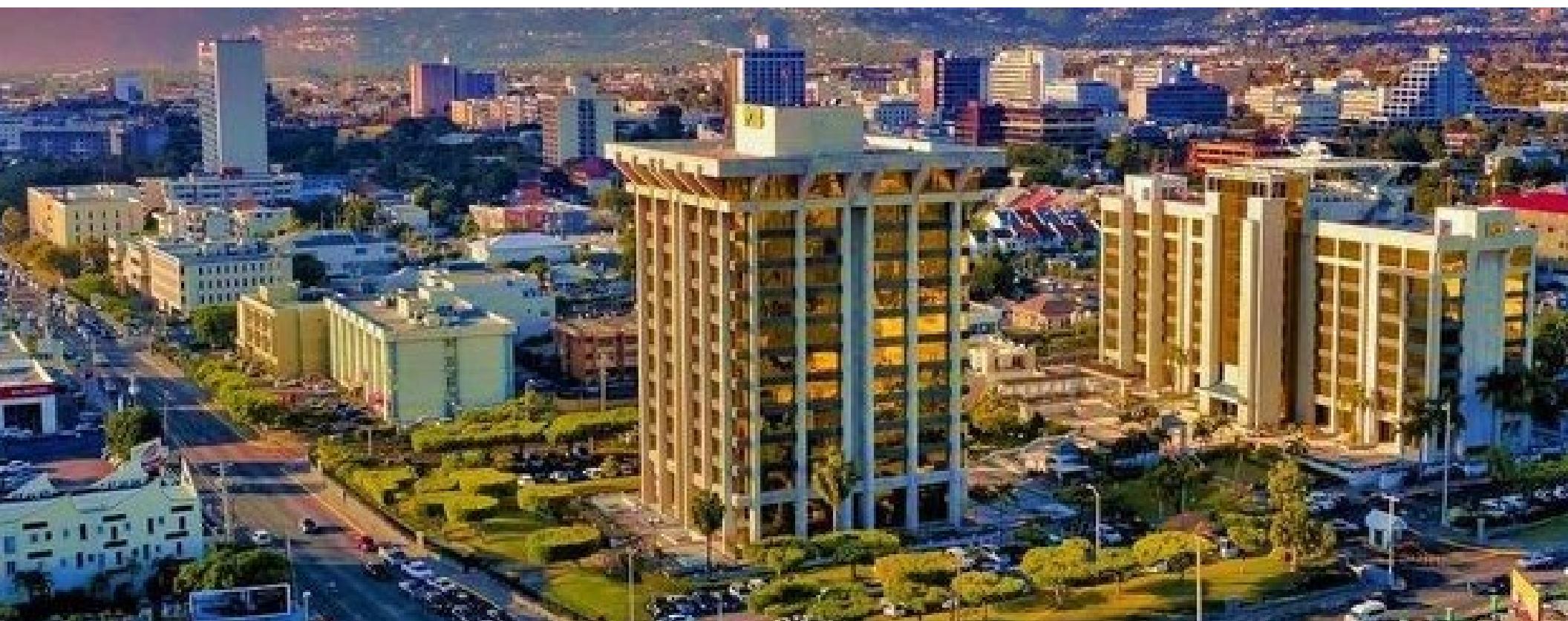
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YOU SPOKE - WE LISTENED!

ED ADVOCACY

PRIORITIES FOR 2026-27

**Each August, we ask educators everywhere to share:
“What are your top 5 priorities for the new school year?”
Here are this year’s results...and our marching orders!**

**1. PRESERVICE
AND INSERVICE
PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING**



**4. JOB-EMBEDDED
LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT**



**2. WELLNESS,
MENTAL HEALTH
AND BURNOUT**



**5. BUILDING
COMMUNITY
SUPPORT FOR
SCHOOLS**



**3. PREPARING
STUDENTS
FOR THEIR
FUTURE**



**5. ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE
LITERACY**



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ED INFLUENCERS

Bringing Science to Life: Using STEAM as a Pedagogical Tool in Science

Alphadine Dennis

Physics Teacher and STEM Educator
Old Harbour High School



What if the key to transforming science education was not found in expensive equipment or imported resources, but in the creativity, compassion, and ingenuity of our own students? Sometimes, the most powerful innovations emerge when educators and learners work together to remove barriers and ensure that every child has an opportunity to succeed. As a science teacher, keeping students engaged can be challenging and that challenge becomes even greater when you must address the diverse learning needs present within a single classroom. While my teacher training introduced me to the concept of differentiated instruction, nothing truly prepared me for the reality of teaching a visually impaired student in my Physics class who I will call Kevin for the purposes of this article. Reflecting on that experience, I realized that traditional approaches alone would not be enough. I needed to find innovative ways to ensure that this student could fully access and engage with the learning process alongside his peers. This student was eager to learn, but he was struggling and understandably so. As a young educator, I felt the need to see how best I could tailor my lessons to assist him. I knew I had to do something.

Before now, I have always believed in the Jamaican ministry of education's mantra, "Every child can learn: every child must". It was the first time I saw this statement for what it really was. In that moment, I truly understood my responsibility as an educator. Kevin was in my care, and regardless of the challenges, it was my duty to ensure that he had every opportunity to learn and succeed. That realization marked a turning point in my teaching journey. It challenged me to rethink my approach to instruction and inspired me to seek innovative ways to make learning accessible to all students. More importantly, it shaped my commitment to creating a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of every learner I encounter. However, I quickly realized that I could not undertake this mammoth task alone.



Jabari Mannings, Alphadine Dennis (teacher), Brian Clarke, Mr. Neville Bell (host), Darnel Hamilton and Theo Carr in the studios of Television Jamaica (TVJ).

As the teacher-leader of the Robotics club at my school, I shared this challenge with the club members, who were mostly students. They immediately accepted the challenge. This marked the beginning of something spectacular. Soon, we got to work using just about any materials we could find to make science manipulatives that would be appropriate for their visually impaired peer to use in learning science concepts. Of course, we

all had to first research how visually impaired students learn, so that was the focus. The club members thought of creating things that he could manipulate - feel and explore concepts via touch. The end product in the first attempt was a representation of the respiratory system using different types of materials of different textures. For example, cotton, board, or just about any scrap materials that could be found in the immediate environment. After all, they were students, and resources and funds were limited. This was necessary so the student could use the sense of touch to identify each part. The club members decided to keep the momentum and went on to design a tactile graph and a digital meter. These devices became essential in helping to enhance Kevin's learning experience. For instance, the representation of the respiratory system, was not only relevant to biology and integrated science lessons, but also allowed all students to visually see concepts that were many times difficult to understand. Moreover, for Kevin, the tactile model enabled him to explore and identify the various components of the respiratory system through touch. Additionally, the analogue meter, which is applicable in physics and integrated science, is used to measure the amount of electricity consumed in a traditional context. That's exactly what Robotics is all about - students building and testing systems to observe scientific principles in action.



Figure 1 Model of the respiratory system. Representation of the respiratory system made from various materials such as board, threads, pipes, cotton, wires, plastic wraps, tie straps and glue.

Why STEAM as a Pedagogy in Jamaican Classrooms?

According to Rodrigues-Silva and Alsina (2023), STEAM is an educational approach that incorporates the application of science, technology, engineering, arts/humanities and mathematics in everyday lessons to enhance students' creativity, innovation and overall critical thinking skills. STEAM emphasizes hands-on learning, critical thinking, innovation and inquiry-based learning (Niu & Cheng, 2022). This aligns well with Jamaica's national curriculum goals in science and technology. In the twenty-first century and beyond, educators need to move beyond passive traditional methods of disseminating knowledge, especially in physics. Also, learners in this changing world have a direct need to be actively involved in their own learning. Of course, this approach requires more creativity and innovation on the part of both teacher and students and is more time-intensive, but the benefits outweigh the challenges. Learners are to become more self-directed, more willing to make hypotheses, design experiments, and come up with innovative solutions to their everyday problems. This is important, as today's learners need to learn that they are the future problem solvers and innovators of tomorrow, so they need to develop those skills today.



Figure 2 Theo Carr, Jabari Manning, Brian Clarke and Darnel Hamilton at the studios of Television Jamaica displaying a representation of the respiratory and the analogue meter.

These are essential twenty-first-century skills that are essential for thriving in an evolving STEAM society that Jamaica aspires to be. This approach also builds their conceptual understanding of the subject matter and deepens their interest in it. It does not take rocket science to become innovative; it only requires a genuine commitment to doing whatever it takes to support our students and a willingness to involve them as active partners in the learning process. When educators and learners work together, even the simplest resources can be transformed into powerful tools that make learning meaningful, engaging, and accessible to all, including those with special needs or disabilities.

Furthermore, this approach can also be integrated with other models to develop an even richer teaching and learning experience. For example, science educators can integrate robotics into project-based units. This is where creativity and innovativeness are valuable skills in designing these resources.



Hope Coming Alive!

Seeing these learning aids, I was deeply inspired by the compassion, selflessness, and commitment demonstrated by the club members in ensuring that their peer had an equal opportunity to learn and succeed. In Physics, learners are expected to manipulate graphs to analyze relationships between variables and draw meaningful conclusions from experimental data. To support their classmate, the club members surprised the student with the tactile graph. For the first time, I saw hope, a spark of curiosity. It was a whole new world. Kevin was able to use their other senses to visualize and understand concepts that had previously been difficult to grasp. An outstanding teaching-learning moment occurred when the visually impaired student independently used the tactile graph to complete a prescribed task. Without this resource, plotting, interpreting, and analyzing graphs would have been a significant challenge. Watching the student confidently engage with the activity was both rewarding and inspiring, demonstrating the power of innovative, inclusive teaching practices. It was a transformative moment - one that opened up a whole new world of learning possibilities and demonstrated that with the right support, every student can meaningfully engage with scientific concepts. At that moment, I recognized that using STEAM as a teaching methodology in the sciences could be an effective way to enhance learning among diverse learners, making it meaningful and enjoyable for individuals with varying abilities and challenges.

It was at that moment that I truly recognized the transformative value of STEAM education. This realization reinforced my belief that STEAM could be instrumental in moving Jamaican educators closer to achieving our vision of becoming leaders in education within an inclusive learning environment. In an inclusive classroom, that student needed something different-an approach that could transform the learning experience and foster meaningful engagement.

When thoughtfully integrated into science education, STEAM provides an innovative and inclusive approach to teaching and learning that is well suited to the demands of the twenty-first century and beyond. By blending science with technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics, STEAM creates authentic, hands-on learning experiences that encourage creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving. Among its many benefits is its ability to spark curiosity, engage diverse learners, and cultivate a genuine interest in scientific inquiry. It also enhances student motivation, increases classroom participation, and creates meaningful opportunities for all learners to experience success.

Long-Term Impact

Using STEAM as a pedagogical approach can contribute significantly to Jamaica's broader economic development goals. By nurturing creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation. It helps to prepare learners for the demands of an increasingly technology-driven world. As such, science educators have a responsibility to harness students' interests and empower them to become creators, innovators, and solution-oriented thinkers rather than passive consumers of knowledge. When learners are encouraged to design, build, and create using available resources, they develop a greater sense of ownership for their own learning, therefore, embracing the engineering aspect of STEAM education. Furthermore, there are immense benefits such as reducing the dependency on imported resources, lowering the cost of resources and creating a local supply of skills through entrepreneurship. Therefore, embedding STEAM within science education is not merely an instructional innovation but a strategic investment in developing a resilient, globally competitive, and sustainable Jamaica.



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Leading into the Future

Dr. Andy Szeto shares a lifetime of leadership learning and doing through this exclusive feature for The Worthy Educator, offering insights, ideas and a path forward for aspiring leaders in education!

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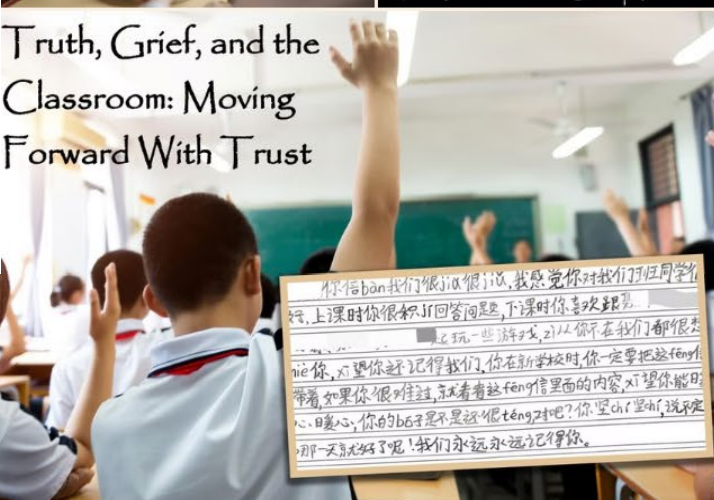
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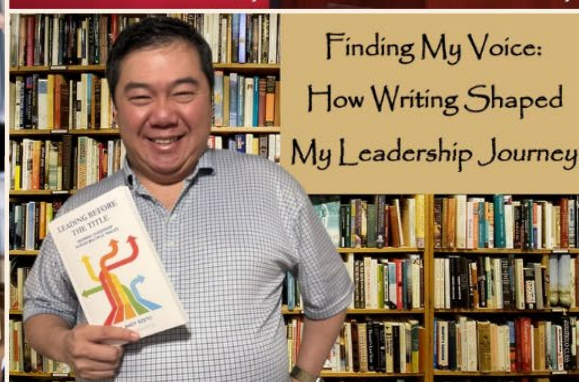
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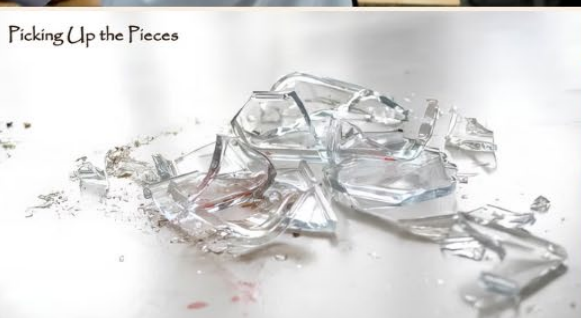
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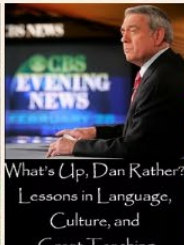
Picking Up the Pieces



The Jacket That Finally Fit



The Summer Program That Taught Me
Everything I Didn't Know



What's Up, Dan Rather?
Lessons in Language,
Culture, and
Great Teaching



A K-Pop Anthem & Authentic
Leadership: Lessons from "Golden"



Open Doors in a Closed World: What Parents
Need to Know About School Receptions



It Starts with a Question

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How Gamified Group Work Transformed Mathematics Learning in My Classroom

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Introduction

I still remember walking into my Grade 10 mathematics class one Tuesday morning, feeling frustrated and uncertain as I prepared for a double session. Of all my Grade 10 classes, this was by far the lowest-performing group. No matter how carefully I planned my lessons or how clearly I explained mathematical concepts, many students remained disengaged. They rarely volunteered to answer questions, avoided coming to the board, and even when they successfully completed activities at their desks, they lacked the confidence to share their thinking with the class. Whenever lessons required mathematical reasoning or problem-solving, the classroom often fell into an uncomfortable silence.

One day, after yet another lesson in which participation was almost nonexistent, I decided to ask my students why they seemed so disconnected from mathematics. Their responses were remarkably honest. One student looked at me and said, “Miss, maths just *anuh fi mi*” (Miss, mathematics just isn't for me). Before I could respond, another student added, “*Anuh fi mi needa*” (It's not for me either). Those few words stayed with me. It became clear that the greatest challenge was not simply that my students struggled with mathematics; many had already convinced themselves that they were incapable of learning it. What they had developed was a powerful mental barrier that prevented them from believing they could succeed.

As I reflected on their responses, I began paying closer attention to their behaviour during lessons. It was seen where students refused to attempt answers publicly, even when they had completed the work correctly. Rather than trusting their own abilities, they waited for one particular classmate to finish before copying his or her approach. There were days I felt as though I was teaching a class of one or two while the remaining students had mentally checked out. Although I knew my students possessed different abilities, I also knew they were far from incapable. They simply lacked confidence, motivation, and a genuine belief that their success in mathematics was possible. This experience forced me to reflect critically on my own teaching practice and methods. If traditional approaches were failing to engage these learners, then I needed to rethink how mathematics was being experienced in my classroom. As educators, we cannot continue relying on a “one-size-fits-all” approach when today's learners require opportunities to collaborate, participate actively, and enjoy the learning process. We must embrace our role as facilitators by creating environments where students feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and develop confidence in their mathematical reasoning.

Being determined to change the culture of my classroom, I introduced gamified group work aiming to transform mathematics from a subject my students fear into one that they were willing to engage with. This article therefore reflects on that journey and explores how gamified group work transformed mathematics learning in my classroom while reaffirming my belief that every child can learn mathematics when given the right opportunities to succeed.

Exploring Gamified Group Work

In my classroom, gamified group work means that students work in teams to solve mathematical challenges, earn points, explain their reasoning, and encourage each other throughout the learning process. So, instead of working individually, students collaborate to complete mathematical tasks while engaging in friendly competition. I incorporate game elements such as points, rewards, timed challenges, and team competitions to make learning mathematics more interactive and enjoyable. In addition to this, the groups I create are not random but are carefully planned based on the lesson objectives and the needs of my students.

As an agent of change, I endorse the belief that it is important for us as educators to understand the diverse abilities within our classrooms, as this helps us to create groups that promote collaboration and meaningful participation. Developing learner profiles has helped me better understand my students' strengths, areas for improvement, and learning preferences, allowing me to group them more effectively. With all said, while gamified group work can be incorporated into any mathematics classroom, the games and activities selected should always be appropriate for the learners and aligned with the lesson objectives. Thoughtful planning ensures that the strategy remains purposeful and supports students in engaging meaningfully with mathematical concepts.

Benefits of Gamified Group Work

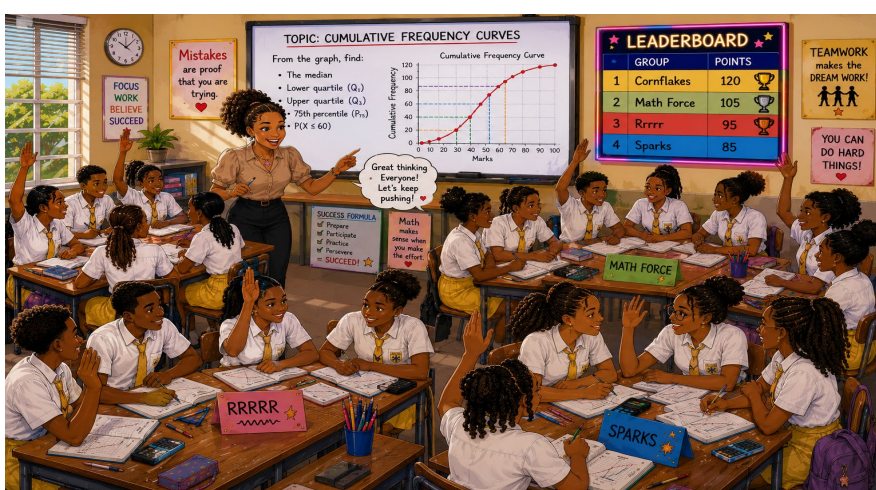
One of the most memorable lessons I facilitated using gamified group work was with my Grade 10 class during a lesson on cumulative frequency curves. After students had explored the concept, I designed a team challenge where each group was given a cumulative frequency graph along with a series of questions that required them to interpret the graph to determine values such as the median, quartiles, percentiles, probabilities, and other information that could be obtained from the graph. Groups earned points for both accuracy and teamwork, and within minutes, the classroom was filled with excitement.

What stood out to me was not simply that students answered the questions correctly, but how eager they were to participate. Students confidently rushed to draw guide lines on the graphs, debated possible solutions with their teammates, and enthusiastically raised their hands to explain their reasoning. What impressed me even more was how effectively they drew on their prior knowledge. Their responses were rarely incorrect, and I realized that concepts they had previously struggled to recall were now being applied naturally and confidently. These were the very same students who, only months before, avoided answering questions openly, particularly when mathematical reasoning was required. During the game, however, mistakes became part of the learning process rather than something to fear. Students willingly took risks, shared ideas, defended their answers, and learnt from each other without the fear of being wrong. For the first time, I looked across the classroom and saw almost every hand in the air. At that moment, I felt as though my mission as their teacher had been accomplished. I even joked to myself that I deserved a medal for getting this particular class so actively involved in mathematics.

Honestly, it felt like one of those lessons you hope an external assessor or appraiser walks in to observe because everything was unfolding just as I had envisioned. The most rewarding moment came when the team with the fewest points refused to give up. Instead of losing interest, as they would have done in previous lessons, they enthusiastically shouted, "No bonus points naa run, Miss?" (Miss, aren't there any bonus points?). They wanted more questions - not because they had to, but because they genuinely wanted another opportunity to improve their score. That response alone showed me how much their attitude towards mathematics had changed. Rather than avoiding challenging questions, they were now actively asking for more opportunities to solve them. It was at that moment that I realized the game had shifted their focus from fearing mistakes to embracing challenges. These students literally had me questioning myself after the lesson. How could it be?

Experiences like this have reinforced my belief that gamified group work is a powerful approach to mathematics teaching and learning, particularly for students who struggle with confidence and engagement. Grounded in the principles of social constructivism, this approach transforms the classroom from a space where students passively receive information into one where they actively construct knowledge through collaboration, discussion, and problem-solving. The game elements used, such as points and rewards, provide immediate feedback that keeps students motivated and focused on achieving shared goals. At the same time, working collaboratively allows students to learn from each other, strengthen their critical thinking skills, and develop greater confidence in communicating mathematical ideas. I must reiterate that this experience truly proves that gamified group work does not only increase student engagement but has also created a classroom environment where students are more willing to participate, persevere through challenges, and believe in their ability to succeed in mathematics.

Impact on Student Achievement



As I continued using gamified group work with my grade 10 students throughout the remainder of the school term, I began noticing meaningful changes in my students' achievement and overall attitude towards mathematics. The friendly competition quickly became something they looked forward to, with each group eagerly anticipating opportunities to earn points and improve their standing. What started as a strategy to increase engagement gradually evolved into a classroom culture where students were motivated to participate, collaborate, and challenge themselves.

One of the most noticeable changes was students' willingness to communicate their mathematical thinking. During whole-class discussions, students who had once avoided answering questions became increasingly confident in explaining their reasoning and justifying their solutions. Classroom discussions became richer, with students questioning one another's methods, offering alternative strategies, and celebrating each other's successes. Homework completion also improved, which I truly appreciated, as many students wanted to contribute positively to their team's performance during subsequent lessons.

Despite that improvement did not happen overnight, I was encouraged by the progress my students made over the term. By the end of the summer term, seven students earned scores above 50% in mathematics, compared to only two students in the Christmas term. While this may appear to be a minimal improvement, it represented a significant achievement for this particular class. Knowing where these students had started, I appreciated the effort, determination, and confidence they had developed along the way. Their success reminded me that improvement should not always be measured by dramatic increases in grades but also by the progress students make from their own starting points.

Term	Average Outcomes	Performance Range (%)			
		80-100	60-79	50-59	30-49
CHRISTMAS	38.6	0	1	1	24
SUMMER	41.8	0	2	5	17

I also noticed that the games strengthened students' retention of previously taught concepts. They were able to activate prior knowledge more readily and apply it when solving new mathematical problems, making lessons more productive and allowing me to assess their understanding continuously through observation and discussion. This ongoing formative assessment helped me identify misconceptions early and adjust my teaching to meet students' needs.

Perhaps the greatest achievement, however, was the transformation in how my students viewed mathematics. The subject gradually became less intimidating and more enjoyable. The fear of making mistakes diminished, mathematics anxiety was reduced, and students became more willing to take risks and persevere with challenging problems. Watching a class that had once viewed mathematics as “not for them” become actively engaged in learning reaffirmed my belief that when students are provided with meaningful opportunities to collaborate, compete positively, and experience success, achievement naturally follows.

Implementing Gamified Group Work in the Mathematics Classroom

Reflecting on my experience, I have learnt several lessons about successfully implementing gamified group work in the mathematics classroom. The first is that every game must have a clear learning purpose. Before introducing any activity, I identify the mathematical concepts and skills that students are expected to master and then design the game around those objectives. I have found that when games are intentionally aligned with the lesson outcomes, students remain focused on learning rather than becoming distracted by the competition.

Another lesson I learnt early was the importance of assigning roles within each group. In my classroom, every group had a designated leader who was responsible for encouraging participation, keeping the team organized, and motivating members to continue learning beyond the classroom by forming study groups. Giving students responsibilities created a greater sense of accountability and ensured that each member contributed to solving mathematical problems and participating in mathematical discussions.

I also learnt that my role shifted from being the primary source of information to becoming a facilitator of learning. As students worked through the challenges, I moved from group to group, asking probing questions, addressing misconceptions, and providing immediate feedback. These interactions helped students refine their mathematical thinking while allowing me to assess their understanding continuously throughout the lesson.

Finally, I found that the reward system should recognize more than simply getting the correct answer. While points encouraged healthy competition, I intentionally rewarded teamwork, mathematical reasoning, effort, perseverance, and improvement. This helped create a supportive classroom environment where students understood that learning mathematics was about growth rather than simply winning.

Although gamified group work transformed the atmosphere in my classroom, it also revealed an important challenge. While many students demonstrated a strong understanding of mathematical concepts during group activities, some struggled to demonstrate that same level of understanding when completing individual tasks. It was almost as if the confidence they displayed while working with their peers disappeared once they were required to work independently. This experience reminded me that creating an engaging classroom environment is only one part of improving mathematics learning. While I was encouraged by the improvements in

participation and achievement, I wanted to see even greater gains reflected in students' independent performance. This has inspired me to continue refining my practice and explore strategies that better support the transfer of collaborative learning to individual mathematical success. It also presents an area for further reflection and research as I continue striving to improve mathematics teaching and learning in my classroom.

Gamified Group Work in a Mathematics Lesson Sample

One of my favourite gamified mathematics lessons is an addition of integers Bingo activity that I implemented with one of my Grade 7 classes early in my teaching career. I have chosen to share this lesson because it demonstrates that gamified group work can be just as effective with students transitioning from primary to secondary school as it is with older learners. At this stage, many students are eager to participate, making it an ideal opportunity to establish a positive attitude towards mathematics from the beginning.

For this activity, I created Bingo cards with sixteen randomly placed answers and prepared a bag containing addition of integers questions. As each question was drawn, students worked collaboratively within their groups to solve the problem. If the correct answer appeared on their Bingo card, they placed a counter on the corresponding square. The classroom quickly became filled with excitement as students discussed solutions, checked one another's work, and eagerly anticipated the next question.

One moment from this lesson has remained with me throughout my teaching career. The students became so engaged in the activity that we continued playing into the lunch period without even realizing it. Rather than rushing to leave the classroom, they were asking for "just one more question." That lesson reminded me that when mathematics is presented in an engaging and collaborative way, students become genuinely invested in their learning. The following lesson outline illustrates how gamified group work was used to teach the addition of integers.

Topic: Addition of Integers (Grade 7)

Learning Objective: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to add integers accurately while collaborating with their peers to solve problems and explain their reasoning.

Step 1: Introduce the concept of adding integers through hands-on group activities using manipulatives or visual models. Encourage students to explore how positive and negative integers interact while discussing their observations with group members. Facilitate discussions that help students discover patterns and relationships.

Step 2: Distribute the Bingo cards and explain the rules of the game. Draw one question at a time from the prepared bag, allowing groups to solve each problem collaboratively. Students place a counter on the corresponding answer if it appears on their card. Award points for correct answers, teamwork, mathematical reasoning, and effective communication. Bonus points may be given to groups that clearly justify their solutions or demonstrate multiple solution strategies.

Step 3: Invite each group to reflect on the strategies they used, any challenges they encountered, and how working together helped them solve the problems. Encourage students to share their mathematical reasoning rather than simply stating answers.

Step 4: Provide immediate feedback, address misconceptions, and recognize groups for their effort, collaboration, participation, and problem-solving skills. Conclude the lesson by reinforcing the key concepts and celebrating the value of teamwork in learning mathematics.



Reflections from My Classroom

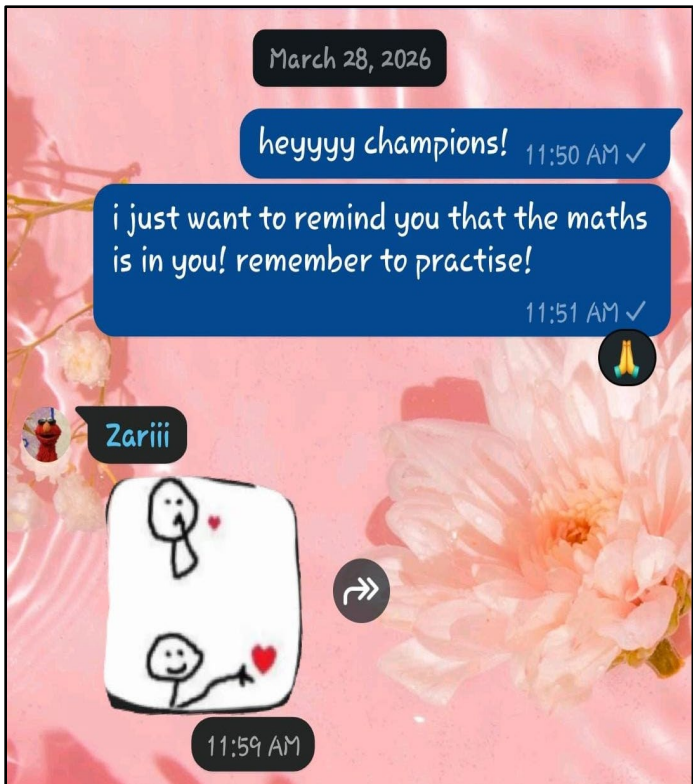
Looking back on this journey, I have come to appreciate that gamified group work is far more than simply adding games to mathematics lessons. It is a carefully planned instructional strategy that, when implemented with a clear purpose, has the potential to transform students' attitudes, participation, and confidence in mathematics. My advice to any educator considering this approach is to begin with the learning objective, not the game. Ask yourself whether the activity is appropriate for your learners, what specific aspect of learning you hope to improve, and how the game will support students in achieving that goal. Purposeful planning will always yield greater results than introducing games simply for enjoyment.

At the same time, I encourage us educators to think beyond the excitement created during the lesson. One of the greatest lessons I learnt was that students may demonstrate strong understanding and confidence within the collaborative setting but still require support to transfer that learning to independent tasks and formal assessments. This challenged me to think more critically about how I could sustain the gains made during classroom activities and better prepare students to apply their knowledge individually. After all, our goal is not simply to create lively mathematics classrooms but to improve students' overall mathematical achievement.

Another important lesson I learnt is that mathematics learning should not end when students leave the classroom. Mathematics is a practical subject that requires consistent practice, and as educators, we should provide opportunities for students to continue engaging with mathematical concepts beyond school hours. Digital platforms such as *Kahoot!*, *Wayground* and similar game-based learning tools can be used to help reinforce concepts while maintaining the motivation and enthusiasm of students outside the learning environment as their features promote independent learning.

Reflecting on my own experience, I often wish I had introduced gamified group work much earlier with my Grade 10 class. Although I implemented the strategy for only the final few months of the school year, I still witnessed meaningful improvements in participation, confidence, and achievement. Looking back, I cannot help but wonder how much greater those gains might have been had I begun at the start of the academic year. This concretizes that if gamified group work is strategically planned as part of a broader programme of intervention, it has the potential to transform not only classroom engagement but also students' confidence, resilience, and achievement in mathematics. More importantly, it reminds us that with the right opportunities, support, and belief, every child can indeed learn mathematics.

With all said, I encourage us educators to remain reflective and flexible as twenty-first-century learners are dynamic, and no single strategy will ever meet every need. We must continually evaluate our practice, celebrate the progress our students make, and refine our approaches when challenges arise.



Lennoxia Clarke is a mathematics educator with four years of experience teaching at the secondary level in Jamaica. She holds a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Education in Mathematics Education and was the Valedictorian of The Mico University College's 2022 graduating class. Passionate about student-centred learning, she is committed to making mathematics engaging, meaningful, and accessible for all learners through innovative and collaborative teaching approaches. In 2024, she received the Governor-General's Achievement Award for the parish of St. Ann in recognition of her academic excellence, leadership, and service. 



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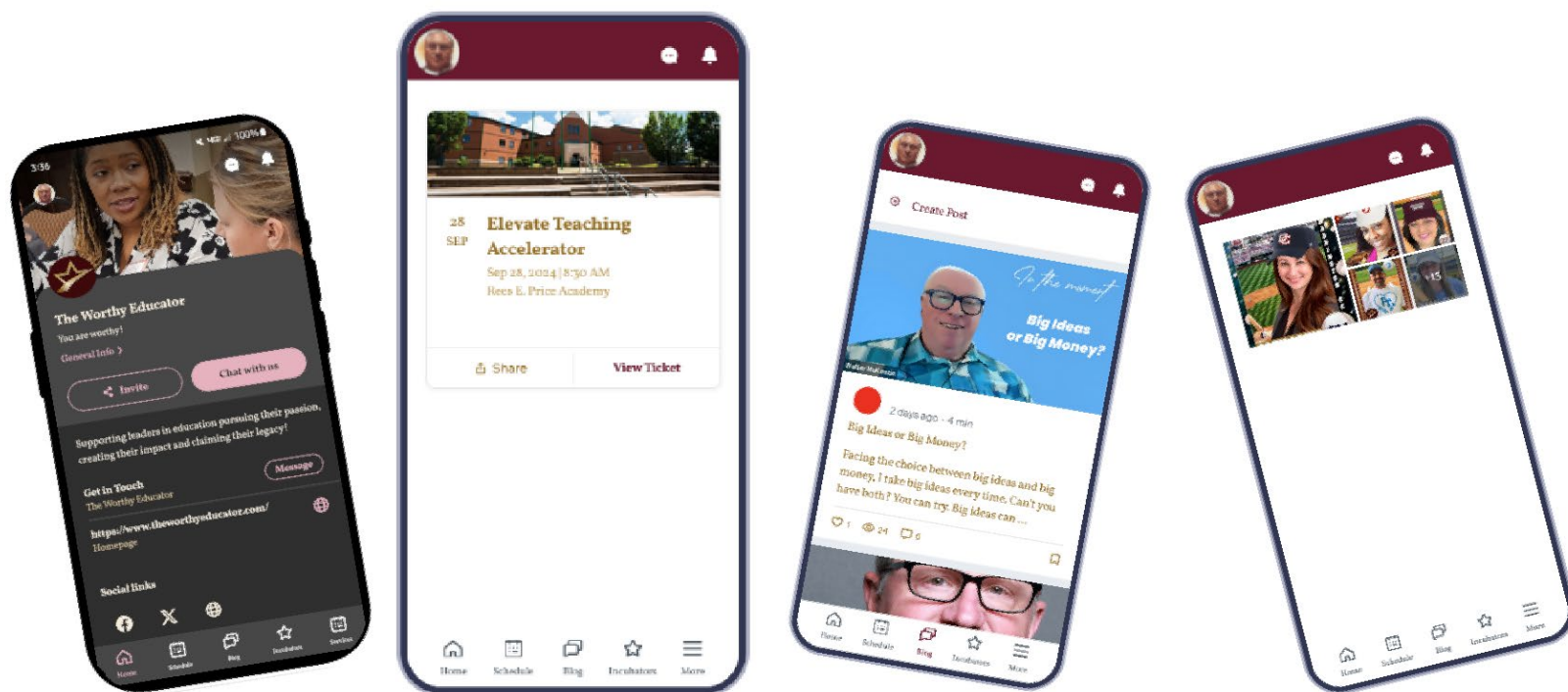
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Quality Assurance to Quality Culture: Collaboration, Reflective Practice, and Collective Responsibility as Strategic Assets

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Abstract

As higher education institutions (HEIs) face increased scrutiny and demands for accountability, relevance, innovation, and sustainability, the concept of “quality culture” has emerged as a central measure of institutional effectiveness. In Jamaica there are different types of higher education institutions with different types of quality assurance systems. There are mature quality assurance systems which possess longstanding traditions, cohesive procedures and systems that support continuous improvement, while newer and changing HEIs have emerging quality assurance systems which often struggle to establish coherent structures, shared values, and sustainable practices that move beyond the illusion of quality culture. This piece explores the foundations for developing a quality culture within the context of an emerging quality assurance system. Drawing on the theories of Total Quality Management, organizational culture, transformational leadership, and organizational learning, the discussion demonstrates that quality culture extends beyond a mechanism for compliance. Rather, it is a shared institutional mindset that must be intentionally cultivated through collaboration, reflective practice, and collective responsibility among all members of the institution.

Introduction

The landscape of higher education has changed dramatically over the last three decades. All over the world institutions are now expected to demonstrate accountability, maintain accreditation standards, respond to labour market demands, integrate technology, support student success, and remain financially viable. The same holds true in Jamaica with the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Youth, Skills and Information calling for HEI leaders in Jamaica to “examine strategies for strengthening institutional leadership, enhancing governance, improving student success, advancing quality assurance, and positioning the higher education sector to respond to emerging national and global priorities” (Jamaica Observer, 2026). (Poruțiu, Merce, & Poruțiu (2015) posited that this can be done by offering products or services of superior quality at lower prices as compared to competitors. Within this context the notion of “quality” has evolved beyond periodic evaluation, or external accreditation exercises but these expectations can be particularly challenging for emerging HEIs that are still developing their governance structures, operational systems and institutional identity. Community colleges in Jamaica have increasingly grappled with defining their institutional identity. Speaking at the Higher Education Leadership Conference, Permanent Secretary Dr. Kasan Troupe emphasized that community colleges should focus on “creating access to tertiary learning at an affordable rate in partnership with the universities in the local spaces where the young people are” (Lewis, 2026), rather than competing directly with universities through the expansion of four-year degree programmes. Unlike institutions with established or mature quality assurance systems, emerging HEIs must intentionally shape their governance structures, operational systems and institutional identity while simultaneously responding to external accountability requirements. Yorke (2000) posits that “although quality and quality assurance have become embedded into the discourse of higher education, the development of a quality culture within higher education has (paradoxically) lagged behind the implementation of quality assurance practices”.

This paper examines the required foundations for the development of quality culture within emerging higher education institutions. Specifically, it explores the following questions:

What is meant by “quality culture” in higher education institutions?

What theoretical perspectives inform the development of quality culture?

What organizational conditions support quality culture?

This paper contributes to ongoing discussions of institutional development, organizational learning, and quality enhancement in higher education.



Defining Quality Culture

Article 11 of World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action published by the United Nations (UNESCO) in 1998 states that quality in education should be viewed as being a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities; teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, services to the community and the academic environment.

Additionally, the British Standard Institution defines quality as determined in education as being "fit for purpose". In simpler or maybe more complex terms, it begs the question, "does this service do what is asked or expected of it?" According to the text Total Quality Management in Education "fit for purpose" as used for the definition of quality in education is not to be imagined as impossible or unattainable. Quality as used in relation to education is to be viewed as being procedural in nature. And this procedural concept of quality is demonstrated in turn by the development of a system of quality assurance. That is, there are systems and procedures in place which seek to guarantee the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes implemented and awards issued by the institution.

According to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA], (2015) quality assurance should be viewed as a necessary part of the culture of higher education institutions and there are some basic principles which the quality assurance systems should consider and safeguard. These include:

The interests of society in the quality of programmes implemented and the awards issued.

The quality of academic programmes developed and improved to benefit students and ultimately society.

Processes to demonstrate accountability of the institution.

Processes to foster diversity and innovation among staff and students.

According to the European University Association (EUA) (2006), quality culture in organizations consists of two interrelated dimensions:

A structural or managerial dimension involving policies, procedures, assessment mechanisms, and quality assurance systems.

A cultural or psychological dimension involving commitment, trust, shared values, and collective responsibility.

However, creating a culture of quality in an institution is more than procedural in nature Rahnuma (2020). This perspective suggests that quality culture should not be reduced to compliance measures, audits, or accreditation activities. Rather, it extends to encompass the ways in which institutional members collectively understand, value, and complete their daily work. In tertiary institutions with more mature quality assurance systems quality is proposed to be every one's business. These institutions have established quality assurance frameworks as well as policies attendant to the demonstration of quality across the campuses of the institution. Primarily the institutions tend to have a specialized office "Quality Assurance Unit" with more than one member. Additionally, dedicated quality management committees comprising representatives from across the institution—including members of the executive leadership team, academic staff, and students—have been established to oversee the implementation and continuous improvement of the quality management system within departments. However, some emerging higher education institutions (HEIs) in Jamaica continue to face staffing constraints imposed by the Ministry of Education. These limitations have created challenges in embedding quality assurance personnel within institutional structures. For example, some publicly funded institutions are authorized to employ only one officially designated Quality Assurance Officer, placing significant demands on a single individual to coordinate institution-wide quality assurance activities.



Conceptual Frameworks of Quality Culture

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) defined the conceptual framework as being the specifics of who and what will (and will not) be studied. This theoretical paper draws on the theories of Total Quality Management, Organizational Culture, Transformational Leadership, and Organizational Learning. These theories help to define quality culture and outline how quality culture can be measured. They further create the framework for establishing coherent structures, shared values, and sustainable practices.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Although originally developed within industrial settings, Total Quality Management (TQM) principles have significantly influenced quality assurance and quality enhancement practices in higher education. The principles from TQM which support institutional effectiveness include encouraging ongoing evaluation, collaboration among stakeholders, evidence-based planning, and a holistic approach to organizational performance (Sallis, 2014). Harvey & Green (1993) emphasised that TQM principles continuous improvement, through customer, or stakeholder satisfaction has positively contributed to the development of quality cultures within universities and colleges seeking to enhance teaching, learning, and

institutional outcomes. Several other TQM principles remain highly relevant to higher education institutions, including shared responsibility, data-informed decision-making, and systems thinking. In most HEIs in Jamaica it not unusual to encounter aspects of TQM in day-to-day activities. It is not unusual to have stakeholder consultation meetings or even focus group discussions as a part of the process for continuous improvement or programme review. Feedback from customer service surveys and stakeholder satisfaction surveys also tend to play an integral part of annual reviews. Additionally, student experience surveys as well as employer perception surveys are important data gathering tools used by HEIs as they seek to remain responsive and relevant to the industry. The use of the findings of these surveys in the decision making process tend to separate the more mature systems from the less mature and emerging systems.

Organizational Culture Theory

Organizational culture theory provides another important foundation for understanding quality culture in higher education. Developed by MIT professor Edgar Schein, organizational culture is defined as a pattern of shared culture groups learn to solve problems (Schein, 2010). Schein identifies three levels of culture: (1) artifacts and observable practices, (2) espoused values, and (3) underlying assumptions. Within educational institutions, artifacts include strategic plans, assessment reports, policies, and established institutional rituals such as graduation ceremonies and faculty recognition events. Espoused values are reflected in mission and vision statements, commitments to excellence, educational philosophies, and the implementation of instructional strategies. Underlying assumptions represent deeply held beliefs about teaching, learning, leadership, and institutional purpose.

According to Fundin et al. (2025), measuring culture involves evaluating the alignment of organisational values with processes and procedures. This perspective suggests that quality culture emerges when institutional values are consistently reflected across all three levels of culture. In other words, quality culture becomes visible when stated commitments to excellence are reinforced by organisational practices and supported by underlying beliefs. Harvey and Stensaker (2008) outline that quality culture requires both structural processes and shared cultural values that promote continuous improvement. Problems arise when institutions publicly advocate values which organizational practices fail to support.

Emerging higher education institutions are particularly vulnerable to such misalignment because their institutional systems, traditions, and governance structures are still evolving. Consequently, leadership must intentionally shape organizational culture through communication, role modeling, policy development, and the creation of shared experiences that reinforce desired values and quality-oriented behaviours (Schein, 2010). One publicly funded institution in Jamaica, specializing in the performing and creative arts has continued to fulfil its vision as “the premier tertiary arts institution in the English-speaking Caribbean” by intentionally celebrating and publicising its Caribbean creativity over conformity. For example, for its graduation it has replaced traditional academic processions with dynamic, and its graduation is marked by multidisciplinary showcases, and powerful performances that embody the institution’s role and identity.



Transformational Leadership Theory

In emerging higher education institutions transformational leadership can be particularly valuable because they tend to create environments where quality becomes everyone's responsibility rather than the sole concern of a specific office. Developed James MacGregor Burns and later expanded by Bernard M. Bass, Transformational Leadership Theory posits that effective leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve higher levels of performance by creating a compelling vision, fostering commitment to organizational goals, and encouraging personal and professional growth. The theory emphasizes four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In higher education settings, transformational leaders are particularly valuable because they tend to promote innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement while fostering a culture of excellence and shared responsibility. In emerging institutions where quality assurance is usually visible during accreditation visits or as the institution prepares for accreditation it takes a transformational leader to move towards the creation of a sustained “visible quality culture”.

One emerging HEI in Jamaica, undergoing a significant institutional transition, had an established quality assurance system; however, its processes were fragmented and operated in silos, with limited collaboration across departments. Recognizing the need for a more integrated approach, the institutional leadership intentionally fostered collaboration, inclusion, and shared ownership through a series of staff engagement initiatives designed to cultivate a visible quality culture. The purpose of these engagements is to move quality assurance towards shared responsibility and transparency. As well as build a shared understanding and direction and create opportunities for staff involvement in decision making. Types of engagement include cross departmental meetings to foster awareness and “ownership” of policies and procedures, townhall meetings to augur feedback to policies and procedures as well as focussed group meetings to review policies and other regulatory documents. Early engagement sessions occasionally attracted little or no participation, reflecting the difficulty of changing long-established organizational practices. Nevertheless, through sustained conversation and collaboration the culture of shared responsibility is taking shape.

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational Learning Theory provides a valuable foundation for understanding the development of quality culture within higher education institutions. The relationship between organizational learning and the development of quality culture is particularly significant because sustainable quality improvement depends on an institution’s members’ ability to critically examine their performance and use evidence to inform decision-making. Argyris & Schön (1996) propose that organizations improve their effectiveness by continuously acquiring, creating, and applying knowledge gained through routinized and systematic reflection, feedback, and inquiry. Senge (2006) also proposes that key characteristics of a learning-oriented quality culture include ongoing reflection on institutional effectiveness, data-driven planning, open communication, cross-departmental collaboration, and a willingness to experiment with innovative practices.

Another key marker of a maturing quality assurance culture is the extent to which the institution is willing to collect and use evidence to inform decisions and drive meaningful change. It is not unusual for all HEIs in Jamaica to collect student course evaluation data. In institutions with more mature quality assurance systems create procedures to ensure the utilisation of the findings. The findings from the data is used as a catalyst for review, reflection and improvement in the departments and faculties. The findings stimulate faculty discussions, programme reviews, and professional development sessions initiated to strengthen assessment practices, clarify course expectations, and enhance feedback mechanisms. However, institutions with emerging quality assurance system tend to collect the data but not use the data. Rather they view these findings as isolated complaints which should not be interpreted for action. Over time, this process reinforces the understanding that student voice is merely a data collection exercise and not a valuable resource for improving teaching, learning, and the overall student experience.

As a result, emerging higher education institutions that do not establish effective mechanisms for reflection, feedback, and knowledge sharing may inadvertently perpetuate ineffective practices or create fragmented approaches to quality assurance. Consequently, reflection/assessment activities should not be viewed merely as accountability requirements but as opportunities for institutional learning and improvement so that results can be used strengthen organizational capacity.



Discussion

This paper examined foundations of developing quality culture within emerging higher education institutions while providing apt examples. Drawing on Total Quality Management, Organizational Culture Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory, the literature revealed the multidimensional nature of quality culture. The principles of TQM reinforce the importance of institutional quality as an ongoing process rather than a

periodic outcome. Literature on Organizational Culture Theory supplies an interpretation of how shared assumptions, values, and practices shape institutional behaviour. While the literature on transformational leaders suggests that transformational leaders are particularly important in emerging institutions because they help create coherence during periods of organizational growth and change. Finally, Organizational Learning Theory complements these perspectives by emphasizing the importance of reflection, knowledge sharing, and evidence-informed decision-making. Collectively, these theories propose that quality culture is concurrently structural, cultural, relational, and developmental. This was seen in an institution with a well-established quality assurance system but an HEI with emerging visible quality culture. The institution quality assurance office embarked on the review of its programmes after the interruption of systems as a result of COVID 19. Findings from the student course evaluation surveys, graduate tracer data, external examiner reports as well as employers identified concerns. Additionally, students reported inconsistent assessment practices across departments while employers indicated that graduates needed stronger digital competencies, and faculty recognised that some course content had not kept pace with changes in the school system.



The response of the institution demonstrated the use of structural, cultural, relational and developmental qualities for building quality culture:

Structural Dimension. The quality assurance office coordinated and collaborated with the Curriculum Department and the Vice President Academics to review the programmes using established institutional policies and procedures. A multidisciplinary review committee was formed, programme data were analysed, stakeholder consultations were conducted, and recommendations aligned with established quality assurance standards established by the nation's accrediting organisation. Clear timelines, reporting mechanisms, and accountability measures ensured that the review process was systematic and evidence-based and the findings shared with the institutional leaders.

Cultural Dimension. Through the multidisciplinary committee institutional leaders emphasised in communication that the review was an opportunity for learning rather than fault-finding and finger pointing. This openness fostered and reinforced the institution's commitment to excellence. Faculty members were encouraged to openly discuss challenges in delivery. Students were encouraged to share honest feedback viewed as a resource for improvement.

Relational Dimension. Although the quality assurance office co-ordinated the review diverse perspectives were included to foster inclusivity and to build relationships and involvement in the decision-making process. The process brought together academic staff, students, alumni, employers, librarians, instructional designers, assessment specialists and administrative personnel. These diverse perspectives strengthened decision-making and created shared ownership of the recommendations. Faculty members who had previously worked independently or in small groups specific to their courses began collaborating to align use the feedback to improve learning across courses.

Developmental Dimension. The review resulted in improved learning across courses, but it also promoted reflection of faculty strength and weaknesses. As a result, professional developments were scheduled on authentic assessment and educational technology, while annual monitoring of student outcomes was introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes. Subsequent student surveys showed increased satisfaction with feedback and assessment practices, and employer feedback reflected improved graduate preparedness. Building an effective quality culture necessitates attention to systems, people, leadership, and learning processes.

In conclusion, while external accountability frameworks provide important benchmarks/standards, visible quality one of the most enduring lessons I have learned is that quality is not created by policies, audits, or accreditation visits alone. A genuine and sustainable quality culture emerges when individuals at every level of the institution understands and plays his or her role and shares responsibility of making quality everybody's business rather than the work of a single office or committee.

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Bridging the Gap Between Knowing and Teaching: A Project-Based Approach to Preparing Science Educators

Nicolia Nelson

Lecturer in Science Education & Teacher Educator
The Mico University College



Each year, when I teach Applications of Genetics to fourth-year pre-service biology teachers, I am reminded that understanding science and teaching it are not the same. As we explore techniques such as polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH), a familiar pattern emerges: students can often define these techniques and explain their purpose, yet many struggle to describe how they work or, more importantly, how to teach them effectively to future secondary school students. Their struggle is understandable. Biotechnology involves molecular processes that cannot be directly observed, and limited access to advanced laboratory equipment in many teacher education institutions, including my own in Jamaica, often leaves students relying on textbooks, animations, lectures, and videos. As a result, these abstract concepts can seem intimidating, reducing students' confidence and increasing anxiety.

I wanted to do more than help students pass examinations. My goal was to prepare future teachers to explain complex scientific ideas confidently, adapt to resource-constrained classrooms, and inspire curiosity. This led to a central question:

How could I make invisible molecular processes visible and, more importantly, teachable without access to sophisticated biotechnology laboratories?

That question became the foundation of one of the most rewarding teaching experiences of my career.

Knowing Is Not the Same as Teaching

One of the greatest misconceptions in teacher education is that mastering content automatically prepares someone to teach it. My experience has shown otherwise. Although I studied biological sciences at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, it was as a biochemistry laboratory demonstrator that the concepts truly came to life. Explaining procedures, answering questions, and connecting theory to practice deepened my own understanding, reinforcing that I learned the content more fully by teaching it.

That experience shaped my philosophy as a teacher educator. I believe that teaching is one of the most powerful ways of making content practical. When we teach, knowledge stops being something we simply possess and becomes something we actively use, question, reshape and communicate. It forces us to organize our thinking, identify misconceptions, and make abstract ideas meaningful for others. A student may understand a concept well enough to answer examination questions yet still struggle to explain that same concept to someone encountering it for the first time. It is this gap between knowing and teaching that I continually seek to address in my own practice.

Biotechnology illustrates this challenge well. Techniques such as PCR and FISH require students to visualize complex molecular processes that cannot be directly observed. Without hands-on experiences, many rely on memorization rather than conceptual understanding, making it difficult to explain these techniques or teach them effectively. This challenge is especially important in teacher education. My students are preparing to become science teachers, not laboratory scientists. They need both a strong understanding of biotechnology and the pedagogical skills to make it meaningful for secondary students.

While lectures provide essential foundations, they were insufficient to bridge the gap between knowing and teaching biotechnology. Students needed opportunities to discuss, simplify, and represent concepts as teachers would. Many of them will eventually teach in schools where laboratory equipment is scarce or unavailable. So I also wanted to demonstrate that limited resources need not limit learning, and that creativity and student-centered pedagogy can make complex science accessible in resource-constrained classrooms.

Why I Chose a Project-Based Approach

I chose project-based learning not because it was popular, but because it addressed a practical teaching challenge. As I reflected on the difficulties my students were experiencing, I realized that asking them to prepare another presentation or write another report would produce the same outcome. They might memorize the content well enough to complete the assignment, but they would still miss the deeper challenge of translating scientific knowledge into effective teaching. Instead, I decided to reverse the process. Instead of asking students to demonstrate what they knew, I challenged them to create something that would help others learn.

The assignment required students to work collaboratively to design a non-digital educational game that accurately represented either PCR or FISH. They could adapt familiar games such as Ludo, Monopoly, Scrabble, card games, or they could invent entirely new ones. Regardless of the format they chose, every rule, challenge, movement, and reward within the game had to represent some aspect of the biotechnology technique. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate two of the student-designed games developed during the project, demonstrating how complex molecular processes were transformed into engaging, interactive learning experiences.

This shift transformed the task. Instead of asking, “What is PCR?”, students began asking, “How can DNA amplification become a game?” or “How can players experience the steps of FISH through movement and decision-making?” Answering these questions required a deeper understanding of the science. The project also modelled the student-centered pedagogy I hope my pre-service teachers will use in their own classrooms. Rather than applying Project-Based Learning as a prescribed method, I adapted its principles of inquiry, collaboration, creativity, and authentic problem-solving to our context. Looking back, the project was never really about making games—they were simply the vehicle. The real goal was to help future science teachers ask the essential question: How can I help someone else understand this? For me, that question represents the true bridge between knowing science and teaching science.

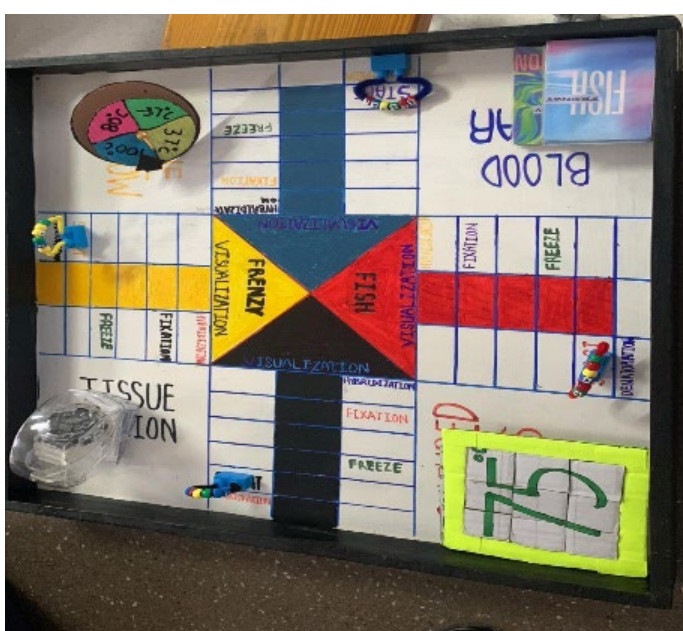


Figure 1 PCR Pathway, A Student-Designed DNA Amplification Board Game that simulates the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using instruction and action cards to reinforce key concepts.

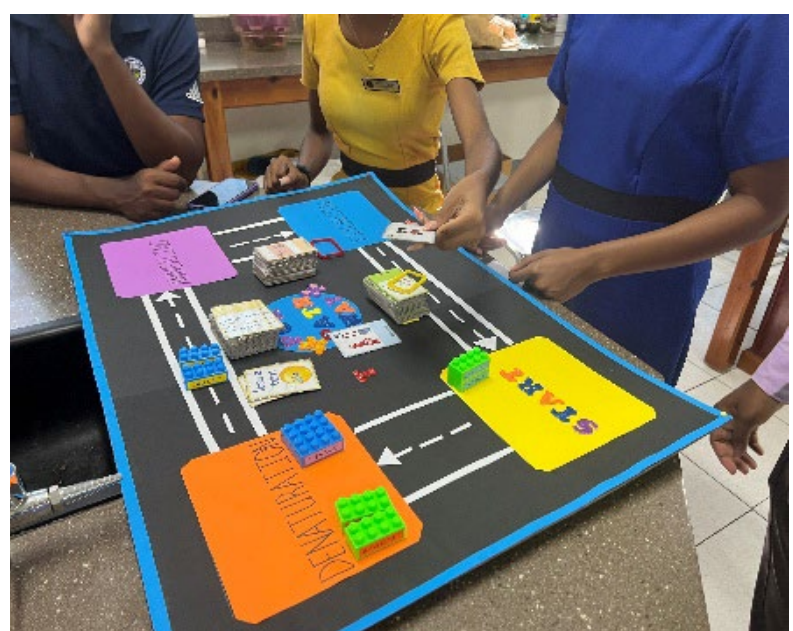


Figure 2 FISH Frenzy, A Fluorescence In Situ Hybridization (FISH) Ludo-inspired Student-developed Board Game in which players apply their understanding by navigating discipline-specific challenges and obstacles to reach the finish.

The Project in Action

The project was implemented over three academic years with fourth-year pre-service biology teachers enrolled in *Applications of Genetics*. I focused on two biotechnology techniques—polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH)—because they consistently pose learning challenges for students. Although PCR and FISH are fundamental biotechnology techniques, their molecular processes are highly abstract and cannot be directly observed. However, because both follow clear, logical sequences, they were well suited for translation into educational games.

The project aimed not only to strengthen students' understanding of biotechnology but also to help them think like future teachers by transforming scientific knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. It formed a major coursework assessment and was introduced at the start of the semester, with design work beginning a few weeks later.

I deliberately began with the science rather than game construction. Students first researched PCR and FISH independently before exploring the concepts through lectures and discussions. Once they had a solid foundation, we shifted to game design, focusing on what makes an educational game effective: clear objectives, meaningful challenges, simple but engaging rules, opportunities for feedback, and an element of fun. More importantly, we discussed that every aspect of the game should accurately represent the scientific process. This was where the deepest learning would occur, through deciding how a biological process could be represented through gameplay.

Students then formed groups and entered what quickly became my favourite stage of the project: the brainstorming sessions. The classroom transformed into a design studio as students sketched ideas on the whiteboard, debated game mechanics, and received feedback from their classmates. Together, we questioned whether the rules accurately reflected the biology, challenged one another's assumptions, and refined ideas before anyone began constructing a final product.

One of the most rewarding moments came when a student who had previously struggled to explain scientific concepts presented "FISHpoly," an adaptation of *Monopoly*. As she explained how the game's spaces, movement, and challenges represented fluorescence *in situ* hybridization, it became clear that she was no longer just learning the concept she was thinking carefully about how another learner could understand the concept, and in so doing improving her understanding of the concept. Figure 3 illustrates the initial brainstorming session for the development of FISHpoly.

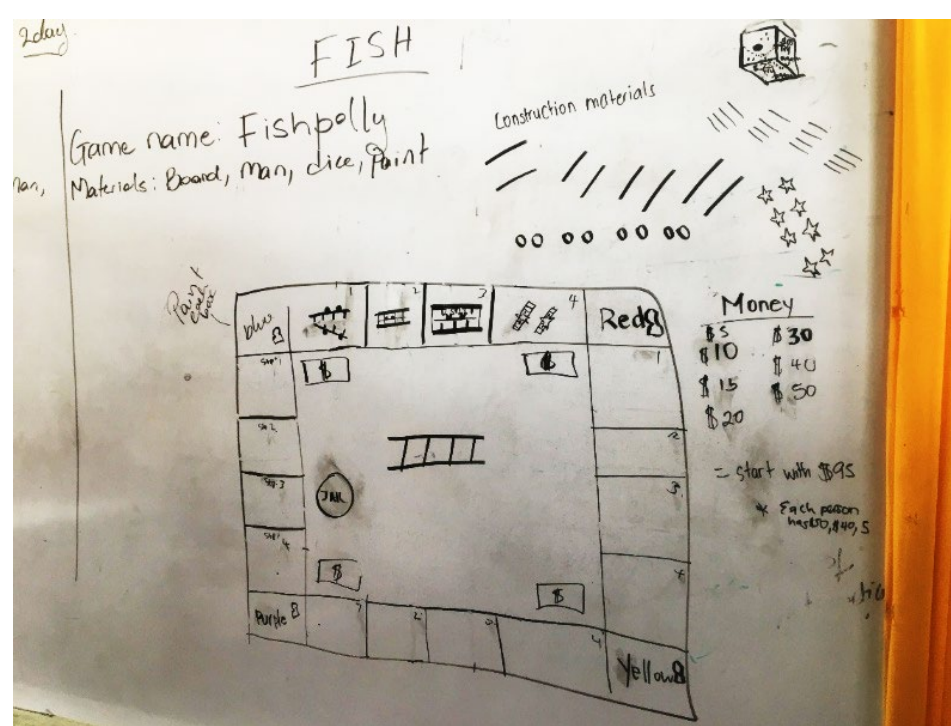


Figure 3 Brainstorming Session for the Development of FISHpoly

Students were free to invent entirely new games or adapt existing ones, provided the science remained accurate. Many groups chose to adapt familiar games that would already be recognized in Jamaican classrooms. Ludo proved especially popular, while others transformed Monopoly, Scrabble, and other traditional card games, into engaging biotechnology learning experiences. Some designed entirely original games. I intentionally limited the project to non-digital games because I wanted students to create resources that could realistically be reproduced in classrooms where there were limited technological access.

Once the game mechanics were finalized, each group identified the materials needed for construction. Students were encouraged to use recycled and low-cost materials, and I contributed toward essential supplies to demonstrate my commitment to the project and support its successful implementation. Construction took place both at home and during scheduled class sessions. These sessions became more than opportunities to assemble game boards. They allowed students to exercise creativity, solve practical problems together, and occasionally step away from the intensity of traditional lectures. Alongside the games, each group was required to produce an instruction booklet explaining the objective of the game, the rules, and how each component represented the biotechnology technique being taught.

Presentation Day

Presentation day was one of the highlights of the course. Students introduced their games, explained the underlying science, and invited classmates to play. The classroom buzzed with discussion, laughter, and friendly competition as students explained PCR and FISH, corrected misconceptions, and justified the biological reasoning behind their game designs. One detail that particularly stood out to me was how students incorporated local culture into their designs. The Ludo adaptations made use of familiar Jamaican

expressions. In Jamaican Ludo, when a playing piece first enters the board, players often say that the piece has been "born." Some groups cleverly linked this idea to stages within PCR and FISH, allowing the game's language to reinforce the biology while remaining culturally familiar. These small touches reminded me that meaningful science teaching does not always require sophisticated technology. Sometimes it simply requires creativity, contextualization, and the willingness to see familiar resources through a different lens.

By the end of the project, I realized that the games themselves were never the greatest achievement. The real success was watching my students move beyond learning biotechnology to thinking critically about how they would teach it.

Figures 4 and 5 below showcase additional student-designed board games that reflect this shift from content acquisition to pedagogical thinking, demonstrating how complex biotechnology concepts were transformed into engaging learning tools.



Figure 4 PCR Roll, An Environmental-Themed Ludo-inspired PCR Student-created Board Game that integrates PCR concepts into an environmental science context. Players collect and replicate DNA samples while navigating different ecosystems.

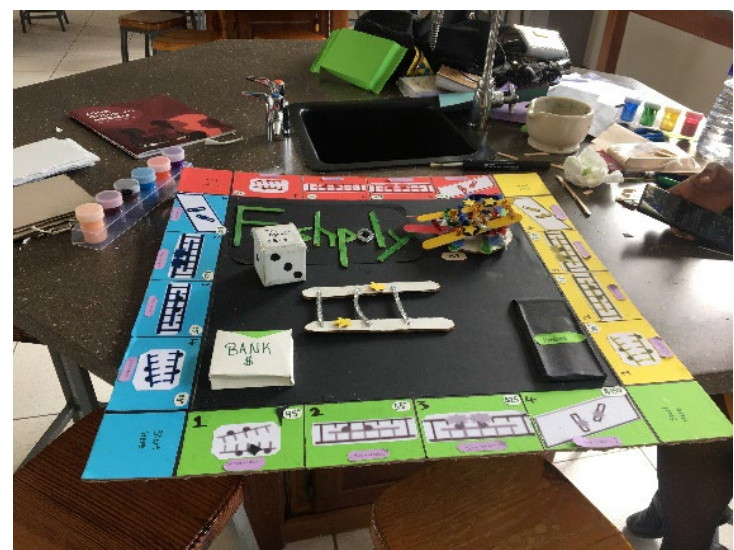


Figure 5 Completed Fishpoly Board Game Prototype, a student-developed board game that reinforces fluorescence *in situ* hybridization (FISH) concepts through handcrafted components, including custom-made dice.

Challenges Along the Way

Although the project was a rewarding learning experience, it was not without challenges. Like many ambitious classroom innovations, it required continuous guidance, flexibility, and patience. The first challenge emerged early. Because the project carried significant coursework weight and extended over approximately eight weeks, many students initially felt overwhelmed. They were expected not only to learn two complex biotechnology techniques, PCR and FISH, but also to transform them into educational games.

At first, many struggled to see how designing a game could deepen their understanding of molecular processes. However, this uncertainty became part of the learning process. Research suggests that the process of designing educational games encourages learners to actively construct knowledge, engage in higher-order thinking, and develop deeper conceptual understanding than simply playing games alone (Kurt & Çetin Dindar, 2025).

Maintaining momentum was another challenge. Although weekly milestones were established, students were balancing multiple courses, assignments, and practicum responsibilities. It quickly became clear that timelines alone were insufficient. Regular in-class reminders, progress checks, and structured opportunities to discuss challenges were essential in keeping students on track.

As with many collaborative projects, participation levels varied. Some students arrived with well-developed ideas, while others contributed minimally and relied heavily on peers. Rather than viewing this only as a limitation, I came to see it as an opportunity to explicitly teach collaboration as a professional skill. Like teaching itself, effective teamwork requires modelling, guidance, and practice.

Time constraints were the most significant limitation. While students had sufficient time to design and construct their games, I would have preferred to dedicate more class time to playing and refining them. One of my original goals was for repeated gameplay to reinforce biotechnology concepts. However, competing academic demands limited the extent to which this aspect could be fully realized. In future iterations, I would deliberately allocate structured sessions for gameplay, reflection, and refinement.

What Changed?

Student reflections confirmed that designing games deepened their understanding of PCR and FISH in ways that lectures alone did not. Translating biotechnology concepts into game mechanics required them to simplify complex ideas, organize them logically, and think critically about scientific processes, reflecting experiential learning (Ranken et al., 2024).

Collaboration further strengthened learning as students justified their reasoning, challenged misconceptions, and refined their designs. Many also reported intending to use similar strategies during their teaching practicum, demonstrating a shift from content mastery to pedagogical thinking.

Over three years, students created eight educational games, including adaptations of Ludo, Monopoly, Scrabble, and original designs that represented PCR, FISH, and biotechnology applications. Notably, students who initially struggled with the concepts often produced the most thoughtful games, highlighting the value of creativity and collaboration as alternative ways of demonstrating understanding.

Assessment outcomes also improved. Most students attempted the optional examination question on PCR and FISH, and approximately 60% passed, suggesting greater confidence and conceptual understanding of these challenging topics.



Lessons for My Practice

This experience continues to shape my approach to teacher education in four ways. First, students develop deeper understanding when required to teach or represent a concept rather than simply learn it. Designing games forced them to think about how others would engage with scientific ideas, an approach consistent with research on learning by teaching, which demonstrates that preparing to teach promotes deeper understanding and knowledge retention (Fiorella & Mayer, 2015).

Second, resource limitations should not be viewed only as constraints. While laboratory tools enhance biotechnology teaching, creative pedagogical approaches can produce equally meaningful learning experiences.

Third, teacher educators must model the pedagogies they expect future teachers to use. If we want graduates to create student-centered classrooms, they must first experience these approaches themselves, a principle consistently highlighted in recent teacher education research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2024).

Finally, learning can be both rigorous and enjoyable. Throughout the project, collaboration, fun, and competition coexisted with scientific reasoning and critical thinking, strengthening rather than reducing engagement.

For educators considering a similar approach, several lessons emerged. Start with one complex concept rather than an entire unit, adapt familiar games to increase relevance, and incorporate regular feedback and brainstorming sessions. Require students to develop instruction manuals linking gameplay to scientific concepts, and provide time for peer play and reflection, where some of the richest learning occurs.

Conclusion

When I first introduced this project, my goal was to improve students' understanding of PCR and FISH. However, the most significant transformation was not in the games themselves, but in students' thinking. This shift captures the essence of science teacher education. Our responsibility is not only to develop scientific knowledge, but to prepare educators who can transform that knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. In resource-constrained contexts, this capacity is especially vital. Creativity, intentional pedagogy, and a willingness to reimagine traditional approaches remain among the most powerful tools in science education.



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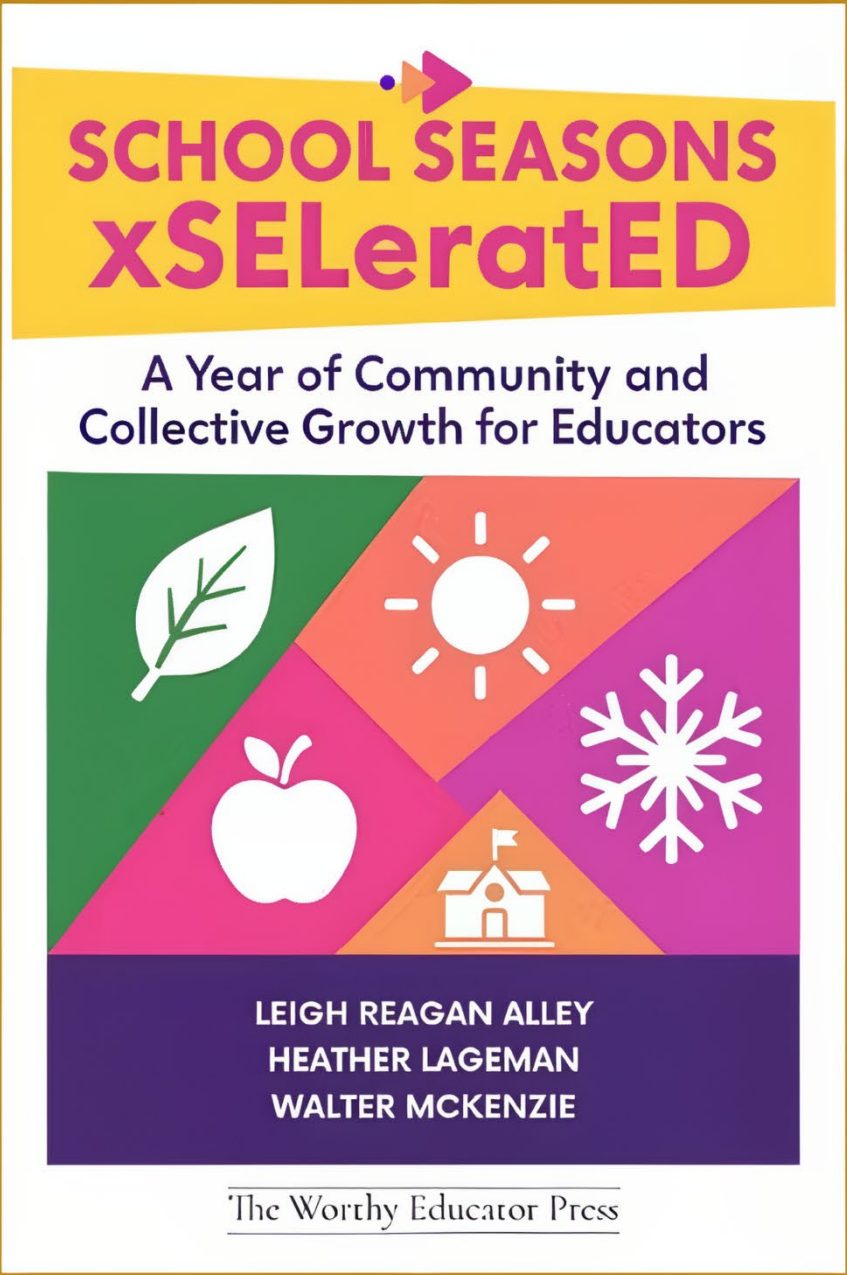


Nicolia Nelson is a biology lecturer and teacher educator, specializing in microbiology, environmental biotechnology, and genetics-based content, helping to prepare pre-service science teachers. Her teaching and professional interests centre on innovative, student-centered pedagogies that enhance conceptual understanding in science, particularly in resource-constrained contexts, and how complex biological processes can be made accessible through creative instructional approaches. Nicolia's recent practice-based work explores the use of educational game design and problem-based learning strategies to support both scientific understanding and pedagogical development among pre-service teachers. She encourages learners to move beyond content acquisition and develop reflective practice by considering how scientific concepts can be effectively taught in real classroom contexts. 



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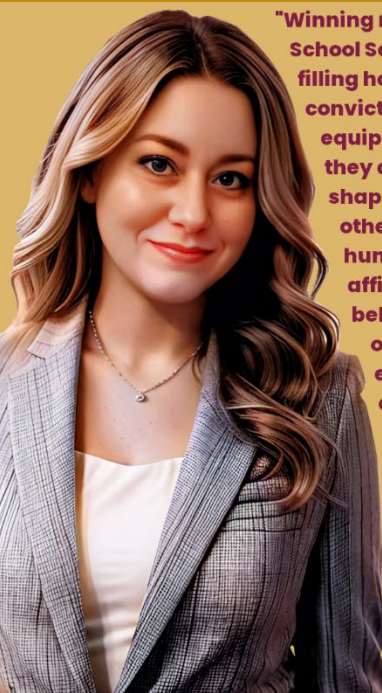


School Seasons xSEleratED: A Year of Community and Collective Growth for Educators (xSEleratED Schools)

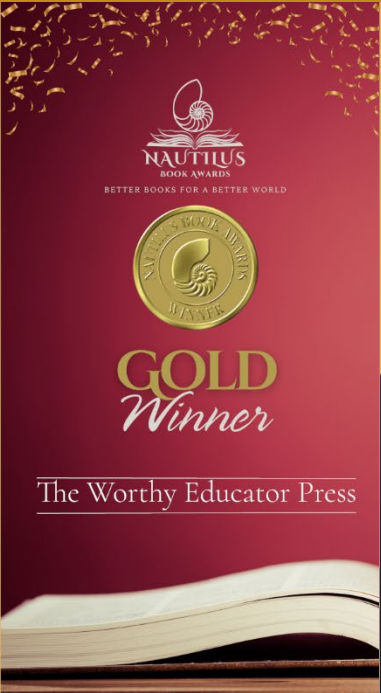
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Bridging the Gap between Reform and Reality: Implementation Stewardship (IS) and the Future of Educational Transformation in Jamaica

Joel Gray

Master Teacher, Co-Head of Humanities,
Dean of Academics

Edwin Allen High School

Overview

My interest in educational policy began in 2012 when I applied for an Australian scholarship to pursue graduate studies in Educational Policy at the University of Melbourne. Although that opportunity did not materialize, the application process sparked a curiosity that has remained with me throughout my career. As a classroom teacher, I watched successive governments introduce initiatives intended to improve educational quality, equity, and student achievement. While these reforms were often visionary and well intentioned, many teachers struggled to see the impact reflected consistently in everyday classroom practice. This disconnect led me to question whether the challenge is embedded not in policy itself, but in how policy is translated into practice. That question became more significant as I progressed through various leadership roles and eventually Edwin Allen High School's first Male Master Teacher. Each role offered a different perspective on leadership and reinforced the hard lesson that meaningful change is rarely driven by position alone. Rather, it is driven by influence, credibility, relationships, and the ability to mobilize people around a shared vision.

Throughout this journey, leadership has often reminded me of a bus ride. At times, you sit in the front supporting the driver. At other times, you work from the middle coordinating the passengers. Occasionally, you find yourself at the back encouraging others to move forward. And, if we are honest, there are moments when it feels as though the bus has run over you entirely. Yet every position offers valuable lessons about leadership, influence, and organizational change. Not everyone will become a principal, but every educator can lead meaningfully from wherever they are positioned. Furthermore, these experiences shaped not only my understanding of leading changes but also to ponder why some reforms succeed while others fail. Over time, I realized the answer is embedded less in policy design but in a leaders' ability to create the conditions that enable reform to take root, build stakeholder ownership, and produce lasting change.

Why Good Reforms Fail

Educational policymakers have, over the years, crafted reforms to improve teaching and learning. Moreover, successive administrations have invested substantial resources in curriculum reform, leadership development, teacher training, technology integration, and accountability systems with the expectation that these initiatives will improve student outcomes. Yet, despite the quality of many policy proposals, the anticipated improvements often fail to materialize. Therefore, If the reforms themselves are sound, why do so many fail to achieve lasting impact?

The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission concluded that many recommendations from the 2004 Task Force on Education failed to produce meaningful impact because of emphasis on institutional capacity while improvements in pedagogy remained limited (The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission, 2021, p. 2). In addition, these changes “are yet to have any meaningful effects on the academic performance of our students, the majority of whom continue to perform at well below the goals and standards set by the Task Force” (The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, these recurring implementation challenges prompted me to reflect more deeply on what successful educational change truly requires. Over time, they led me to develop a practical leadership framework that ultimately became the foundation for what I now describe as *Implementation Stewardship (IS)*.

Introducing Implementation Stewardship

Implementation Stewardship (IS) is a framework that guides educational transformation from policy to practice by intentionally creating the organizational, relational, and contextual conditions necessary for sustainable improvement. Rather than viewing implementation as a compliance exercise, the framework recognizes it as a continuous leadership process that builds understanding, develops capacity, fosters collaboration, and sustains improvement over time. In addition, while policies establish directions, it is valuable human resources who determine whether change is understood, embraced, implemented, and sustained.

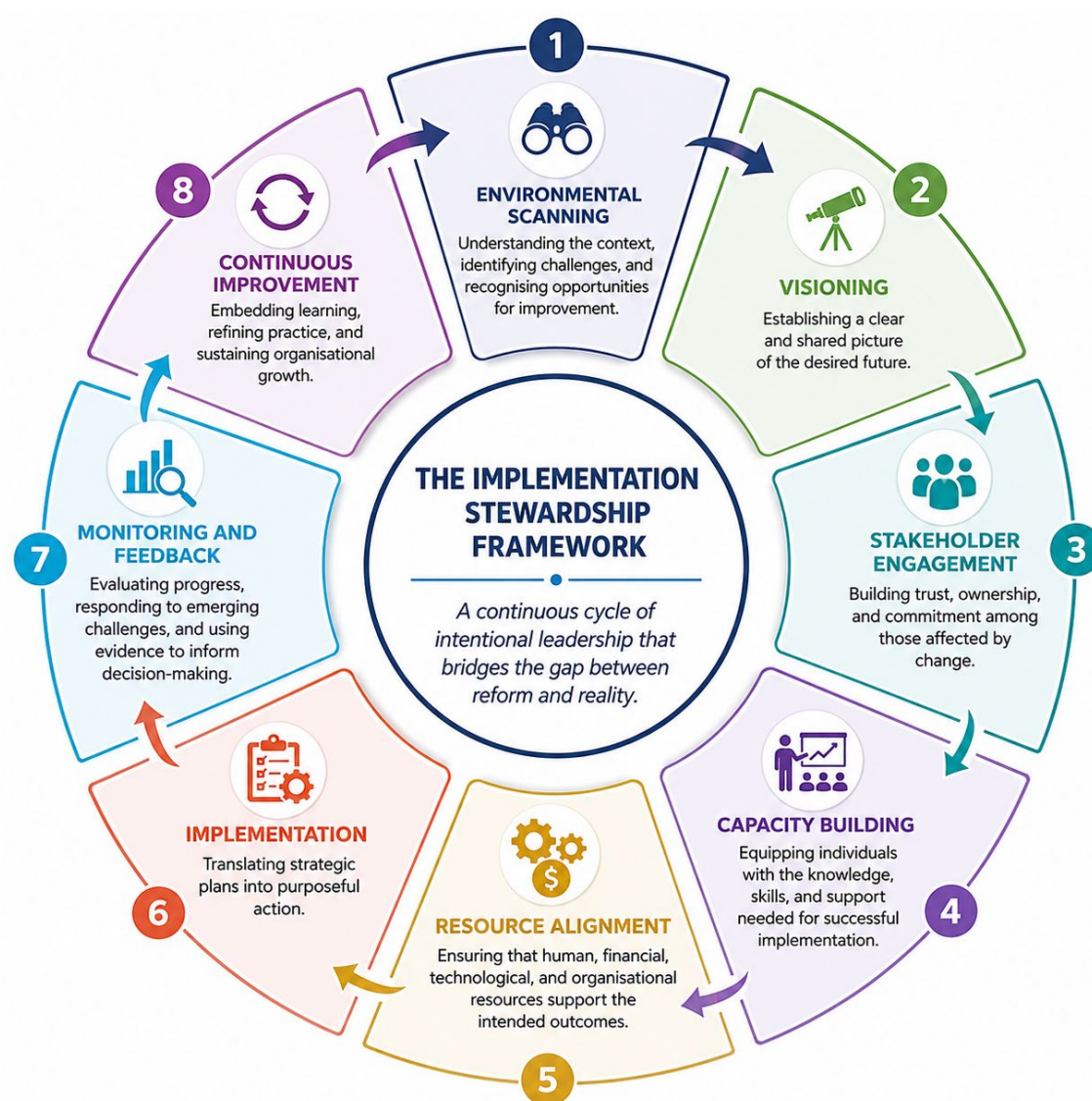


Figure 1 The Implementation Stewardship Framework

A practice-informed leadership framework illustrating the continuous cycle of implementation from environmental scanning through continuous improvement.

Although presented chronologically, these stages are not linear. Effective implementation requires school leaders to move continuously between them as circumstances evolve, new evidence emerges, and stakeholders’ needs change. The framework therefore encourages ongoing reflection, adaptation, and learning rather than a one-time implementation process.

This framework has been shaped through practice rather than abstract theory. It developed from years of leading school improvement initiatives, responding to National Education Inspectorate recommendations, analyzing student achievement data, engaging stakeholders, strengthening instructional leadership, and refining school improvement at Edwin Allen High School. Looking back, I recognized that the success of these initiatives depended less on the programmes themselves than on the deliberate leadership practices that supported their execution. While the framework is theoretical, its true value is demonstrated through practice. The initiatives undertaken at Edwin Allen High School illustrate how this approach translated strategic vision into measurable improvements in teaching, learning, stakeholder engagement, environmental stewardship, and organizational excellence.

Implementation Stewardship (IS) In Action

The true value of this leadership framework lies in its ability to translate vision into sustained practice. At Edwin Allen High School, IS was not applied through a single initiative. Distinctly, it provided the leadership approach that guided the planning, implementation, monitoring, and continuous refinement of several unified improvement strategies. Although each initiative addressed a separate school priority, collectively they demonstrate how intentional leadership, collaborative decision-making, and evidence-informed practice can transform reform into measurable and sustainable outcomes.

Building Capacity

From our 2015 and 2020 National Education Inspectorate (NEI) Reports, it highlighted weaknesses in instructional leadership, curriculum implementation, lesson planning, assessment practices, and the consistent use of data to improve teaching and learning. These findings prompted our leadership team to reflect critically on the school's existing practices and recognize that sustainable improvements in student achievement would require more than isolated interventions. Rather, they would require strengthening teachers' professional capacity while establishing systems capable of supporting continuous improvement.

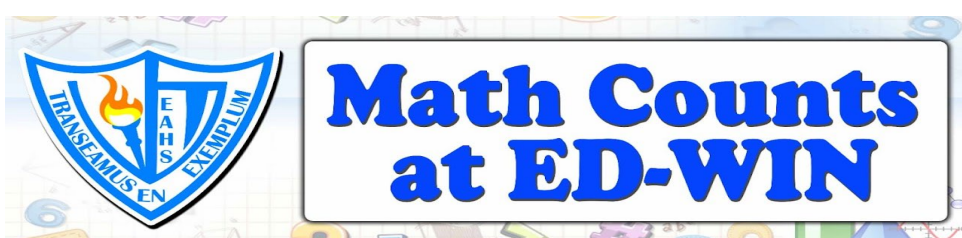
Consequently, the implementation journey began with strengthening the school's organizational infrastructure. During the 2021- 2022 academic year, under the leadership of Principal Jermaine Harris, the role of Dean of Academics was established to provide strategic oversight of curriculum implementation and academic improvement. At the same time, the Curriculum Implementation Team (CIT) was repositioned as the school's change agent. Regular CIT meetings became rooted within the academic calendar, creating a forum to engage our conversational competencies of visioning, creativity, relationship and implementation essential to transformational leadership.

As the work progressed, student achievement data, lesson observation findings, departmental reports, and stakeholder feedback were systematically analyzed to guide decision-making and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. This evidence-informed approach laid the foundation for the Innovation in Teacher-Student Engagement and Assessment through Collaboration for Holistic Development (I-TEACH) Initiative, which integrated professional learning communities, instructional coaching, standardized lesson planning, curriculum monitoring, diagnostic assessments, technology integration, and the development of an Artificial Intelligence Governance Framework. Collectively, these strategies strengthened collaboration, enhanced instructional practice, and fostered a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

Overtime, the initiative strengthened instructional leadership, promoted evidence-informed teaching, enhanced collaboration across departments, and improved curriculum implementation. More importantly, it established the organizational capacity needed to sustain ongoing school improvement rather than relying on short-term interventions. These efforts contributed to measurable gains in academic performance and were further affirmed when the school received the MOESYI/Region 7 School Awards for Innovation in Teaching and Learning at the School Leaders Conference 2026, recognizing the school's commitment to instructional excellence and continuous improvement.



While the I-TEACH Initiative strengthened the school's instructional capacity, the leadership team recognized that this capacity had to be translated into measurable improvements in student achievement. Although academic performance had begun to improve, the school remained committed to increasing the proportion of students leaving with at least five CSEC subjects, including Mathematics and English Language, while ensuring that every learner had access to an appropriate pathway for success.



Building on the structures established through the Curriculum Implementation Team (CIT), the school introduced the ED-WIN 5 in 5 Framework as a strategic approach to improving academic outcomes. The 5 in 5 Policy reflects Edwin Allen High School's commitment to academic excellence, vocational competence, and career readiness. Aligned with the vision of our Principal, Mr. Jermaine Harris, this policy ensures that every

student entering Grade 7 graduates with at least five (5) subjects, including Mathematics and English at the CSEC or City and Guilds level. The framework aligned curriculum planning, targeted interventions, literacy and numeracy support, pathway placement, continuous assessment, and departmental collaboration around a shared vision of student success. Student performance data were routinely analyzed to identify learning needs, monitor progress, evaluate interventions, and inform instructional decisions. This approach encouraged collective responsibility, enabling teachers and to work collaboratively in supporting student achievement rather than operating in isolation.



Master English at ED-WIN, Master Your Future

Moreover, the framework contributed to sustained improvements in literacy, numeracy, and external examination performance while embedding a culture in which student success became a shared responsibility across the school. Evidence from the school's self-evaluation demonstrates measurable improvements in overall CSEC performance, significant value-added gains across several subject areas, and a steady increase in the percentage of students attaining five (5) or more CSEC subjects, including Mathematics and English. These outcomes reflect the impact of aligning instructional practice, continuous monitoring, and collaborative leadership around a common goal of improving learning for every student.

EDUCATION

Edwin Allen High Back on Track Under National School Learning Intervention Plan

The Clarendon-based institution is celebrating a 74.1 per cent pass rate in Mathematics in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC).

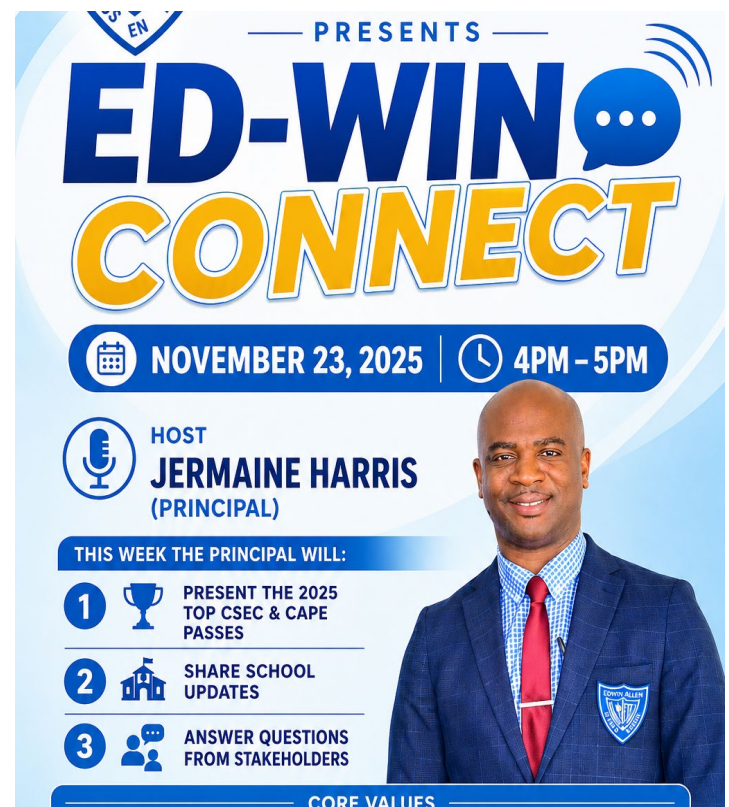


Strengthening Partnerships: Edwin Connect

As instructional systems became more firmly established, it became increasingly evident that sustainable school improvement could not be achieved through internal leadership alone. Lasting transformation required the confidence, participation, and collective ownership of parents, alumni, community partners, and other stakeholders. Recognizing that meaningful partnerships are built through consistent communication and shared responsibility, the school introduced Edwin Connect as its strategic stakeholder engagement framework.

Guided by the principles of IS, Edwin Connect created structured opportunities for collaboration through town hall meetings, virtual conferences, WhatsApp communication, alumni engagement, career expos, and strategic partnerships with community organizations. In addition, through the support of our stakeholders, the school has established scholarship opportunities valued at more than \$6 million (JMD) for our students and successfully published two digital scholarship magazines to recognize and promote these initiatives. This has strengthened communication, encouraged stakeholder participation in school improvement, and fostered a shared commitment to student success. Rather than viewing parents and community members as external supporters, the framework positioned them as active partners in the educational process.

The impact of this collaborative approach extended beyond improved communication. Stakeholder confidence increased, parental engagement became more consistent, alumni involvement expanded, and community partnerships contributed directly to the school's strategic priorities and student development initiatives. These collective efforts strengthened the school's culture of shared accountability and were formally recognized at the MOESYI/Region 7 School Awards by receiving the Best School-Community Partnership Award.



Building Responsible Citizens: Sustain-ED



As academic performance improved and stakeholder partnerships strengthened, the school's leadership recognized that educational success must also be measured by the character, values, and civic responsibility of its students. For this reason, the school sought to create meaningful opportunities for students to apply their learning beyond the classroom while contributing positively to their communities and the environment.

This commitment led to the introduction of the Sustain-EDWIN Waste Reduction and Recycling Initiative, which integrated environmental education with practical action through campus-wide recycling programmes, student leadership initiatives, environmental awareness campaigns, and strategic partnerships with agencies such as the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA) and Recycling Partners of Jamaica. By engaging students in authentic sustainability projects, the

initiative enabled them to address real-world environmental challenges while developing leadership, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and a greater sense of civic responsibility.

The initiative not only increased environmental awareness across the school community but also strengthened external partnerships, attracted additional support for environmental programmes, and reinforced the school's commitment to holistic education. More importantly, Sustain-ED demonstrated that educational transformation extends beyond academic achievement to prepare students to become responsible citizens capable of making meaningful contributions to society. In this way, the initiative exemplified another dimension by creating learning experiences that connect curriculum, community engagement, and character development in ways that produce lasting educational impact.

LAUNCH OF THE SUSTAIN-EDWIN PROJECT



Lessons Learned



Viewed collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that successful educational reform is rarely the result of isolated programmes. Instead, lasting improvement depends on building organizational capacity, establishing collaborative structures, using evidence to guide decisions, engaging stakeholders meaningfully, and continuously refining practice in response to emerging needs. The Curriculum Implementation Team served as the strategic mechanism through which these principles were translated into action.

I have come to appreciate that educational transformation depends as much on people as it does on policy. While every school operates within its own context, four enduring lessons emerged from our experience that continue to shape my approach to educational leadership.

The lessons from Edwin Allen High School extend beyond a single institution and offer practical insights for educational leaders navigating Jamaica's evolving reform agenda. As initiatives such as the National School Leaving Certificate (NSLC), the Education Management Information System (EMIS), ZyQual, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence continue to reshape education, successful reform will depend not only on sound policy but also on effective implementation. The experiences presented in this article informed the development of the Implementation Stewardship (IS) framework, which offers a practical, adaptable approach to translating reform into practice. While every school's context is unique, enduring educational transformation requires leadership, organizational capacity, and sustained commitment to implementation.

Conclusion

While policies establish direction and reforms articulate ambition, meaningful change occurs only when leaders intentionally translate policy into practice. The experiences at Edwin Allen High School demonstrate that lasting improvement is built not through isolated initiatives, but through professional capacity, collaborative relationships, evidence-informed decision-making, and a culture of continuous improvement. Although every school's context is unique, these principles provide practical guidance for educational leaders seeking to implement reform successfully. As Jamaica's education system continues to evolve, school leaders must remain intentional, adaptive, and committed to stewarding implementation with the same care devoted to developing policy.

Figure 2. Leadership Lessons Emerging from Implementation Stewardship



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Joel Gray is a Master Teacher, Co-Head of the Humanities Department, Dean of Academics, and Head of the Curriculum Implementation Team at Edwin Allen High School, with more than 18 years of experience in secondary education. He previously served as Acting Vice-Principal of Programmes and has contributed to improvement initiatives which have strengthened teaching, learning, stakeholder engagement, and student achievement. Joel holds a Master of Science in Management and Educational Leadership and is nationally recognized for excellence in teaching through his Master Teacher designation. Professional interests include educational leadership, policy implementation, school improvement, curriculum innovation, and the ethical integration of emerging technologies in education. Through his work, he advocates for Implementation Stewardship as a practical leadership framework for translating educational reform into sustainable educational improvement. ✉

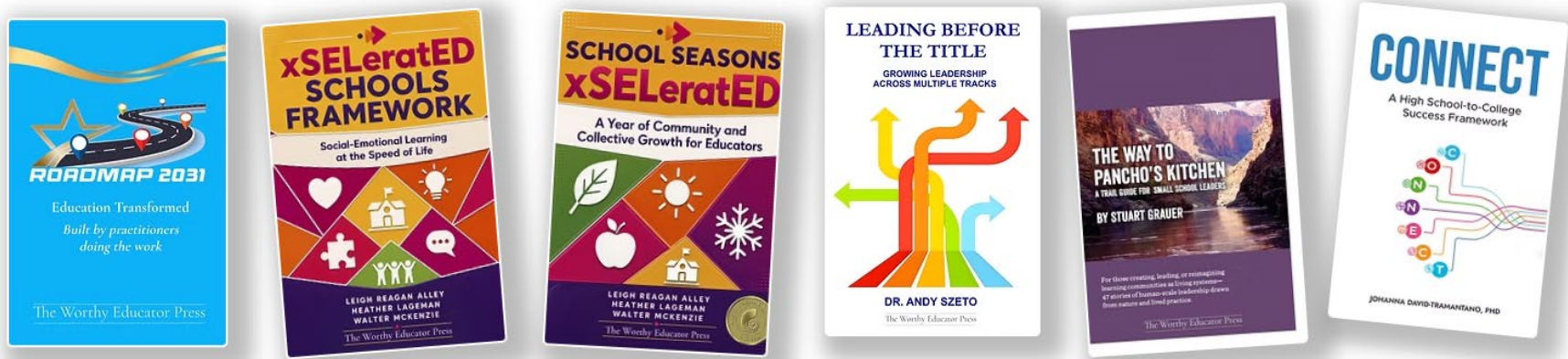


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Developing Confidence in Pre-Service Mathematics Educators: Making Mathematics Meaningful for All

Cheryl Lue-Simpson
Career Mathematics Educator and Lecturer
Department of Mathematics
The Mico University College



Overview

This article highlights the need for the design of authentic assessment in the Mathematics Education Programme, showcasing how future educators utilize diverse models and technologies to enhance teaching and learning across mathematical strands. The initiative sought to develop greater confidence and competence in Pre-Service Mathematics Educators as they showcased their work to visiting teachers and students, and to promote a shift away from traditional rote learning toward the practical, real-world application of mathematical concepts.

The Challenge

Each year, pre-service teachers enter the teaching profession, many motivated by their enjoyment of and aptitude for Mathematics. They enter teacher training institutions with a passion to gain more knowledge in the subject area of Mathematics and in essence develop their skills and competences in delivering the concepts associated with the subject. However, as they begin their teacher preparation programmes, mathematics teacher educators often observe that many pre-service teachers lack confidence in their ability to effectively communicate concepts across the major strands of mathematics.

The challenge, therefore, was developing both mathematical confidence and mathematics teaching self-efficacy in Pre-Service Mathematics Educators.

These attributes significantly influence instructional effectiveness, teachers' willingness to engage students in meaningful mathematical inquiry, and their persistence in teaching challenging concepts. Research indicates that teachers with high mathematics teaching self-efficacy are more likely to adopt effective, student-centred instructional practices that enhance students' learning experiences and achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Similarly, engaging pre-service teachers in rich problem-solving experiences strengthens their confidence by promoting productive struggle, persistence, and deep conceptual understanding rather than an overreliance on procedural fluency (Boaler, 2022).

Recognizing the importance of these competencies, the Bachelor of Education in Mathematics programme introduced the use of authentic assessment early in Year One in many courses. One such course is: 'Problem Solving and Mathematics Investigation'. This course provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage in authentic mathematical tasks that require investigation, reasoning, collaboration, reflection, and the application of multiple problem-solving strategies to real-world contexts. Through these experiences, students begin to develop the confidence, resilience, and pedagogical understanding necessary for effective mathematics teaching throughout the remainder of the programme and into their professional practice.

The Innovation

In the Problem Solving and Mathematics Investigation course, pre-service teachers participate in authentic assessment experiences that require them to apply mathematical knowledge and pedagogical skills to real-world contexts. Working from an assigned theme, they design and develop an innovative product, such as a mathematical model, educational game, mobile application, or other technology-based solution, that demonstrates meaningful connections between mathematics and everyday life. As part of the assessment, they create problem-solving tasks that integrate concepts from the major mathematics strands, including Number, Algebra, Geometry, Measurement, Statistics, and Probability.

The culminating assessment is presented at the institution's annual Mathematics Exposition, where pre-service mathematics teachers showcase their projects to an audience of teacher educators, peers, school students, and other invited stakeholders. They are evaluated on the creativity, mathematical accuracy, relevance, and practicality of their products, as well as their ability to communicate mathematical concepts effectively, justify their design decisions, and engage visitors in meaningful mathematical discussion. This authentic assessment fosters confidence, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and effective mathematical communication while preparing pre-service teachers to design engaging learning experiences for their future classrooms.

In addition, students in Grades 4 to 11 who attended the Mathematics Exposition were exposed to a variety of problem-solving strategies and mathematical investigations that enhanced their analytical and critical thinking skills. Through observing demonstrations and engaging with pre-service mathematics educators, they explored multiple approaches to solving mathematical problems and developed a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts across the curriculum. These experiences strengthened students' preparedness for national and regional examinations, including the Primary Exit Profile (PEP) and the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Mathematics examination. By showcasing the practical application of mathematical concepts, the exposition sought to increase students' interest, confidence, and positive attitudes towards mathematics.

A Taste of the Experience at the Mathematics Exposition

The Mathematics Exposition is an annual event held during Semester Two of each academic year (January–May). Each year, the exposition is organized around a theme aligned with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information's national focus for Mathematics Week, ensuring that the authentic assessment activities in the Problem Solving and Mathematics Investigation course are directly connected to current national priorities in mathematics education.



This year's Mathematics Exposition was held on March 31, 2026, under the theme, "Mathematics for All: Building Communities, Confidence, Competence and Creativity." The event welcomed approximately 300 students and 30 teachers who were formally invited to participate. It provided pre-service mathematics educators with an authentic platform to showcase the assessment projects they had developed throughout the course while engaging with students, teachers, teacher educators, and other invited stakeholders. They used demonstrations, mathematical investigations, educational games, models, and technology to showcase their mathematical knowledge, creativity, teaching skills, and ability to integrate technology effectively into mathematics instruction. These authentic interactions contributed significantly to the development of their confidence, communication skills, and readiness for classroom practice. Furthermore, participants also receive a certificate of participation, acknowledging their involvement and encouraging continued interest and engagement in mathematics.

The highlights included the participation of keynote speaker Senator the Honourable Dr. Dana Morris Dixon, Jamaica's Minister of Education, Skills, Youth and Information. In her keynote address, Dr. Dana Morris Dixon emphasized that mathematics is everywhere -in banking, road design, public health, architecture, logistics, coding, construction, robotics, music, climate science, and artificial intelligence. Similarly, President of The Mico University College, Dr. Asburn Pinnock, noted that when mathematics begins to make sense to learners, it builds confidence, as students' struggles often stem not from a lack of ability but from a lack of connection to the subject. The Mathematics Exposition sought to strengthen that connection by demonstrating the relevance of mathematics through authentic, real-world applications while highlighting its interdisciplinary nature across the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM).

I was also delighted to capture many of the event's highlights through the accompanying photographs. Viewing the mathematics exposition through the lens of a photographer - one of my favourite passions after teaching mathematics, gave me a unique perspective on the excitement, curiosity, and meaningful learning that unfolded throughout the day.



Dr. Asburn Pinnock, President of the Mico University College, Kingston, Jamaica



The Honourable Dana Morris Dixon, Minister of Education, Skills, Youth and Information



Pre-Service Teachers showcasing their work at Math Expo 2026

The Impact of the Mathematics Exposition

The Mathematics Exposition became a highly anticipated annual event for mathematics teachers, students, and pre-service mathematics educators. It consistently left a lasting impression on teachers, many of whom expressed a desire to replicate the innovative teaching resources and mathematical activities they experienced. They frequently inquired about how the materials were developed and how similar ideas could be incorporated into their own classrooms, with some even expressing a willingness to purchase the resources for use in their schools.

The impact of the exposition extended beyond practising teachers to the pre-service mathematics educators themselves. Many who participated during the first year of their teacher education journey described the experience as transformative, shaping their perspectives on effective mathematics instruction. As they transitioned into classroom teachers, many expressed a strong commitment to bringing their own students to future expositions so that they, too, could experience mathematics as an engaging, interactive, and meaningful subject. For me, this became one of the greatest indicators of the exposition's success—it influenced teaching practices well beyond the event itself and contributed to the preparation of future generations of mathematics educators.

For school students, the exposition provided opportunities to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and mathematical reasoning through hands-on activities, mathematical games, and real-world applications. Students actively engaged with challenging tasks in a supportive and enjoyable environment, which helped them recognize that mathematics was both accessible and enjoyable. Participating in games and competitions also built their confidence and sense of accomplishment, particularly when they successfully solved problems or received recognition for their achievements.

Ultimately, the Mathematics Exposition became much more than an authentic assessment activity. It inspired practising teachers, empowered pre-service educators, and fostered confidence, curiosity, and deeper mathematical understanding among students. Its impact continued to strengthen mathematics education within schools and across the wider educational community.



Year One Pre-Service Mathematics Teachers with their Lecturers for the course: 'Problem Solving and Mathematics Investigation', Cheryl Lue-Simpson and Jessica Scarlett at the Mico University College, Kingston, Jamaica (March 2026)

Lessons Learnt

Continuous reflection and improvement remained essential responsibilities of mathematics teacher educators in ensuring that pre-service teachers were equipped to meet the evolving demands of contemporary classrooms. As curricula, learner needs, and educational priorities changed, teaching approaches, learning experiences, and assessment practices also needed to be regularly reviewed and refined to promote meaningful and effective mathematics learning. Such reflective practice enabled teacher educators to evaluate the impact of instructional strategies and make evidence-informed decisions that enhanced student learning and professional competence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Following each annual Mathematics Exposition, pre-service teachers and mathematics teacher educators engaged in reflective discussions to evaluate the strengths, challenges, and overall effectiveness of the event. These reflections informed improvements for future expositions while reinforcing successful practices. The discussions consistently revealed a strong sense of accomplishment among participants, who took pride in creating an engaging and meaningful learning experience. Feedback from visitors also indicated that the exposition left a lasting impression, with many continuing to speak about its impact long after the event. Such reflections reaffirmed the exposition's value as a transformative learning experience that inspired innovation, promoted collaboration, and strengthened the teaching and learning of mathematics.

Mathematics teacher education programmes should remain responsive to advances in technology and emerging pedagogical approaches that enrich the teaching and learning of mathematics. Integrating digital technologies, authentic problem-solving experiences, mathematical modelling, and inquiry-based learning helped pre-service teachers develop conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, and confidence while demonstrating the relevance of mathematics to everyday life.

By designing courses that reflect contemporary educational practices and technological innovations, teacher education programmes better prepared future mathematics teachers to create engaging, student-centred learning environments and equip their own students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to thrive in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Looking Ahead: Recommendations for Future Practice

Reflecting on this experience, I believe there are several practical steps that mathematics teacher education programmes can take to strengthen the use of authentic assessment and better prepare future teachers for today's classrooms.

- 1. Expand the use of authentic assessment.**
As technology continues to advance and learners become increasingly reliant on digital tools, teacher educators must adapt their assessment practices to better reflect the realities of contemporary classrooms. Greater emphasis should be placed on authentic assessment strategies that require pre-service teachers to apply their knowledge in meaningful, real-world contexts. Unlike traditional assessments that often emphasize procedural fluency and recall, authentic assessment provides a richer measure of learners' ability to apply mathematical knowledge, reasoning, communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving to unfamiliar situations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2023).
- 2. Make authentic assessment an integral part of teacher preparation.**
Authentic assessment should not be viewed as a single activity at the end of a course but as an ongoing part of teaching and learning. The Mathematics Exposition demonstrated how meaningful assessment experiences can strengthen pre-service teachers' confidence, pedagogical competence, and ability to communicate mathematical ideas while bridging the gap between theory and classroom practice.
- 3. Continue embracing technology in mathematics education.**
Teacher education programmes should continue creating opportunities for pre-service teachers to integrate digital technologies into mathematics teaching and learning. The use of virtual manipulatives, interactive games, simulations, presentation technologies, and mathematical visualization tools enriched the learning experience and helped pre-service teachers communicate mathematical concepts more effectively. Technology-rich learning environments also strengthened learner engagement and conceptual understanding when integrated purposefully into instruction (UNESCO, 2023).
- 4. Create opportunities for authentic audiences.**
Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to present their work to school students, teachers, and teacher educators encouraged ownership of learning, sustained engagement, and greater confidence. These authentic experiences reinforced the relevance of mathematics and helped pre-service teachers appreciate the importance of making learning meaningful and accessible.
- 5. Assess professional competence in multiple ways.**
Authentic assessment provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to demonstrate their understanding not only through the mathematical products they created but also through their ability to explain concepts, justify their reasoning, respond to questions, and facilitate mathematical discussions. These experiences offered a more comprehensive picture of the professional competencies expected of effective mathematics teachers than traditional written examinations alone.



Members of the Mathematics Department at the Mico University College, Kingston, Jamaica

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Cheryl Lue-Simpson is an experienced mathematics educator with over 20 years of teaching experience at the secondary and tertiary levels in Jamaica. She currently serves as a Lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at The Mico University College, where she is committed to preparing future mathematics educators through innovative, student-centred teaching and authentic assessment practices. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing mathematics education through effective teaching, curriculum development, and teacher preparation. Her work spans classroom instruction, mentoring pre-service teachers, and facilitating professional development initiatives aimed at strengthening mathematical understanding and pedagogical practice. Cheryl is particularly passionate about problem-solving, helping learners develop logical and critical thinking skills through real-life experiences. As a dedicated lecturer and educational practitioner, she continues to contribute to the improvement of mathematics teaching and learning in Jamaica by fostering engaging, relevant, and learner-centred approaches to mathematics education. 



CONTENTS



THE GREAT WORK VISIBILITY LAB

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 8
6:00 PM ET

WITH DR. AMANDA CROWELL

"Great Work is about reclaiming what matters most to you and learning how to make steady progress on it without burning yourself out."

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Towards an Ethos of Culturally Responsive Differentiation

Gillian Campbell
Lecturer in Education
The Mico University College

Introduction

Sometimes educators seem to expect learners to leave their language, culture, and lived experiences at the classroom door. Can true educational equity exist when students with diverse identities, backgrounds, and learning needs are taught as if they were the same? In Jamaica's classrooms, where diversity is increasingly becoming the norm, culturally responsive differentiation emerges not merely as an instructional strategy, but as an educational necessity.

Differentiation is frequently understood as the ideal when teaching diverse learners. However, effective differentiation typically requires small class sizes, sufficient resources, and a vast amount of planning time, conditions that are seldom reflected in many Jamaican classrooms. Consequently, there is a need to rethink differentiation through a culturally responsive lens. Culturally responsive differentiation is a flexible learner-centered approach that moves beyond the traditional one-size-fits-all model. It intentionally incorporates learners' cultural backgrounds, their lived experiences, language and learning preferences into the teaching and learning process. Because learners come from different contexts, they bring unique perspectives and experiences to the classroom. Therefore, an ethos of culturally responsive differentiation is essential for creating equitable learning opportunities that acknowledge, value, and support the diverse needs of all students.

Diversity in Student Population

Jamaican classrooms are vibrant spaces characterized by diversity. Students enter the classroom with varying abilities, learning preferences, socio-economic background, cultural experiences and language abilities. Throughout my years as an educator in both the private and the public educational systems, I have witnessed first-hand how these differences shape teaching & learning experiences. In many privately owned institutions, the student-teacher ratio is approximately twenty (20) students to one teacher. In contrast, the public educational system often exceeds the recommended student-teacher ratio of thirty-five (35) students to one teacher, despite policy aspirations to reduce class sizes (Davis, 2017). The reality is that many teachers are expected to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners under far from ideal conditions.

One experience remains etched in my memory. I remember having sixty-three (63) students in a grade five class in a rural school. Yes, you heard that correctly, sixty-three! Each learner came with a unique story, distinct values, different home experiences, and varied academic strengths. They also brought something equally important, their language. Was it an easy task to address the unique needs of each individual learner? Absolutely not! The classroom was a rich tapestry of different ways of speaking the dialect, cultural practices, and ways of knowing. These differences were not obstacles to learning; rather, they were resources that could be harnessed to support it.

Reminiscing on the very first interactions with this group, I quickly realised that their first language, their mother tongue - the patois, would play a central role in their learning journey. However, I did not view the students' use of Jamaican creole as "bad English" that needed to be corrected or avoided. Instead, I recognized it as their first language and a valuable bridge to acquiring Jamaican Standard English. If learning was to be meaningful, students needed to feel that their voices, identities, and linguistic heritage were valued within the classroom. I listened, responded, and often incorporated elements of their dialect into our discussions. Students realized that they did not have to abandon their identity to participate in learning. The

transformation was remarkable. Students became more comfortable in expressing themselves freely using the language with which they were most comfortable. Students were encouraged to speak up and express themselves freely and were reminded that they belonged in the learning environment. Additionally, they were reassured that I was their biggest cheerleader. This immediately created a sense of belonging and trust. They used their dialect, and I used it too. Rather than silencing them, I used it as a scaffold to model Jamaican Standard English. Through conversations, collaborative activities, and carefully structured group work, students gradually learned to navigate between both languages. In this way, the dialect became a bridge rather than a barrier.

The transformation was remarkable. Students became more confident communicators, classroom discussions became richer, and engagement increased significantly. By validating their linguistic and cultural identities while simultaneously modelling academic language, I was able to create an environment where students felt respected, capable, and empowered to learn. This experience reinforced my belief that culturally responsive differentiation is not simply about adapting instructional strategies. It is about recognizing and valuing the diverse assets that learners bring to the classroom and using those assets as foundations for meaningful learning. In the Jamaican context, this means embracing learners' lived experiences as strengths rather than deficits. An ethos of culturally responsive differentiation, therefore, seeks not only to improve academic outcomes but also to affirm students' identities while providing equitable opportunities for success.

A New Way Forward

Culturally responsive differentiation challenges traditional approaches to schooling by recognising that learners do not all learn at the same own pace or in the same way. Rather than expecting students to conform to a single method of instruction, it creates opportunities for learning experiences that are responsive to their individual strengths, cultural identities, and prior knowledge. New concepts are not introduced in isolation; rather, it builds on what students already know, making learning more meaningful, relevant, and accessible.

However, the successful implementation of culturally responsive differentiation cannot be separated from the realities of educational inequity. Disparities exist regarding how resources are distributed across Jamaican schools. Simply put, some public schools are more privileged than others. Many benefit from strong alumni support, state-of-the-art laboratories, modern computer laboratories, reliable internet access, and expansive sporting amenities. These resources provide students with a wealth of opportunities for academic, social, and personal development, allowing them to experience a more holistic education.

On the other hand, some public schools, especially those in rural areas, continue to grapple with significant resource constraints. Some lack basic amenities that many educators would consider essential for effective teaching and learning. These challenges range from include inadequate furniture, outdated library resources internet and insufficient instructional materials. Such disparities inevitably affect the quality of learning experiences available to students and further widen existing educational inequalities.

In fact, I have experienced this in my career. During a lesson, I wanted my students to have a vicarious learning experience through a video presentation. However, the only technology available was a single cell phone. Yes! One cell phone for sixty-three students. Determined not to allow resource limitations to hinder learning, I ensured that I had sufficient data and rotated the device among groups so that every student had an opportunity to engage with the video presentation. This was nothing short of a miracle. While this may seem insignificant in more resource-rich settings, it was transformative for my students. I still remember the excitement on their faces, the animated discussions that followed, and those unmistakable "light bulb" moments that signal genuine understanding. Students eagerly contributed to the discourse, making connections between the content and their own experiences. In that moment, learning transcended the limitations of the environment.

Experiences such as these underscore the importance of culturally responsive differentiation as both a pedagogical framework and an equity-driven practice. Adapting an ethos of culturally responsive differentiation as a pedagogy, although it can be time-consuming and demanding, it enables educators to creatively leverage available resources while drawing upon students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and strengths. More importantly, it demonstrates that meaningful learning can occur even in under-resourced settings. Nevertheless, for culturally responsive differentiation to achieve its full potential, it must be supported by a broader commitment to educational equity, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic circumstances, have access to the resources and opportunities necessary for academic success.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Recent research has shown that educators in the Caribbean lack adequate training in differentiation and its implementation (Suryati et al., 2023). While stakeholders increasingly advocate for inclusive and equitable learning environments, teachers are often expected to meet the diverse needs of their students without sufficient preparation, resources, or ongoing professional support. This disconnect underscores the need for greater attention to be placed on how culturally responsive differentiation is understood, implemented, and supported within Jamaican schools.

Hence, as educators, it is important to remember that learners possess diverse cognitive abilities and prior knowledge. Educators must be intentional about creating a classroom culture that normalizes and affirms learner diversity. Although navigating increasingly diverse classrooms can be quite challenging, educators. One must remember that learners' academic, behavioural, and independent functioning abilities vary now more than ever. This is compounded by the fact that these variations often exist without formal diagnoses or documented support needs. As a result, teachers are frequently required to identify and respond to diverse learning needs based on their professional observations and classroom interactions. This reality underscores the importance of culturally responsive differentiation, which enables educators to proactively address learner variability and create equitable opportunities for success.

Therefore, teacher preparedness and professional development are essential for effectively implementing culturally responsive differentiation. To achieve this, educators must have access to training that is culturally relevant and reflective of the Jamaican educational context. Professional learning opportunities should move beyond generic approaches and instead equip teachers with practical strategies that address the realities of Jamaican classrooms, including linguistic diversity, large class sizes, and resource constraints. This means that teacher training institutions all have a role to play by championing this approach by developing short courses, workshops, and professional learning communities focused on culturally responsive differentiation and inclusive pedagogical practices. By investing in such initiatives, educators will be better positioned to recognize, accommodate, and celebrate the diverse strengths, needs, and identities of their learners, ultimately fostering more equitable and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Summary

Culturally responsive differentiation offers a meaningful approach to addressing learner diversity by intentionally integrating students' linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds into the teaching and learning process. Within the Jamaican context, this means affirming the Jamaican learner's identity while simultaneously promoting equity in the classroom. Consequently, culturally responsive differentiation functions both as a pedagogical framework and a sociocultural intervention. The equation is simple. The interest in differentiation developed because of educational inequalities, policy reform and the need for culturally responsive pedagogy. Ultimately, culturally responsive differentiation has the potential not only to strengthen educational practice in Jamaica but also to contribute to broader conversations about inclusive education within postcolonial societies and other developing contexts around the world

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Gillian Campbell is passionate about learners and learning. An experienced educator she describes herself as a facilitator of learning, an agent of positive change, and an exceptional educator. In her classroom she adopts a learner-centered approach, using a range of methodologies to promote critical thinking and real-world teaching and learning. Gillian exemplifies the profession living by the mantra, "To create an indelible mark on everyone I come in contact with." Beyond teaching and learning, she's an avid reader who enjoys solitude, appreciating scenic views, and spending quality time with family and friends.



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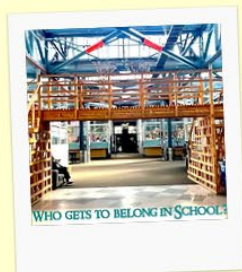
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Curriculum Leadership in Teacher Education: Implications for 21st-Century Classroom Practices

Tamekia Green-Mitchell

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The Mico University College



Overview

My role as a practicum supervisor has provided opportunities for me to get a first-hand view of how the pre-service teachers, who my colleagues and I spend approximately four years preparing, implement curriculum. During recent visits, I observed units focusing on municipal corporation delivered through teacher led discussions and notetaking with minimal focus on collaboration and problem solving. Immediately, I reflected on the profile of the 21st-century learner, the significant role of the municipal corporation in decision-making and problem solving, and the importance for students to get a fulsome understanding of its functions. These sessions triggered one essential question that I recorded in my visitation logbook: Are we really preparing teachers for the 21st-century classroom?

Responding to the challenges of an ever-evolving world has been the principal focus of many fields. In fact, education scholars and policymakers believe education is a key element in responding to present and future challenges. Scott (2015) contends that “all countries will face consequences if today’s learners are not adequately prepared to collaborate and resolve the world’s economic, environmental, health, social, and political challenges” (p. 9). Notably, as the demand for students who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of problem solvers, designers, and creators increases, school curricula and students’ roles have shifted drastically. The goal of 21st-century curricula is to produce learners armed with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaborative problem solving, communication, cultural competence, and digital literacy. Furthermore, in the 21st-century classroom, students have transitioned from simply being participants to active participants, where student agency and co-agency with their teachers and peers are emphasised (OECD, 2019).

Importantly, the National Standards Curriculum (NSC), implemented in Jamaican primary and secondary schools in 2016, has responded to the demands of developing students who possess 21st-century skills. Its constructivist underpinning requires teachers to engage students using project-based learning, problem-based learning, and STEM/STEAM methodologies. These 21st-century methodologies provide opportunities for hands-on learning where students collaborate to solve real-world problems. To this end, teachers engaging students in 21st-century classrooms, specifically Jamaican classrooms, should be able to effectively use these methodologies to engage students and develop their 21st-century skills. Practicum observations reveal that while some pre-service teachers demonstrate the ability to develop 21st-century skills such as the 4Cs in learners, gaps exist. More often than not, pre-service teachers tend to camp around the periphery of these skills without allowing students to fully develop them. For instance, collaborative activities usually do not require much collaboration and key elements such as leveraging student’s individual expertise and collaborative problem solving are usually omitted.

Implications for Practice

What does this mean for teacher training institutions? Kim et al. (2019) assert that teachers need to be regarded as learners, and the learning that is expected in our children should be taking place with our teachers. Drawing on the principles of social learning theory, situated learning theory, and constructivism, if teachers are to be effective in using project-based learning, problem-based learning, and STEM/STEAM methodologies, teacher training programmes should be delivered using these methodologies. Furthermore, if teachers are to develop problem-solving and other 21st-century skills in students and create opportunities for students to utilize these skills, they first must possess these skills and demonstrate competence in their use. Social Learning Theory emphasizes that new behaviours are learned through observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviours of others (Bandura, 1977). Lave and Wenger’s (1991) Situated Learning Theory posits that the learner is an active participant in the learning process and that the learning community is a critical component of the learner’s gradual growth as he/she moves from a novice to an expert. Constructivists view the learner as a key player in the learning process and an active participant in meaning-making and generating understanding (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

What role does curriculum leadership play? For this article, curriculum leadership and the role of curriculum leaders will be examined through the lenses of social learning theory, situated learning theory, and constructivism. Curriculum leadership is a dynamic process that involves collaboration with school officials to design, implement, and monitor the total learning experience of students. Fundamentally, curriculum leadership must prioritize teacher preparation as the core driver of educational quality and the chief response to global challenges. Notably, no curriculum—no matter how well designed—can succeed without teachers, key players in curriculum implementation (Fullan, 2007), who are trained to implement it with creativity, accuracy, and cultural responsiveness. Therefore, though well-designed, successful implementation of the NSC and effective use of its methodologies depend on the quality of teachers.

Most importantly, the majority of the teachers trained in Jamaican teacher training institutions will end up working in Jamaican classrooms. This means that they will be integral in actualizing the goals of the Jamaican curricula. As a result, a general preparation model for teachers is not prudent. Teacher preparation should be context-specific and culturally relevant. In other words, teacher training programmes must be thoughtfully designed to ensure relevance to Jamaican realities. Does this mean ignoring the preparation of teachers for the global marketplace? Absolutely not; however, it does mean giving foremost attention to alignment with the Jamaican context and the needs of the Jamaican classroom. Consequently, the role of curriculum leaders in teacher training institutions is to engage in what I call bespoke teacher preparation. With this, just as a tailor who has been contracted for a custom-made design stitches his client's suit with precision, teacher training institutions must prepare teachers who are fit for purpose, having the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions for curriculum implementation in the Jamaican context. This, however, requires deliberate, evidence-based planning and partnerships between teacher training institutions, the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth, and Information (MOESYI), and schools.

Suggestions for Improvement and Implications for Classroom Practices

Evidence-based teacher training. One key factor in ensuring that teacher preparation programmes produce teachers who are fit for purpose is for curriculum leaders to engage in evidence-based planning, anchored in research and trends in education. A staple in teacher training is the practicum experience. This is where teacher training institutions partner with schools, providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to complete practical training. Essentially, practicum allows teacher training institutions to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their programmes and the preparedness of their teachers to implement curriculum and respond to classroom needs. Data collected from the practicum experience should answer the hard but important questions and ultimately influence curriculum decisions. Some of the questions include: Are our programmes contextually relevant? Are they aligned with national curriculum goals? Have we prepared bespoke teachers who are fit for purpose? Are they able to use the required methodologies for curriculum delivery? Are they able to develop 21st-century skills in students? Answers to these questions should be the foundation of curriculum review and capacity building.

Considering the importance of 21st-century skills in classrooms that use 21st-century methodologies and the noticeable gaps observed on practicum, I deliberately target these skills in my own classroom. For example, a common challenge observed is pre-service teachers' ability to promote problem-solving and critical thinking in learners due to poor questioning techniques. Consequently, in my lessons, I intentionally focus on developing pre-service teachers' questioning techniques by asking questions that encourage deep thinking, challenge assumptions and elicit divergent perspectives.

Learning by doing. Using the principles of social learning theory, situated learning theory, and constructivism, curriculum leaders must ensure that the methodologies used to deliver programmes are aligned with those pre-service teachers are expected to use in their own classrooms. Many teacher training programmes teach pre-service teachers about 21st-century methodologies such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and STEM/STEAM methodologies. However, not many deliver their programmes using these methodologies. For instance, many pre-service teachers complete teacher training armed with the knowledge of the steps involved in project-based learning and problem-based learning, and the STEM/STEAM approaches, but lack the skills necessary to engage students using these methodologies. Although knowledge of these methodologies is important, it is even more important to develop the skills that will complement the knowledge. Principally, this great responsibility lies with teacher educators. Teacher educators must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience these methodologies at work in their classrooms—as students—and develop 21st-century skills as they solve real-world problems with their peers. These experiences will allow pre-service teachers to see what works and what does not. With course facilitators modelling these methodologies and the active participation of pre-service teachers, they will eventually grow from novices to experts and from simply knowing to being skilled and better prepared to engage their own students using these methodologies.

To better align programmes with the expectations of the NSC, my institution developed and implemented two courses targeting STEM and STEAM integration. Through these courses, pre-service teachers will get the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to design and implement STEM and STEAM lessons. Notably, while these methodologies, including project-based and problem-based learning, are integral for the 21st-century classroom, their implementation at this level can be superficial if not carefully designed. Therefore, to ensure pre-service teachers receive authentic and sustained immersion in these methodologies, curriculum leaders must address potential structural, pedagogical, and institutional barriers.

Continuous professional development for faculty. The demand for education to solve the world's problems, the shifting roles of teachers and students, and emerging trends in education have given rise to the need for the continuous professional development (CPD) of faculty. Importantly, for course facilitators to prepare pre-service teachers using 21st-century methodologies, they must first be experts in their use. Additionally, if pre-service teachers are to be prepared to function effectively in 21st-century classrooms, course facilitators must view the teacher preparation classroom as a 21st-century classroom. Through CPD, facilitators remain competent, current, and contextually relevant. They engage in reflective practice to identify their learning needs, then seek to acquire new knowledge and refine their skills. To this end, curriculum leaders must establish systems for continuous professional development. Furthermore, curriculum leaders must establish mentoring systems and professional learning communities that create a platform for facilitator collaboration and growth.

Following the development of the STEM and STEAM courses at my institution, my colleagues engaged in training sessions to be equipped to facilitate them. This demonstrates the importance of teacher educators being experts in 21st-century methodologies in order to effectively prepare pre-service teachers to use them.

Conclusion

This article highlights the significant role teacher training institutions play in preparing teachers who are relevant for the Jamaican classrooms. It underscores that along with curriculum leaders, my role as a teacher educator determines whether pre-service teachers are fit-for-purpose and armed with the required knowledge and skills to facilitate lessons using 21st-century methodologies and develop 21st-century skills in students.

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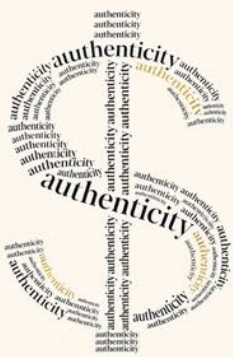
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Boys as Jamaica's Future: A Practitioner's Reflection on Early Intervention, Positive Masculinity and Transformation in Action

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Abstract

As a Jamaican educator and founder of the *Boy Power Movement*, I have become increasingly convinced that boys' educational needs must be addressed early, holistically and without placing their advancement in competition with that of girls. This practitioner reflection explains why I established the Jody Brown Boys' Symposium, how the initiative developed from a parish-based intervention into the *Eastern Sons Boy Power Summit*, and what the experience has taught me about literacy, mentorship, positive masculinity, practical learning and community partnership. I situate my reflections within Jamaican education data and international research, while acknowledging that public reports of participation and continuity do not by themselves establish long-term impact. I therefore argue for a next phase that combines the relational strength of the symposium with school-based follow-up, safeguarding, measurable outcomes and sustained collaboration. My central position is that boys should not be approached as problems to be managed, but as learners and future citizens whose potential must be deliberately cultivated.

Introduction: Why This Work Became Personal

Jamaica's future is sitting in classrooms today. Throughout my career as an educator, I have worked with boys who were curious, capable and eager to contribute, but I have also encountered boys who appeared restless, discouraged, angry, ashamed or already convinced that school was not a place where they belonged. Those encounters have shaped my belief that the way adults interpret boys' behaviour matters. A boy who is labelled only as disruptive may also be struggling to read. A boy who appears indifferent may be protecting himself from repeated embarrassment. A boy who refuses help may have learned that vulnerability is incompatible with manhood.

My concern for boys has never been an argument against girls. Girls' achievements must be celebrated, protected and extended, particularly in fields and situations where inequity remains. I reject the idea that educational opportunity is a contest in which one gender must lose for another to gain. For me, equity means recognizing that different learners may require different forms of support if the national promise that every child can learn is to become more than a slogan.

The evidence makes targeted attention difficult to dismiss. In June 2026, the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information announced a national Boys' Committee after Primary Exit Profile results again showed a female advantage in Language Arts and Mathematics. Girls recorded 80.2 per cent proficiency in Language Arts compared with 63.5 per cent for boys, and 73.2 per cent in Mathematics compared with 64.9 per cent for boys (Jamaica Information Service [JIS], 2026a). Yet the pattern is not one of universal male incapacity. In 2023,



girls outperformed boys in Mathematics and Language Arts, while boys performed better in Science and Social Studies (JIS, 2023). I interpret these differences as a call for careful diagnosis, not stereotyping.

This article presents my perspective as a practitioner. It is not an empirical impact evaluation of the Boy Power Movement. Rather, it combines research, public documentation and reflection on the choices that shaped the initiative. I am of the firm belief that boys' development requires joined-up attention to literacy, social-emotional learning, positive masculinity, mentorship, practical career exposure, spirituality and values, family engagement and school follow-up.

Why I Chose to Intervene Early

The idea for the Boys' Symposium grew from a simple but urgent concern: many interventions reach boys after academic, behavioural or emotional difficulties have become deeply established. By the time some boys arrive at secondary school, they may already identify themselves as failures, resist reading, distrust adults or use disruptive behaviour to protect a fragile sense of competence. I believed that we needed to meet boys earlier, while schools and families still had substantial opportunities to strengthen habits, confidence, identity and aspiration.

I also wanted the intervention to begin by seeing their potential rather than from a deficit mindset. Terms such as 'at risk' may help institutions identify vulnerability, but they can become labels that reduce a child to his difficulties. My intention was not to gather 'problem boys' and lecture them into obedience. I wanted to create a space in which boys could be affirmed, challenged, exposed to new possibilities and reminded that their choices mattered. They needed to encounter adults who could see more in them than a disciplinary record or a test score.

The first publicly reported symposium was held in St. Thomas on May 31, 2023, under the theme 'Today's Boys ... Tomorrow's Men.' Thirty boys from ten primary schools participated, with guidance counsellors helping to identify learners who could 'benefit from the experience' (Stewart, 2023). The programme combined motivational engagement, grooming and self-care, interaction with public agencies, values formation and exposure to adults who could widen the boys' sense of possibility. I chose these elements because education is not only the transmission of subject content. It is also the formation of identity, judgement, relationships, habits and hope.

The theme was intentional. I wanted the boys to understand that childhood choices are connected to adult responsibility. 'Tomorrow's men' was not a call to toughness, dominance or emotional silence. It was an invitation to imagine manhood as discipline, service, respect, courage, responsibility and care for others.



What the Evidence Taught Me to Avoid

As the initiative developed, research strengthened my conviction that boys' underachievement cannot be explained by one cause. It is not enough to say that boys are lazy, careless or naturally less interested in school. It is equally inadequate to blame mothers, absent fathers, female teachers, technology, poverty or peer pressure as though any single factor explains every learner. UNESCO (2022) links boys' disengagement with poverty, child labour, repetition, harmful gender norms, inflexible schooling and weak learning experiences. The World Bank similarly identifies labour-market expectations, social norms and education processes as interacting influences (Welmond & Gregory, 2021).

This complexity matters in Jamaica. Wright's (2025) analysis of CSEC and CAPE outcomes found that female students were 8.5 and 6.6 percentage points more likely, respectively, to pass a generic subject than their male peers. However, school characteristics, subject selection and the composition of subject cohorts explained much of the measured difference. I find this conclusion encouraging because it suggests that outcomes are not fixed features of male identity. Structures, expectations, subject pathways and learning environments can be changed.

The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (JETC, 2021) offers a useful national framework through its emphasis on pedagogic transformation, STEAM, social-emotional learning and equity. These principles challenge me to ask not merely whether a boy is present in school, but whether he feels that the curriculum is meaningful, whether he can read well enough to access it, whether he has a trusted adult, and whether the school environment allows him to seek help without humiliation.

Research on masculinity has been especially important to my thinking. The Jamaican Man-Box study found that restrictive expectations of 'real men', including emotional repression, compulsory toughness and extreme self-reliance, remain influential and are associated with harm to mental health and relationships (Levtov & Telson, 2021). I have therefore come to view positive masculinity as an educational issue. When a boy believes that reading is not masculine, asking for help is weakness, or respect is earned through aggression, his relationship with learning becomes more difficult.



Building the Boy Power Movement

The movement's development has been gradual. I did not begin with a finished national model. I began with a concern, a local network and a willingness to bring people together around boys. Each staging taught me more about what captured the boys' attention, what partners could contribute, and what would be required to move from an inspiring event to a sustainable intervention.

At the second staging, held at Rudolph Elder Park in 2024, boys from two parishes in Jamaica participated in equipment troubleshooting, cardboard recycling, art and craft, jewellery making and engagement with government and corporate booths (JIS, 2024). I valued these activities because they connected education to making, creativity, environmental responsibility and possible careers. The lesson was not that all boys learn in one way or that hands-on experiences should replace academic rigour. Rather, practical activity can provide an entry point through which literacy, numeracy, collaboration, problem-solving and confidence become visible and meaningful.

By May 2026, the initiative had developed into the third Eastern Sons Boy Power Summit at Bath Primary School, involving boys from St. Thomas, Portland and St. Mary. Under the theme 'Today's Learners ... Tomorrow's Leaders,' the summit included motivational presentations, agency booths, practical activities, community participation, devotional leadership by a school boys' group and support from the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information (JIS, 2026b). The widening geographic reach was encouraging, but the deeper significance for me was the continuity. Many good initiatives disappear after one successful event. Sustaining the programme across three stagings required partnership, trust and a shared belief that the work was worth continuing.

The themes also evolved deliberately. 'Today's Boys ... Tomorrow's Men' focused on identity and adult responsibility. 'Today's Learners ... Tomorrow's Leaders' placed learning at the centre of leadership. I wanted the boys to understand that leadership is not simply visibility, status or authority. It begins with teachability, self-management, service, competence and respect for others.

What the Boys and the Process Have Taught Me

My first lesson is that high expectations are most powerful when they are joined with dignity. Boys should be corrected, held accountable and challenged to improve, but shame is not a sustainable teaching strategy. Public humiliation may produce temporary compliance while weakening trust and belonging. I have become more convinced that adults can be firm without being cruel and demanding without making a child feel worthless.

My second lesson is that exposure can break the cycle of limitations. A child cannot easily aspire to a future he has never seen. When boys meet professionals, agencies, skilled workers, entrepreneurs, artists, educators and community leaders, occupations that once seemed distant become imaginable. Career exposure is therefore not an added attraction; it is part of helping boys connect present learning with future purposes.

My third lesson is that mentorship must be broad and carefully structured. Responsible men are important because boys need to see men reading, serving, apologizing, managing emotion, respecting women and working with discipline. At the same time, I would never minimize the contribution of mothers, grandmothers, female teachers, guidance counsellors and female leaders. Many boys are sustained by women. The goal is not to exclude women, but to expand the number of trustworthy adults surrounding each boy. Any formal mentoring programme must include screening, safeguarding, training, supervision and clear boundaries.

My fourth lesson is that literacy cannot be separated from identity. Reading is the gateway to every subject, to technical training, job applications, digital information and lifelong learning. A boy who repeatedly struggles to read may begin to protect himself by rejecting the activity that exposes his difficulty. We must therefore make literacy intervention dignifying, diagnostic and culturally relevant. Jamaican and Caribbean stories, biographies, sports, music, agriculture, science, technology, entrepreneurship, faith-based texts and graphic formats can help boys see reading as a source of power rather than punishment.

My fifth lesson is one of humility: a successful event is not the same as proven transformation. Public reports establish that the initiative occurred, attracted partners and continued to grow. They do not establish that attendance caused lasting improvements in reading, behaviour, school attendance, emotional regulation or transition outcomes. I regard this distinction as essential. Advocacy should be passionate, but claims must remain honest.



A Secular and Values-Based Responsibility

My commitment to boys' education is grounded in both national development and faith. From a secular perspective, Jamaica loses human capacity when any young person leaves school without the literacy, numeracy, communication, technical competence and self-management required for employment and family life. Early disengagement narrows the future supply of technicians, farmers, entrepreneurs, educators, creatives, health workers, fathers, community leaders and mentors.

A values-based perspective asks what kind of men education is helping to form. Jamaica's approved Philosophy of Education begins 'Under God' and calls for the nurturing of each learner's potential through academic and vocational learning, values, life skills, inclusivity, respect and love of country (Ministry of Education and Youth, 2024). I see this as an invitation for schools, families, churches, community organizations and public agencies to cooperate around shared virtues even when participants do not hold identical beliefs.

Within my Christian understanding, Proverbs 22:6 presents adults as stewards of children's formation, while Luke 2:52 portrays development in wisdom, stature and relationships with God and people. These biblical scriptures do not justify domination or restrictive gender roles. For me, they support a view of manhood marked by discipline, humility, courage, service, compassion, justice and respect for women and girls. Strength includes self-control. Leadership includes service. Faith includes responsibility.

From an Annual Event to a Sustainable System

The next stage of the Boy Power Movement must preserve the warmth, visibility and partnership of the summit while creating stronger continuity around each participant. A memorable day can ignite hope, but transformation depends on what happens before and after the event. I therefore believe that participating schools should use a simple referral process based on multiple indicators rather than labels. Attendance, literacy need, social-emotional concerns, behaviour patterns, family circumstances, teacher observations and the boy's own voice can guide selection.

Each participant should leave with a short development plan, a named school-based adult and scheduled follow-up. Mentors should work through safe, documented arrangements connected to schools and families. Where a boy requires specialized support, the programme should strengthen referral pathways rather than attempt to replace counsellors, psychologists, social workers or other professionals.

Evaluation also needs to become a central part of the model. It need not be excessively expensive or technical. A core dashboard could compare baseline and follow-up information on attendance, reading confidence, disciplinary referrals, participation, goal clarity and school belonging. Short interviews with boys, parents and teachers could explain changes that numbers miss. Data should be disaggregated by age, school, disability and location while protecting confidentiality. This evidence would help us identify which components deserve expansion.



What I Believe Jamaica Must Do Next

Based on the evidence and my experience, I believe Jamaica should pursue six connected actions.

Strengthen early-warning and early-support systems in primary schools. Persistent absence, low literacy, withdrawal and escalating behaviour should be addressed before secondary transition. Early support can prevent temporary difficulty from becoming a stable identity of failure.

Make literacy intervention dignifying and relevant. Diagnostic teaching, small-group support, attractive libraries, digital texts and Jamaican and Caribbean material should be paired with learner choice and practical application.

Explicitly teach social-emotional skills and positive masculinity. Boys need language for emotion, strategies for resolving conflict, permission to seek help and models of strength based on self-control, responsibility and service.

Develop mentorship networks. Schools, alumni, churches, professional bodies, youth organisations and businesses can provide role models and career exposure, but common standards are necessary to protect children and maintain quality.

Connect academic learning with purposeful activity. STEAM, TVET, agriculture, music, sport, entrepreneurship, coding, food preparation, design and community projects can reveal the usefulness of literacy and numeracy. Practical learning should enrich, not replace, strong academic instruction.

Fund long-term partnership. The national Boys' Committee, schools, teacher-training institutions and community initiatives should document effective practice and distribute responsibility across institutions so that programmes can survive changes in leadership.

Conclusion: The Legacy I Hope to Build

I began this work with a conviction that remains unchanged: Boys should not have to reach crisis point before adults decide that they are worth sustained attention. They need early support, positive role models, emotional language, clear boundaries, faith and values, career exposure and adults who refuse to reduce them to their worst day.

The Boy Power Movement has shown me what can happen when schools, guidance counsellors, public agencies, businesses, churches and communities gather around boys with a common purpose. It has also reminded me that inspiration must be followed by systems. The movement's future value will depend on stronger school follow-up, safeguarded mentorship, family partnership and credible evaluation.

Jamaica does not have to choose between the advancement of girls and the development of boys. We need both. My hope is for an education system in which every learner is seen, supported, challenged and prepared for life. When boys grow in wisdom, skill, character, faith and responsibility, they become more than successful students. They become builders of families, communities, institutions and the nation. That is the legacy I hope to help create. That is transformation in action.

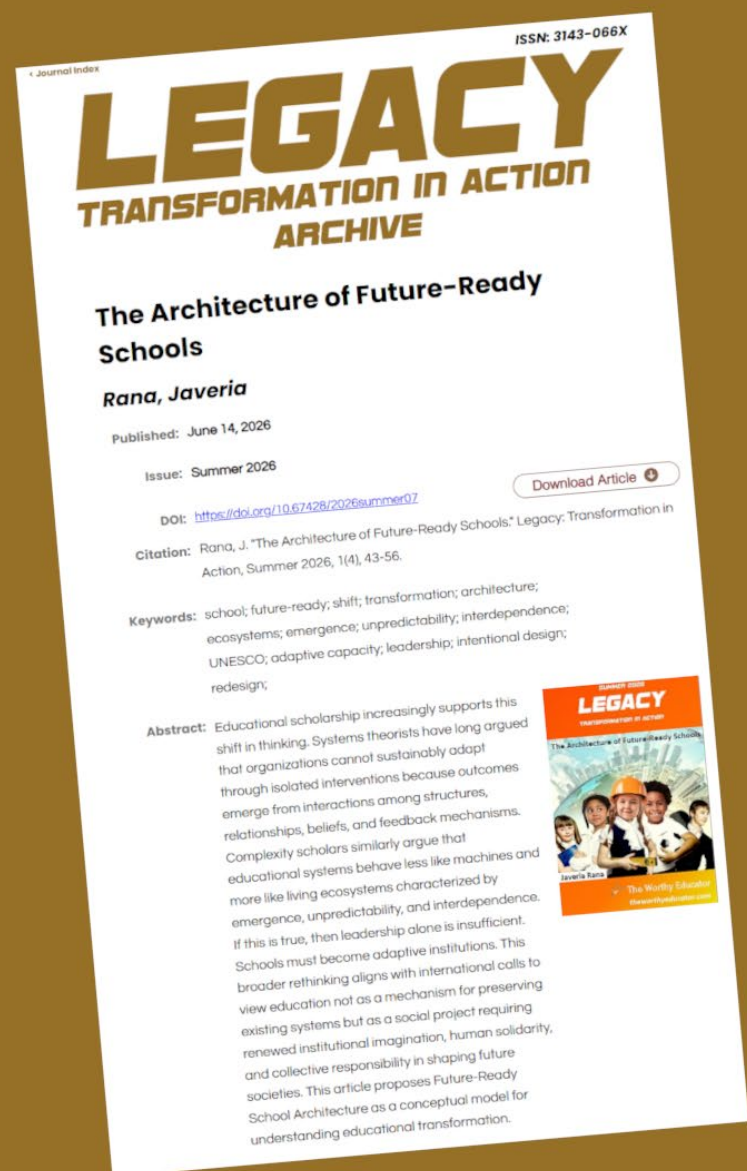
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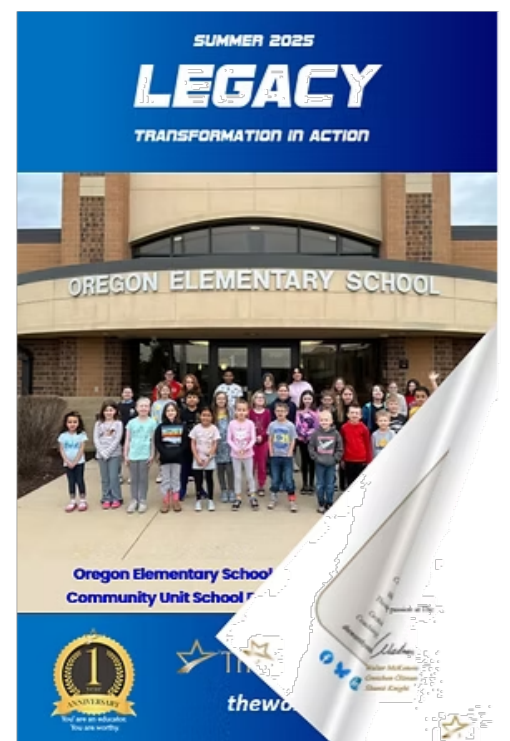
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The Importance of Teacher Wellness in Higher Education

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher wellness has become an increasingly important topic within education. Although teaching at the tertiary level is often perceived as having fewer barriers to wellness than other educational settings, higher education lecturers face numerous challenges that can affect their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This growing concern reflects a broader recognition that the success of education depends not only on what is taught but also on the well-being of those who teach. Education has long been regarded as the cornerstone of national development, social mobility, and economic prosperity.

While educational success has traditionally been measured by students' academic performance, examination results, and graduation rates, there is increasing recognition that meaningful teaching and learning cannot occur unless equal attention is given to the overall wellness of teachers. Teacher well-being is now widely recognized as a critical factor influencing teaching quality, learning environments, and student outcomes. Wellness is therefore not merely an outcome of education but a fundamental prerequisite for quality teaching, effective learning, and sustainable educational development (OECD, 2020).

Understanding Lecturer Wellness

To fully appreciate the importance of lecturer wellness in higher education, it is first necessary to understand what wellness encompasses. Wellness extends beyond the absence of illness and is widely recognized as a multidimensional concept that includes physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being (McMullin, 2024). Physical wellness includes proper nutrition, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, and access to healthcare. Mental wellness refers to one's ability to cope with stress, think clearly, and maintain psychological resilience. Emotional wellness involves understanding and managing emotions while maintaining healthy self-esteem and positive relationships. Social wellness focuses on developing meaningful connections with colleagues, families, and communities, while spiritual wellness reflects one's sense of purpose, values, integrity, hope, and moral responsibility.

When these dimensions are nurtured, individuals are better equipped to cope with life's challenges and perform at their fullest potential. For lecturers, maintaining these dimensions of wellness is particularly important, as the demands of teaching, research, student supervision, academic advising, and institutional service require sustained physical energy, emotional resilience, and mental clarity. When lecturers are well, they are better positioned to contribute positively to the academic community.



The Reality of Lecturer Wellness in Higher Education

Despite the importance of these dimensions of wellness, they are often overlooked within higher education. Lecturers and other academic staff are expected to balance teaching, research, student supervision, administrative responsibilities, and community engagement, yet the demands associated with these multiple roles can place considerable strain on their well-being.

Unfortunately, the health and wellness of teachers have often taken a back seat within educational systems. Oftentimes, as lecturers, we are told that our 18 contact hours are what we are employed to do. However, these hours do not include research, student consultations, marking, supervising students, professional development, course reviews, or the many meetings and staff development sessions we must attend. Policies frequently prioritize curriculum reform, standardized assessments, and accountability measures while giving insufficient attention to the people responsible for delivering education. As a result, many educators have silently endured chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and overwhelming workloads. The consequences of lecturer wellness extend far beyond individual health; they directly influence the quality of teaching, learning, and student outcomes in higher education.



Reflecting on my own experience, after serving more than eighteen (18) years in education without taking a vacation from teaching, I came to the realization that I needed to prioritize my own well-being. As a result, I made the decision to take my vacation leave in 2025. While I often joke that taking this leave was one of the best decisions I have ever made, there is a great deal of truth in that statement. The time away provided the rest and renewal that I desperately needed, allowing me to return with renewed energy, fresh perspectives, and the inspiration to write this article. My experience reinforced the importance of lecturer wellness and demonstrated that investing in one's own well-being is not a luxury but a necessity for sustaining excellence in teaching and scholarship.

Research has consistently shown that teacher wellness directly influences instructional quality, student engagement, classroom management, and student achievement. Teachers who are mentally and emotionally healthy are more enthusiastic, patient, creative, and capable of building positive relationships with their students they are more likely to design engaging lessons, differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs, and foster classroom environments where students feel safe and valued. In higher education, these qualities enable lecturers to facilitate critical thinking, encourage independent learning, promote collaboration, and support the professional growth of adult learners.

In contrast, teachers experiencing burnout often struggle with emotional exhaustion, reduced professional accomplishment, and depersonalization. Burnout can also diminish lecturers' capacity to supervise research, provide constructive feedback, engage in scholarly activities, and maintain productive relationships with students and colleagues. It also contributes to increased absenteeism, high turnover, and the growing migration of Caribbean teachers to countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States in search of improved working conditions and better work-life balance. These challenges not only affect individual lecturers but also place significant pressure on higher education institutions, which may experience disruptions in programme delivery, reduced institutional capacity, and difficulties in retaining experienced academic staff.



The growing emphasis on lecturer wellness is also supported by international research. The 2024 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) found that teacher well-being is closely associated with job satisfaction and teaching quality. Excessive administrative responsibilities, increasing classroom demands, inadequate support systems, and heavy workloads were identified as significant contributors to declining teacher well-being. These findings mirror the realities experienced by many educators across the Caribbean. Although TALIS focuses primarily on school educators, the findings are equally relevant to higher education, where lecturers face comparable challenges. Similar pressures arise from increasing student enrolment, research productivity expectations, accreditation requirements, grant writing, and service commitments, all of which place considerable demands on lecturers' time, energy, and overall well-being.

These competing responsibilities reinforce the importance of prioritising lecturer wellness as a key component of institutional effectiveness and teaching excellence. Beyond its impact on lecturers themselves, wellness has significant implications for student learning. Teacher wellness does not only affect teachers themselves; it profoundly influences student outcomes. Research indicates that students taught by highly stressed or burned-out teachers often demonstrate lower academic achievement, reduced motivation, and increased behavioural challenges. A classroom reflects the emotional climate established by the teacher. When educators are supported, students are more likely to flourish academically and socially.

Supporting Lecturer Wellness

Looking back on the many days when I have left work feeling mentally and physically exhausted, I have often wondered whether this is simply part of being a lecturer or whether it reflects a much deeper issue within higher education. The demands of teaching, preparing lectures, supervising students, responding to emails, attending meetings, and meeting institutional deadlines can easily become overwhelming. These experiences have led me to reflect on the importance of lecturer wellness—not simply as a personal concern but as an essential component of effective teaching and learning.

Having reflected on these experiences, I believe the conversation must now shift from recognising the problem to identifying how higher education institutions can better support wellness among lecturers

Equally important, leadership plays a significant role in promoting lecturer wellness. Supportive leaders who encourage collaboration, recognize staff achievements, communicate openly, and prioritise employee well-being contribute significantly to lecturer morale and job satisfaction. As lecturers, we are more likely to remain motivated, engaged, and committed to our profession when our contributions are recognised and when we feel trusted and supported by institutional leaders. Conversely, authoritarian leadership, excessive monitoring, unrealistic expectations, and poor communication can accelerate stress and burnout.

Higher education institutions should therefore move beyond isolated wellness initiatives and establish comprehensive wellness programmes that include employee assistance services, counselling, peer mentoring, stress management workshops, wellness committees, and opportunities for professional collaboration. Embedding these initiatives into institutional policies and everyday practice would provide meaningful support systems that promote the physical, mental, emotional, and professional well-being of academic staff.

Another strategy that would make a difference is reducing unnecessary administrative burdens while strengthening professional support structures. Many lecturers find themselves balancing teaching, research, publishing, curriculum development, student advising, committee work, accreditation requirements, and community service. When these responsibilities become overwhelming, they reduce the time and energy available for high-quality teaching, positive interactions with students, and scholarly productivity.

Policy reform remains essential if wellness is to become embedded within higher education systems. Universities and colleges should develop comprehensive wellness policies that prioritise lecturer well-being. These policies should include increased investment in employee assistance programmes, counselling services, wellness training, annual wellness assessments, and opportunities for professional development. Bearing in mind what works well in our jurisdiction as not a one size fits all.



I also believe that opportunities for professional collaboration should be intentionally fostered. Working alongside supportive colleagues through peer mentoring, collaborative teaching, and communities of practice can strengthen professional confidence, reduce feelings of isolation, and create a stronger sense of belonging within the institution.

Investment in wellness should not be viewed as an additional educational expense but rather as a strategic investment in educational quality. Poor lecturer health contributes to increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, staff turnover, and declining educational outcomes.

Conclusion

Looking back on those exhausting days, I no longer believe these roles and responsibilities should simply be accepted as part of academic life. Rather, they have reminded me that lecturer wellness is not solely an individual responsibility but a shared institutional commitment. Educational excellence depends on creating environments where lecturers are respected, supported, and empowered to thrive.

I believe higher education institutions must be intentional in developing policies and support systems that promote lecturer wellness. These policies should not remain on paper but should be embedded in everyday practice, creating conditions where lecturers can truly benefit and maintain healthy, balanced, and productive professional lives.

Ultimately, investing in lecturer wellness is an investment in better teaching, richer learning experiences, stronger institutions, and, most importantly, the success of the students we serve. My hope is that this article encourages meaningful conversations and practical action, reminding us that as we invest in the well-being of those who educate others, we strengthen the future of higher education itself.



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Attending to the Affective Domain for Increased Student Participation and Improved Behaviour

Judene Williams

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Educator

Very early in the semester, while teaching at the primary school, I realized that many of the challenges I encountered in the classroom were rooted in students' social and emotional needs. This realization shaped my approach to teaching and deepened my appreciation for the affective domain of learning. The affective domain focuses on learners' social and emotional development and was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) to complement the cognitive and psychomotor domains. However, I believe its application should extend beyond acknowledging students' emotions to intentionally addressing factors that significantly influence learning, such as hunger, the need for attention and affirmation, opportunities for play, and meaningful engagement. In my experience, attending to these needs encourages greater student participation and contributes to improved behaviour. Although such an approach may not eliminate all instances of misbehaviour or guarantee full cooperation, it can significantly reduce disruptive behaviours. Over time, teachers who consistently demonstrate care for students' holistic well-being earn their trust and respect, fostering stronger relationships and encouraging students to work collaboratively toward creating a positive and productive learning environment.

My appreciation of the affective domain was strengthened through my classroom experiences, where I witnessed firsthand how attending to students' emotional and social needs positively transformed both their behaviour and their attitudes toward learning. The affective domain encompasses aspects of learning related to emotions, attitudes, values, and motivation, reflecting changes in learners' interests, dispositions, and appreciation (Kretchmar, 2019). Although the cognitive domain has traditionally received greater emphasis in education, the affective domain has gained increasing recognition for its significant influence on learning outcomes (Kretchmar, 2019). This growing recognition is reflected in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information's (MOEYI) commitment to promoting a more holistic approach to education. Such an approach acknowledges that cognitive, psychomotor, and affective development are interdependent, and that neglecting any one of these domains can undermine students' overall learning and development.

From Behaviour Management to Relationship Building

My first year of teaching was both challenging and enlightening. I vividly remember being assigned a class in which two students consistently stood out because of their restlessness, disruptive behaviour, and failure to complete assigned tasks. Their behaviour initially appeared to be disciplinary issues, but as I got to know them better, I realized that their actions reflected unmet emotional, social, and academic needs rather than simple defiance.

One day, I publicly commended both students for completing a classroom task. The response was immediate. One student beamed with a broad smile, reminding me of the transformative power of affirmation. Although the other student responded more quietly, his increased effort in completing subsequent tasks suggested that he, too, had been motivated by the recognition. This experience demonstrated that students often respond positively when their efforts, rather than only their shortcomings, are acknowledged.

For one of the students, however, affirmation alone was insufficient. I soon recognized that much of his disruptive behaviour was driven by a need for attention. Rather than repeatedly correcting him, I intentionally redirected his energy by creating opportunities for him to contribute positively in the classroom. He was

placed in a small collaborative group and assigned leadership roles that allowed him to showcase strengths I had observed early in the year, particularly his creativity in songwriting and dance. Each opportunity to lead or perform was met with visible pride and enthusiasm, reinforcing positive behaviours through recognition from both his peers and me.

As our relationship developed, the student became increasingly comfortable approaching me to discuss matters unrelated to school. Although these conversations occasionally interrupted lessons, I listened attentively, engaged him briefly, and then gently redirected him to complete his work. These interactions strengthened our relationship and helped him feel seen and valued beyond his academic performance.

Recognizing that part of his frustration stemmed from a reading difficulty, I also implemented peer support by pairing him with academically stronger classmates while I attended to the rest of the class. This reduced his anxiety, increased his willingness to attempt assigned tasks, and fostered greater participation in classroom activities.

Understanding that meaningful change required a partnership beyond the classroom, I contacted his parent to discuss both his behavioural and learning challenges and sought support in reinforcing the strategies being implemented at school. The student was aware of these conversations and appeared encouraged by the collective effort invested in his success. I also provided regular motivational conversations about the importance of education, celebrated incremental progress through praise and small incentives, and, on a few occasions, ensured that he received lunch when I became aware that hunger was affecting his ability to concentrate and engage in learning.

These experiences reinforced an important lesson: students' behaviour is often a form of communication. When teachers intentionally address learners' emotional, social, and basic needs alongside their academic needs, they create conditions that foster engagement, improve behaviour, and strengthen relationships. While no single strategy transformed the student overnight, the combination of affirmation, meaningful responsibility, academic support, family collaboration, and genuine care gradually contributed to more positive classroom participation and a greater willingness to learn.

Overtime, I recognized the transformation in this student in two distinct ways. Firstly, his attitude towards schoolwork moved from disinterest to taking the initiative to prepare his utensils for the start of class, enquiring about the task for the day, admitting, and seeking help when he came upon a challenge. Secondly, his behaviour improved and he became more settled, engaged in the lesson and consistent in attempting to complete the tasks for each day. He also sought feedback on his efforts when they were not readily stated. Although these changes did not happen overnight, the consistent use of these strategies gradually began to influence both student behaviour and his attitude towards learning. Looking back, I realised that before these students were ready to learn from me, they first needed to know that I genuinely cared about them as an individual.

Responding to Students' Emotions: A Lesson Beyond the Curriculum

My experiences also taught me that the affective domain is not only essential for supporting students with behavioural or academic challenges; it is equally important for students who consistently perform well and readily complete their work. One morning, my students worked diligently to complete their first assigned task because they were eagerly anticipating an outdoor class competition during the next physical education session. However, at the scheduled time, the activity had to be cancelled as dark clouds gathered and rain became imminent. The disappointment of the students was evident. Rather than continuing with the day's timetable as planned, I decided to respond to their emotional needs first. I brought out a collection of indoor games, including card games and other activities, and invited the students to form small groups and choose a game to play. I even joined one of the groups in a card game, which quickly filled the classroom with laughter, conversation, and excitement. Within a short time, the disappointment that had overshadowed the morning had given way to joy and renewed enthusiasm. The children were observed laughing and talking while playing.

After approximately thirty minutes, I announced that it was time to resume lessons. Without hesitation, the students cooperated by rearranging their desks, taking out their learning materials, and quietly awaiting the next instructions. The remainder of the lesson was one of the most productive of the day. That afternoon reminded me that acknowledging students' emotions is sometimes the most effective classroom management strategy. Once the students felt their emotion of disappointment was validated, they were ready to learn. This reinforced an important lesson for me. Sometimes the most effective teaching strategy is not introducing new content but first responding to the emotional needs of students.

Embedding the Affective Domain in Everyday Teaching

I am convinced that attending to the affective domain should not be viewed as an optional aspect of teaching but as an essential component of creating inclusive, engaging, and effective classrooms. Krathwohl's taxonomy of affective domain comprises of five levels namely receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and

characterization (Cutting Edge, 2007). By intentionally incorporating affective objectives into lesson planning, teachers help students move beyond acquiring knowledge to developing attitudes, values, and behaviours that influence how they relate to others and apply their learning in real-life situations. According to Cutting Edge (2007), the taxonomy encourages learners to progress from simply receiving information to valuing and ultimately characterizing it, where positive attitudes and values become internalized and reflected consistently in their behaviour. For example, an affective objective such as *respecting the opinions of others* not only enhances classroom discussions and group work by promoting cooperation and reducing conflict but also nurtures dispositions that extend beyond the classroom. As students internalize this value, they are more likely to build healthy relationships based on mutual respect. Equally important, teachers reinforce these values when they consistently model respect, empathy, and compassion in their own interactions with students. For this reason, I believe that attending to the affective domain should extend beyond including affective objectives in lesson plans to intentionally responding to students' social and emotional needs through everyday classroom interactions and relationships.

Recognizing the importance of the affective domain, I offer several practical strategies that teachers can use to support students' social and emotional development:

- Being intentional about understanding the factors that affect students, such as their home situation, reading level, interests, and individual needs.
- Involving parents or guardians in reinforcing students' behavioural and academic progress.
- Addressing basic needs that may affect students' behaviour and learning, such as hunger.
- Demonstrating genuine interest in students' interests and talents to build rapport.
- Celebrating effort, small improvements, as well as significant achievements.
- Acknowledging students' feelings or behaviour before redirecting them.

Looking back, I realise that some of my greatest successes, as a teacher did not come from delivering the perfect lesson, but from taking the time to understand my students as children first and learners second. When teachers intentionally attend to the affective domain, they create classrooms where students not only demonstrate behaviours that are conducive to learning but also feel valued, respected, and eager to learn.

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Judene Williams has over 15 years of teaching experience across the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of the education system. She is passionate about education and training, viewing them as powerful tools for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to thrive in their professions and contribute meaningfully to society. Committed to lifelong learning, Mrs. Williams continually seeks opportunities to enhance her professional practice, enabling her to make lasting contributions to the education sector. She is married and the proud mother of one child.



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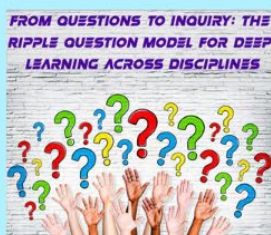
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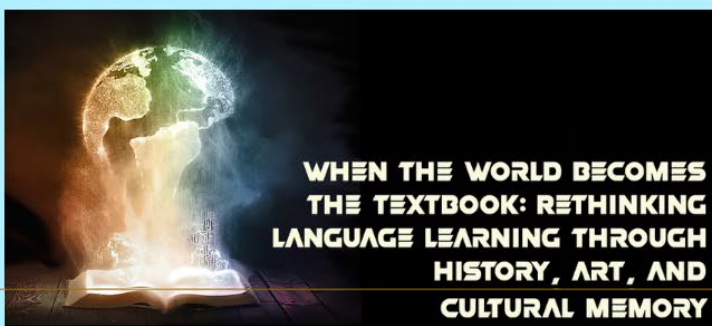
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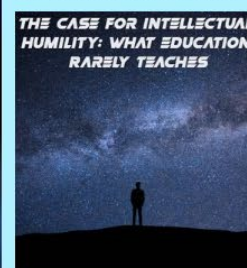
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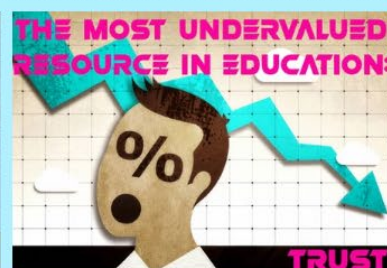
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Javeria Rana is the Director of Academics at Unique International Educational Services (UIES), overseeing more than five-hundred schools, ensuring that quality education reaches thousands of students, always looking for ways to improve teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and leadership in education. She founded Café Learning, inspired by the World Café Method, to dismantle traditional barriers, empowering learners and educators to reimagine the future of education. You can connect with Javeria by email [here](#) and see more of her work on her [site](#)!



Tackling Incidence of Academic Dishonesty through the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) Framework

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Introduction

The rapid ascension of Artificial Intelligence (AI), coupled with psychosocial disruptions due to COVID-19, has led to discordance in the cognitive development of younger generations, and is invariably experienced by educators at all levels in this digital age. Notwithstanding, the inception of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, ClaudeAI, and Google Gemini has made penwriting and long hours of academic research a thing of the past. Bourne (2025) argues that the global education sector has experienced a digital transformation with the inception of AI, and has become key to pedagogical novelty. By proxy, our brains have habitually evolved to seek the fastest and most efficient pathways, requiring the least effort or expenditure of energy; some call it ingenuity, while others dismiss it as lackadaisical. Daringly, there is a semblance of insurgence against the traditional learning dogma, indubitably evident with modern generations, as AI and digital technology has taken over the mundane functions of data summary, synthesis, and redacting. There is growing incidence observed in academic dishonesty however, among students at the secondary and post-secondary level and “although AI offers the potential for enhanced teaching and learning, it raises questions regarding its appropriate scope” (Clarke, 2025).

Addressing Academic Dishonesty in the Caribbean

Students are unfortunately engineering novel avenues of proclaimed originality through AI, commensurate to growing efforts to reduce academic dishonesty incidence by facilitators. A 2023 survey on LLM usage by 3,017 students carried out by Pudasaini et al (2025) revealed that nearly one third admittedly use ChatGPT to aid them in completion of their homework, and “The rise of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and Gemini has led to a surge in academic misconduct” (Pudasaini et al., 2025). Despite this increase of academic dishonesty through AI usage, there is no observed combined Academic Integrity Policy fashioned for the Caribbean region to address this incessant issue. Recently the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) (the Caribbean region’s governing body for standardized assessments) published its intent of removing Student Based Assessment (SBA) for most non-practical subjects, in response to students using AI to fashion their portfolios to nigh perfection. Therefore, It is clear that overreliance on customary theoretical assessment for evidence of learning in this day and age should be tailored or rather discontinued in my candid opinion, and further centralise the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) methodology to full effect. The CBET framework reverses the narrative of relying solely on pure theoretical assessment, through engaging psychomotor and affective domains as evidence of learning and competence for the modern student.

Context of the CBET Framework

Why fully centralise CBET? More appropriately, will it receive the necessary buy in and monetary investment to fully retrofit the Caribbean region’s education system in today’s economic climate? Competency Based Education and Training “can be defined as training based on the participant’s ability to demonstrate mastery of skills performed under certain conditions, to specific standards which he or she must acquire before moving to the next phase of learning or life” (Nyachiro, n.d.). CBET’s definition although elastic, has provided a systematic approach to addressing skills shortage, and it is heralded as an act of providence for potential

productivity evidence to employers; a skills transcript or passport for lack of a better term. The Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) architecture astutely provides an umbrella to CBET, and may not have the same level of publicity or prestige of regional universities and colleges, for instance the University of the West Indies (The UWI), University of Technology (UTECH), or the Mico University College (The Mico), but nevertheless it plays a pivotal role in driving economic resilience and attracting global talent through the brain gain phenomena or brain circulation. “TVET programs typically include a mix of classroom instruction, hands-on training, and experiential learning opportunities, and may be offered at the secondary, post-secondary, or higher education level” (Okoth, 2023).

According to Dambudzo (2018), employers have made numerous complaints about the lack of preparedness of school leavers for the job industry, and “the two [educators and industry] do not understand each other and appear to lack an understanding or respect for interests and requirements for the other and yet TVET institutions are there to service industry, and also ensure that their graduates get employed for personal and industry’s benefit in order to promote socio-economic transformation” (Davis, 2004, as cited by Dambudzo, 2018). The heightened dissonance between the competencies of hired workers and their qualifications has resulted in countless millions lost in capital and productivity hours. Notably, it can be reasoned that those same students that had the propensity and overreliance on AI during their studies would consequently succumb to workplace exposure; stymieing their critical thinking and deductive reasoning required for workplace augmentation and market adaptation.

In Jamaica, the HEART NSTA Trust was established in 1982 by then Prime Minister The Honourable Edward Seaga to address underdevelopment in Jamaica, at a time when the country faced bouts of economic stratification and unrest. The institution’s intent was to “provide vocational training across the island, which, in the long run, would have equipped Jamaican workers with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for higher levels of productivity” (HEART NSTA Trust, n.d.). Instinctively it has grown to champion TVET and the CBET methodology with much promise and results, with over 600,000 skilled workers and entrepreneurs to date, ready to inspire meaningful change with humble pride.

The Role of the Modern Educator

Efforts to cheat, regardless of context will be inevitable. With ongoing instances of Academic Dishonesty in the modern classroom, as an educator our role must decisively create a potent fissure in their efforts, perhaps not punitive in nature, but rather utilise positive reinforcement where necessary. This is where the belief in CBET methodology will flourish, as students demonstrating what they know not on paper but through guided practical simulation will eventually force themselves to improve. Benjamin Franklin once quoted that “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” Student involvement is critical for learning as there is a greater load of sensory information collected, and it builds rapport with the facilitator, leading to a greater probability of empowerment and confidence. Skills such as active listening, public speaking, negotiation, persuasion and storytelling would be amplified geometrically through CBET; skills that most C- executives treasure more than hard skills and technical competencies amid little contribution to process efficiency. Mark you, it is imperative to have competent skill workers, as they not only provide a higher productive throughput, but they instinctively make the workplace safer for themselves and their colleagues. “Employers too want soft skills, and they do want to know that their workforce is qualified and effective but they want the skills to be wrapped up and operate in situ” (Shakespeare, Keleher & Moxham, 2007).

Conclusion

Although the process of integrating the CBET framework for such a reform in the realm of education may be complex, bureaucratic, and easily misunderstood at first, the Return on Investment (ROI) for such an implementation would transfigure many Small Island Developing States’ (SIDS) economic infrastructures long term, which could ultimately attract new talent, become resilient to recession shocks, and aggressively drive technological ingenuity. I am confident that any Caribbean SIDS would hope to model a country such as Singapore: Singapore is 1/15th the size of Jamaica, yet has a 600 Billion USD economy recorded, according to the World Bank Group website (n.d.). The country learnt from early to take its education sector seriously, especially in the area of financial literacy. Artificial intelligence will not leave us, and it goes the same for academic dishonesty, however it is our duty as educators to establish an ethical platform of academic integrity and engineer new ways to combat cheating in our classrooms. The CBET methodology is a practical, effective framework that ensures students don’t heavily rely on artificial intelligence to give them all the answers. Instead, they can ethically use it to bridge gaps in their own learning, and address it with their facilitators in an appropriate context.

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It's September and Time for Our Annual Ask: What's Your Organization's Wellness Score?

The 2026 Worthy Educator Wellness Survey

Please share your organization's current wellness practices!

All responses are anonymous and confidential.

How many years are you in the profession? *

What is the highest degree you have attained? *

- Select -

What is your current role in education? *

- ☐ Classroom Teacher
- ☐ Building Level Support Staff
- ☐ District Level Support Staff
- ☐ Building Administrator
- ☐ District Administrator
- ☐ Higher Education Faculty
- ☐ Higher Education Staff
- ☐ Other

My organization values relationships as a priority. *

☆

1

☆

2

☆

3

☆

4

☆

5

We monitor and report on wellness. *

☆

1

☆

2

☆

3

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4

☆

5

We utilize trauma-informed approaches. *

☆

1

☆

2

☆

3

☆

4

☆

5

My work environment is a safe place. *

☆

1

☆

2

☆

3

☆

4

☆

5



Leading by Serving: A New Principal's Reflection on Servant Leadership

Devmarie Blake-Brown

Principal, Bath Primary School

Ministry of Education Teacher of Excellence

Background

When I stepped into the role of principal, I did not see it as a promotion above people. I saw it as a deeper call to serve those who I was called to lead. For me, leadership in a school cannot begin with the title on the office door. It must begin with the people at the gate, in the classroom, in the office, on the compound, in the kitchen, on the board, in the church, in the community, and, most importantly, in the hearts and homes of our children. I distinctly remember the astonishment, followed by the sheer delight, on the face of the first student I encountered when I stopped to help him tie his untied shoelace. Though simple, that act reinforced my belief that true service begins by meeting people where they are and seeking to uplift them one step at a time. It was a small gesture, but it became a powerful reminder that leadership is expressed through everyday acts of care, humility, and presence.

That lesson continues to shape my leadership journey as a new principal. Each day, I am reminded that service is not weakness; it is strength exercised with humility and purpose. One of the clearest examples came during Sports Day, one of the most anticipated events on our school calendar. Unfortunately, severe weather and other unforeseen circumstances left the field waterlogged, placing the event in jeopardy. When a parent and a teacher suggested a way to salvage the field, I immediately picked up a shovel and wheelbarrow and began heaping sand to put onto the surface. Before long, teachers, parents, and community members joined the effort. In that moment, I learned that servant leadership is not about issuing directives from the sidelines; it is about being the first to serve so that others are inspired to serve alongside you.

This commitment to leading through service extends beyond the school gates and into the wider community. Another incident that pops into mind of what servant leadership looks like in reality is when a worker ran into my office to say that a nearby dwelling of a community member was ablaze. I quickly called the Fire Department and then proceeded to jump walls and fences to assist in whatever way I could. One of the workers, unknowingly, was observing my actions and proceeded to blurt out: "Is wha kind a Principal this mon?! (What kind of Principal is this?!) Shi sidung and talk to wi as workers; (She sits and talks with us as workers;) shi go community ded yaawd; (she goes to community funerals;) she on scene of fire, she visit the shut in. (she is at the scene of a fire, she visits the shut-ins.) This Principal different mon. (This Principal is different.)"

Those words resonated because the actions were being carried out instinctively in connection with that innate desire to help/serve others, and they affirmed that people notice authentic leadership. These actions were also impactful. More importantly, the ultimate goal is for my team to understand the leadership style and adopt it in their relationship with all stakeholders.



A Journey of Service and Growth

I began teaching at a young age, and over the years I have served in different school spaces in St. Thomas, Jamaica. My work as Literacy Coordinator became one of the most defining parts of my professional life because it reminded me that no school improves by accident. Improvement comes when people are mobilised, encouraged, trained, and trusted.

I remember being given a young man who was very disruptive at school. He could not read and spent most of his engaging in disruptive behaviours that affected those around him. I decided to work with him, one step at a time. I used my early mornings, my lunchtime, and my evenings to find the best ways to help him leave primary school with the basic skill of reading. Our efforts paid off, and he successfully earned placement at a highly regarded secondary school.

That same commitment to investing in people extended beyond students. I recall a teacher whom I was supervising who was struggling with English Language, which severely impacted her overall performance appraisal. I immediately recognised that she needed a special kind of support and offered to do morning tutoring sessions with her to cover as many grammar and syntax rules as I could. I watched as she learnt, grew in confidence, and became empowered as an educator. A year ago, she sent me a copy of her appraisal where she had done remarkably well and expressed her gratitude for what I did to help her grow as a professional. Moments like these remind me that servant leadership leaves a lasting influence.

Servant leadership is leadership that places people before ego. It does not mean that the leader has no vision, no authority, or no standards. Rather, it means that the leader uses authority to build people, not to break them. It means the principal asks: What do my teachers need in order to teach well? What do my students need in order to learn well? What do my parents need in order to support the school? What does the community need in order to trust us? What does the institution need in order to grow?

Recent research supports this approach. Ouyang et al. (2026) found that servant leadership in education is closely connected to teacher well-being, professional engagement, positive behaviour, performance, and a more harmonious school environment. These findings resonate deeply with my own experience as a school leader. I recall my secretary saying recently that I needed a sign on my door to lessen the parade of visitors who came seeking support and guidance. This is because I create a space that enables everyone to feel safe expressing themselves and discussing how I can best assist them in carrying out their responsibilities. My favourite sentence is often: “How can I help?”

How can I Help?



That simple question embodies my philosophy of leadership because a school cannot rise higher than the emotional and professional health of the people who serve in it. I have found that when my teachers feel seen, supported, and motivated, they report to work ready to give their fullest creativity. When my ancillary staff feel visible, they not only complete what is required, but often ask if I need help with additional tasks, motivated by their love for the institution. When my parents are heard and incorporated into decisions, they become active partners in the school's growth and development. When students feel heard and valued, they embrace the help we are trying to give. Ultimately, servant leadership is what helps to create this kind of culture, one where people feel valued, supported, and inspired to contribute to the collective success of the school.

Learning from Exemplary Leadership

I have also seen this people-centred approach in the leadership of a fellow colleague, who is the Acting Principal of a prominent high school in my hometown. I taught at that institution prior to my new role as principal, and I would watch as she made a deliberate effort to stop and speak to everyone she encountered, asking how they were and making suggestions or offering to help in whatever way she could. It was profound because this ritual would include everyone, from the clerical staff, to the bus driver, to the security guards, to students, to parents, and to teachers. No one she encountered was left without a “check-in.”

One conversation with her led me to the term “servant leadership” as I tried to define her leadership style. She did not lead from distance alone. She led by connection. She understood that the staffroom was not just a place where teachers sat between classes; it was one of the emotional engines of the school. She recognised that when staff members feel that their leader listens, understands, and advocates for them, they are more likely to go beyond the minimum. They become more willing to collaborate, to solve problems, and to give the extra effort that school life so often demands. Observing her leadership helped me to appreciate one of the great strengths of servant leadership: it creates loyalty without forcing it. It builds commitment without intimidation. It encourages excellence without making people feel disposable.



Balancing Service with Vision

My role as Sunday School Director has also shaped how I understand leadership. Sunday school leadership teaches patience. It teaches that every child learns differently, every family carries a story, and every person needs both guidance and grace. In that setting, leadership is not about standing above people; it is about walking beside them. It is about preparing, nurturing, correcting, encouraging, and helping others discover purpose.

Research on religious values and servant leadership also supports this connection. Hossain et al. (2024) found that principals’ religious values and servant leadership can positively influence teacher satisfaction, with servant leadership acting as an important bridge between values and workplace outcomes. This does not mean that a principal should impose religion on a school. It means that values such as humility, compassion, fairness, forgiveness, service, and moral responsibility can positively shape how people experience leadership.

For me, Sunday school service and school leadership are connected by one truth: people grow best where they are loved, challenged, and believed in. However, it would be dishonest to suggest that everyone will approve of this style. Some people believe that a principal must be feared in order to be effective. They may see kindness as softness, consultation as uncertainty, and humility as a lack of authority. In some school cultures, people are accustomed to top-down leadership where instructions are given and questions are discouraged. In such spaces, servant leadership may be misunderstood. Some may even try to take advantage of it.

This is the flip side that every servant leader must face. If the leader serves without boundaries, the school may become disorganized. If the leader listens but never decides, progress may be delayed. If the leader is compassionate but avoids accountability, standards may fall. If the leader is always available but never replenished, burnout may follow. Servant leadership is powerful, but it must not become people-pleasing. A servant leader must still make difficult decisions, address poor performance, protect children, enforce policy, and maintain order. In that sense, servant leadership must be guided by wisdom. It must be kind, but not careless. It must be humble, but not timid. It must be inclusive, but not indecisive. It must serve all stakeholders, but it must also protect the mission of the school.

This is where servant leadership and transformational leadership are often compared. Transformational leadership focuses on vision, inspiration, innovation, and change. A transformational principal motivates staff to believe in a bigger future for the school. This style is useful, especially when a school needs renewed energy, improved performance, a stronger culture, and a shared sense of purpose. Research by Heenan et al. (2023) found that transformational school leadership positively influences staff motivation, collaboration, school culture, organizational commitment, and teacher confidence. In many ways, transformational leadership asks: *Where are we going, and how can I inspire others to help us get there?*

Servant leadership asks a slightly different question: *Who are the people on this journey, and how can I help them grow as we move?* The two styles are not enemies. In fact, schools need both. A principal must be transformational enough to cast vision and servant-hearted enough to carry people with care. Transformational leadership can move a school towards change, but servant leadership helps people feel safe enough to participate in that change. Transformational leadership may focus strongly on goals, innovation, and performance. Servant leadership focuses strongly on trust, development, empathy, and relationships. One says, “Let us rise to a higher vision.” The other says, “Let me help you become strong enough to rise.”

The danger of transformational leadership, if it is not balanced, is that people may feel used for the vision. The danger of servant leadership, if it is not balanced, is that the vision may become weak because the leader is trying too hard to accommodate everyone. The wise principal learns to blend the two: serve people deeply, but still lead them forward boldly. At Bath Primary, my desire is to serve in a way that produces results. I do not want servant leadership to be only a beautiful phrase. I want it to be seen in literacy improvement, stronger teaching, better student behaviour, deeper parent involvement, cleaner and safer school spaces, improved morale, and children who leave us more confident than when they came. I want it to be seen in boys and girls who are given targeted support, in teachers who receive training and encouragement, in parents who feel welcome, and in community members who understand that they are partners in the work.

To serve all stakeholders does not mean that everyone will always agree with the principal. It means that every decision should be made with the welfare of the school community at heart. Sometimes service looks like listening. Sometimes it looks like saying no. Sometimes it looks like giving another chance. Sometimes it looks like insisting on accountability. Sometimes it looks like standing alone for what is right. In the end, the principal is not merely the person who signs documents, chairs meetings, or gives instructions at devotion. The principal is the chief culture-builder. The tone of the school often follows the tone of the leader. If the leader is arrogant, fear spreads. If the leader is careless, standards fall. If the leader is distant, people disconnect. But if the leader serves with courage, listens with intention, corrects with fairness, and leads with vision, the school becomes a place where people feel that they belong.

Servant leadership is not the easiest path. It requires emotional strength, spiritual grounding, professional discipline, and constant reflection. It asks the principal to lead with both heart and backbone. It demands that we serve without losing authority and correct without losing compassion. As a new principal, this is the kind of leader I am striving to become: one who serves the child who struggles to read, the teacher who needs encouragement, the parent who needs guidance, the staff member who feels overlooked, the community member who wants to help, and the board member who carries responsibility for governance.

Leadership, at its best, is not about how many people stand when the principal enters the room. It is about how many people rise because the principal has served them well. And if, through servant leadership, even one child reads better, one teacher feels renewed, one parent becomes more involved, one staff member feels valued, and one school community becomes stronger, then service will not have been a soft option. It will have been the strongest leadership choice of all.



Key Lessons for Aspiring School Leaders

As I reflect on my first year of school leadership, I recognize that this journey has been one of continuous learning, growth, and self-discovery. While I do not claim to have all the answers, the experiences, challenges, successes, and relationships I have encountered have shaped my understanding of what it means to lead with purpose. The following five principles are among the most valuable lessons I have learnt, and they continue to guide my leadership practice.

School ethos is critical to the leadership style demonstrated, hence, a leader must understand his/her school culture and operate accordingly.

Listen to your staff. Every voice matters and how they feel often impacts their productivity. Create a space that encourages them to respectfully air their thoughts/feelings.

It is not uncommon to utilize more than one leadership style. Sometimes a shift in school dynamics requires a shift in leadership style.

Adopting a leadership style should not compromise your principles as you lead an institution, but rather complement it. In essence, stay true to who you are as a leader and as an ordinary individual.

Self-Assessment and self-monitoring is critical as a leader as you seek to achieve institutional goal/s. Therefore, if there is low productivity and limited involvement of stakeholders then it will do no harm to analyze your leadership style for effectiveness.

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Devmarie Blake-Brown is the Principal of Bath Primary School and a distinguished Jamaican educator with over 25 years of service. Recognized by the Ministry of Education as a Teacher of Excellence, she has held key leadership roles and presented internationally on sustainable education. She has been featured on TVJ, The Gleaner, JIS Magazine and The Pitch for her contributions to education and community development. Notably, she has prepared students as young as 11 and 12 to earn Range 2 passes in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) English A, demonstrating her commitment to exceptional learner achievement. A devoted Pentecostal Christian, she has served as a Sunday School Leader for more than 15 years and volunteers in adult literacy, national reading competitions, and HEART/NSTA Trust training. Deeply committed to community development, she organizes annual back-to-school drives and Christmas treats. Her leadership, service and outreach continue to make a meaningful impact on education and community life in Jamaica. 



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Leading through Relationships: Strengthening School Success through Community Partnerships



Lorna E. Morgan
Program Coordinator, Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching
The Mico University College

Lowel George Morgan
Attorney-at-Law and Managing Partner
Nunes, Scholefield, DeLeon & Co.

Introduction

Effective leadership is widely recognized as one of the most important determinants of organizational success, and educational institutions are no exception. It is important to note that effective school leadership extends beyond managing staff and students. It involves building meaningful relationships with parents, past students, community members, businesses, government agencies and other stakeholders. Strong community partnerships are important as they create a supportive environment that enhances student achievement, improves school resources and promotes the wholistic development of learners. Schools that actively engage their communities are better positioned to address challenges, create opportunities and sustain long-term success. Research consistently demonstrates that effective educational leadership contributes to improved teacher performance, increased student achievement, enhanced school culture, and stronger partnerships with families and communities. School leaders influence not only instructional quality and student outcomes but also teacher well-being, professional practice, and the overall organizational health of schools (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Furthermore, leadership practices that promote collaboration, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement have been shown to strengthen school culture and improve educational outcomes (Tan et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the view that educational leadership extends beyond the management of people and resources to fostering meaningful relationships and partnerships that support teaching, learning, and sustainable school improvement. As a result, effective leadership remains a cornerstone of successful and sustainable educational institutions.

The Importance of Community Partnerships

The value of community partnerships is perhaps best illustrated through our own experiences as Chairmen of the Boards of Management of two educational institutions in rural Jamaica. Over the years, we have witnessed first-hand how strategic partnerships have strengthened teaching, learning, and institutional development. Organizations such as the Digicel Foundation, the Peace Corps, and the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education (CHASE) Fund have made invaluable contributions through the provision of educational resources, infrastructure improvements, professional development opportunities, and student support initiatives. Together, these partnerships have enhanced educational outcomes, strengthened institutional capacity, and demonstrated that sustainable school improvement is most effectively achieved through collaboration between schools and the communities they serve.

Corporate Partnerships Supporting School Improvement

Among the most transformative partnerships has been our collaboration with the Digicel Foundation, whose donation of a multi-purpose court addressed a longstanding need for safe and dedicated recreational space at the primary school. Before this investment, limited infrastructure restricted the effective delivery of the physical education curriculum, reduced opportunities for sporting and extracurricular activities, and constrained the school's ability to provide a holistic educational experience. The facility has not only enhanced students' physical development and well-being but has also created a venue for assemblies, community functions, and school events, strengthening the relationship between the school and the wider community. In rural communities, where financial and infrastructural constraints often limit educational opportunities, such partnerships demonstrate how strategic investment can significantly advance equitable access to quality education.

A second partnership that transformed teaching and learning was the Peace Corps' placement of a literacy specialist at the primary school. At the time, the school faced limited access to specialized literacy expertise, inconsistent instructional practices, and insufficient support for struggling readers. Working alongside teachers, the literacy specialist introduced evidence-based instructional strategies, facilitated professional development, developed literacy resources, and supported targeted reading interventions. Beyond improving teachers' instructional capacity and students' literacy achievement, this partnership fostered a school-wide culture that positioned reading as the foundation for academic success. More importantly, it demonstrated how sustainable school improvement is achieved by building local capacity rather than relying solely on temporary assistance.

The Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education (CHASE) Fund has similarly strengthened educational provision through the donation of a purpose-built facility for the preparation of Early Childhood teachers. Prior to this investment, the college operated with limited infrastructure and inadequate specialist spaces for practical teacher preparation. The new facility has enhanced the quality of instruction by providing a modern environment that supports interactive learning, practical training, and professional development. By strengthening institutional capacity, this partnership has contributed not only to the college's continued growth but also to the preparation of highly competent Early Childhood educators for Jamaica's education system.

Community Philanthropy and Shared Responsibility

The practical examples presented above reinforce the importance of collaborative partnerships in achieving educational success. According to Richey (2025), *“Collaborative learning partnerships are essential because they combine the strengths of different organizations, institutions, and individuals. When schools, businesses, non-profits, and community groups work together, they create a richer learning environment that benefits everyone involved”* (para. 2). This assertion is reflected in the partnerships established with the Digicel Foundation, the Peace Corps, the CHASE Fund, the Past Students' Associations, and individual community members, each of whom has contributed unique expertise, financial resources, infrastructure, and services to strengthen educational provision.

Collectively, these partnerships demonstrate that educational excellence is most effectively achieved when responsibility for learning is shared among schools and the wider community. Rather than relying solely on government funding or internal school resources, these collaborations have expanded learning opportunities, strengthened teacher capacity, enhanced school infrastructure, and improved the overall educational experience for students. They also illustrate that community partnerships extend beyond financial support. Equally important are the knowledge, professional expertise, volunteerism, mentorship, and shared commitment that stakeholders bring to the educational process.

For educational leaders, these examples highlight the importance of intentionally cultivating relationships with stakeholders whose strengths complement the needs of the school. Meaningful partnerships do not emerge by chance; they are built through trust, open communication, shared vision, and sustained collaboration. When schools embrace this collective approach, they become centres of community engagement where students, educators, families, alumni, businesses, and civic organizations work together toward the common goal of improving educational outcomes. In this way, community philanthropy becomes more than an act of generosity—it becomes a catalyst for sustainable school improvement and educational transformation.

Conclusion

The importance of community and private sector partnerships in advancing education has also been recognized at the national level. During a tour of schools in St. Thomas in November 2024, the Minister of Education, Skills, Youth and Information, Senator Dr. the Hon. Dana Morris Dixon, highlighted the critical role that private sector and community partnerships play in strengthening Jamaica's education system. In acknowledging the Digicel Foundation's contributions to schools in the parish, including the donation of smartboards and sensory equipment, the Minister reaffirmed the value of collaborative partnerships in enhancing teaching, learning, and educational outcomes across Jamaica.

These experiences reinforce an important lesson: effective school leadership extends beyond the boundaries of the institution. It is built through meaningful relationships that engage parents, alumni, community members,

corporate organizations, government agencies, and international partners in a shared commitment to student success. While instructional leadership remains central to school improvement, sustainable transformation is more likely to occur when schools intentionally cultivate partnerships that expand opportunities for learners, strengthen teacher capacity, improve school infrastructure, and foster a culture of shared responsibility.

Ultimately, leading through relationships is not simply an administrative responsibility but a leadership imperative. Educational leaders who recognize the strengths and contributions of their communities are better positioned to address challenges, mobilize resources, and create learning environments where students, teachers, and schools can thrive. As the experiences shared in this article demonstrate, when schools and communities work together with a common purpose, they create the conditions for lasting educational excellence.

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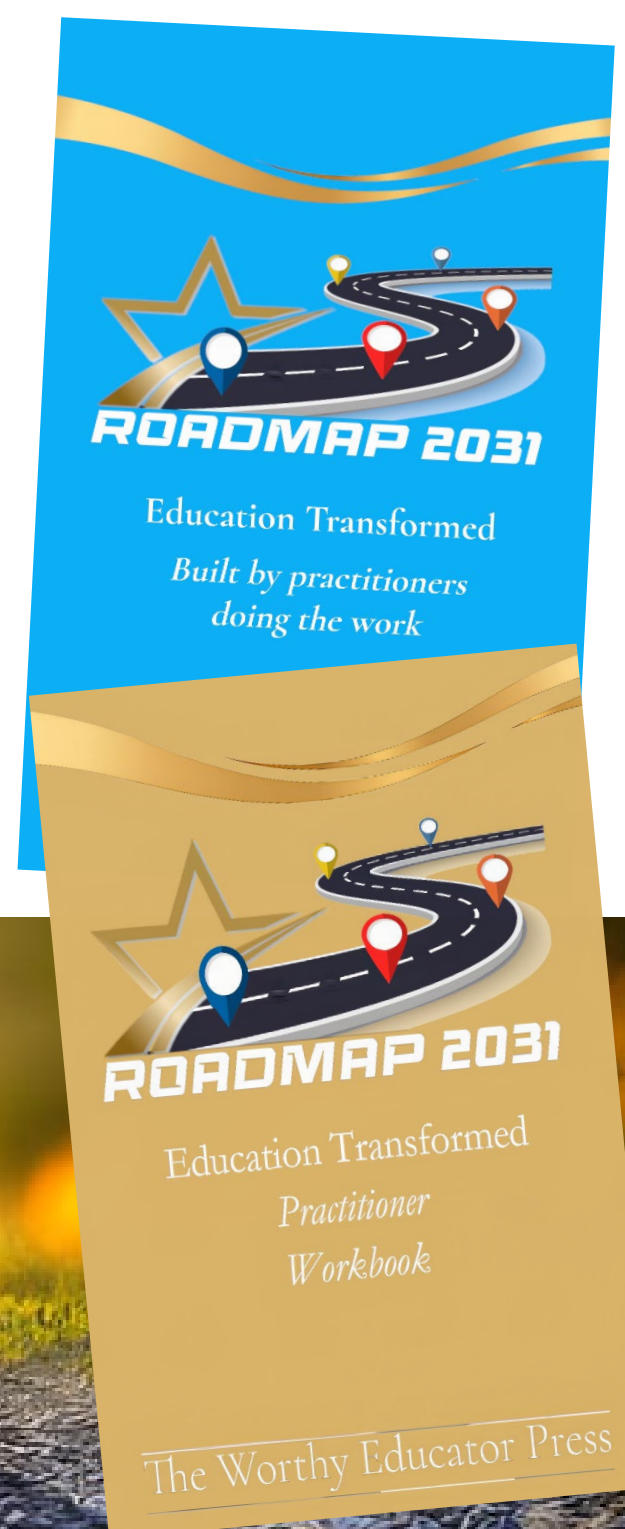
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When Fair Isn't Fair: Rethinking Higher Education Assessment for Greater Inclusion

Shellon Samuels-White

Student Assessment Officer & Learning Facilitator
The Mico University College

Years ago, I had my first real encounter with inclusion. It began with an email from a first-year student informing me that she was visually impaired and would be taking one of my classes. At first, I was not overly concerned. I assumed she had low vision and that a few adjustments, such as enlarging my PowerPoint slides, would be sufficient. It never occurred to me that she was completely blind.

My first class was humbling. I had carefully planned an image-analysis activity as the lesson introduction, only to realize she could not participate. Throughout the semester, I redesigned my teaching materials, prepared accessible PDF handouts, increased whole-class discussions, and relied more heavily on verbal descriptions. Despite these adjustments, I still felt she was experiencing the course differently than I had intended. Much of the learning relied on images, diagrams, demonstrations, and videos, and I questioned whether my adaptations were enough to provide meaningful access.

I was equally concerned about the rest of the class. Many students appeared unsure of how to interact with their classmate, often tiptoeing around her, uncertain whether to offer assistance or simply carry on as usual. Seeking guidance, I consulted colleagues in the Special Education Department. Their advice was practical but while their recommendations were helpful, I left the conversation wondering whether inclusion could really be reduced to a checklist of accommodations. Even with these adjustments, I questioned whether any of us truly understood what inclusion looked like in practice.

The experience that fundamentally changed my thinking came at the end of the semester. The final assessment for the course was a written Growth and Development Portfolio. A few days before the due date, the student approached me and asked whether she could complete the assessment through an oral interview instead. She explained that she was still waiting for the Jamaica Society for the Blind to assign a scribe to assist with typing the portfolio.

It was not a request for sympathy or special treatment. It was simply an explanation of a barrier I had never considered. As I reflected on that conversation, an uncomfortable question surfaced: *Had I really been inclusive, or had I simply expected her to fit into a system designed for everyone else?* Initially, I saw it as a question about disability. Over time, however, and through subsequent experiences with students whose learning was shaped by diverse abilities, personal circumstances, and competing responsibilities, I came to realize that it was really a question about assessment. It challenged me to examine not only how I assessed students but also the assumptions underpinning my assessment practices. Like many lecturers, I believed I was being fair because I treated every student the same. Yet, fairness and inclusion are not always synonymous.

In teacher education, we devote considerable attention to designing assessments that are rigorous, authentic, and aligned with programme outcomes. We refine rubrics, debate marking criteria, and strive for consistency in our judgements. Despite these good intentions, our assessment practices may inadvertently privilege some students while disadvantaging others, not because of differences in academic ability, but because of differences in circumstances.

As teacher educators, this should prompt us to pause and reflect. For decades, fairness has largely been equated with treating every student identically: the same assignment, the same deadline, the same assessment format, and the same examination conditions. Such consistency is often viewed as evidence of academic integrity. However, as higher education has become increasingly diverse, it has become equally apparent that equal treatment does not always produce equitable opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. This changing landscape invites us to rethink what fairness means and to consider whether our assessment practices are designed for the diversity that now characterizes our classrooms.

Rethinking Fairness in Assessment

Today's higher education classrooms bear little resemblance to those of previous generations. Alongside recent high school graduates sit mature students returning to education after years in the workforce. Some travel long distances from rural communities, while others balance study with full-time employment, caregiving responsibilities, or financial hardship. Many are the first in their families to attend university, while others navigate physical, emotional, sensory, or learning disabilities, sometimes without formally disclosing them. Diversity, therefore, extends far beyond visible characteristics. It reflects the varied experiences, identities, responsibilities, and opportunities that shape how students engage with learning.

This diversity enriches the higher education experience, but it also challenges long-held assumptions about fairness in assessment. Increasingly, assessment scholars argue that when students underperform, we should not automatically attribute their performance to a lack of ability or effort. Instead, we should also ask whether our assessment practices create unnecessary barriers that prevent students from demonstrating what they genuinely know and can do (McArthur, 2016; Tai et al., 2022).

This represents a subtle but important shift in thinking. Traditionally, inclusion in higher education has been addressed through accommodations implemented after barriers have been identified, such as granting additional examination time or modifying assessment arrangements for students who disclose disabilities. While these accommodations remain essential, they often assume that the assessment itself is inherently fair. Contemporary perspectives on inclusive assessment challenge this assumption by arguing that inclusion should begin during the assessment design process rather than after barriers emerge (Hockings, 2010; Tai et al., 2022).

Inclusive assessment therefore asks a different set of questions. Rather than asking, *How can this assessment be modified for individual students?* It asks, *How can this assessment be designed to minimize unnecessary barriers from the outset while maintaining rigorous academic standards?* This perspective aligns closely with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024), which encourage educators to anticipate learner variability during the design process rather than responding to it retrospectively.

For teacher educators, this distinction is particularly important because we are not only assessing what future teachers know—we are modelling how they will eventually assess others. Every assessment we design communicates implicit messages about fairness, inclusion, and what we value as evidence of learning. If student teachers experience assessment as rigid, compliance-driven, and centered on uniformity, they may replicate those practices in their own classrooms. Conversely, when they experience assessment that is transparent, flexible, authentic, and intentionally inclusive, they begin to appreciate that maintaining high academic standards and promoting equity are complementary rather than competing goals.

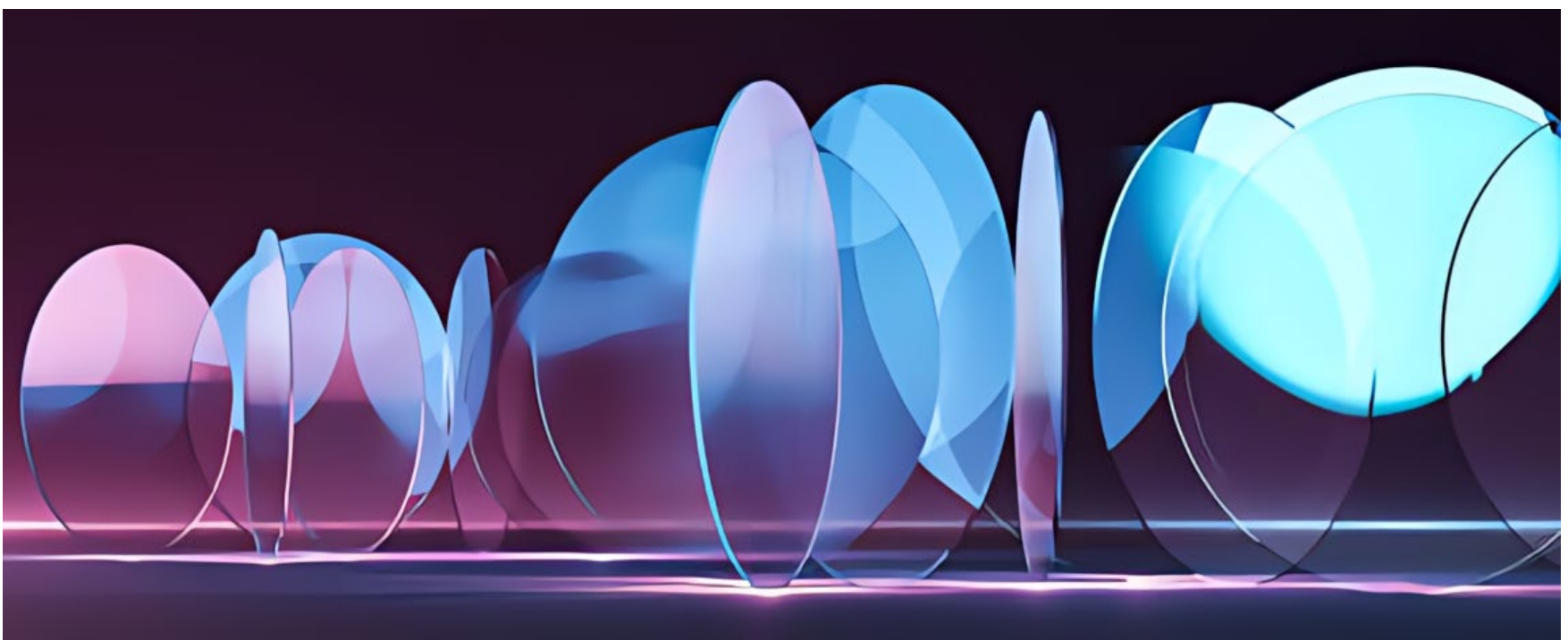
Reflecting on my earlier experiences, I have become much more attentive to the invisible stories students bring into my classroom: the mature student caring for aging parents, the student travelling three hours each day to attend lectures, the student working night shifts to pay tuition, and the first-generation university student navigating unfamiliar academic expectations. None of these realities excuse poor performance, but they inevitably influence how students engage with learning and assessment. They challenge me to ask whether my assessments truly measure the intended learning outcomes or whether they inadvertently reward factors such as financial resources, technological access, prior educational privilege, or familiarity with particular assessment formats. As McArthur (2016) reminded us, fairness is not simply about treating everyone identically; it is about creating meaningful opportunities for every student to demonstrate their learning.



From Principles to Practice: Designing Inclusive Assessments

Recognizing the need for more inclusive assessment is only the first step. The greater challenge lies in translating that understanding into assessments that are rigorous, equitable, and meaningful. Inclusive assessment is not a different form of assessment; rather, it represents good assessment practice viewed through the lens of learner diversity. As Tai et al. (2022) argued, it challenges educators to question assumptions that may unintentionally disadvantage some learners while still maintaining the integrity of academic standards.

My own experiences have convinced me that inclusive assessment is not achieved through isolated accommodations or individual adjustments. Instead, it emerges through intentional assessment design. In my own practice, two principles have come to guide the way I design assessments. First, assessments should be transparent, supportive, and flexible, enabling all students to understand expectations and demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways. Second, assessments should be authentic and culturally relevant, connecting learning to students' lived experiences while modeling the assessment practices we hope future teachers will adopt. These principles have gradually transformed not only how I design assessments but also how I think about fairness in higher education.



Transparency and Feedback

One of the first lessons I learned was that accessibility begins long before students submit an assignment. Several years after my experience with the student who was visually impaired, I noticed that students repeatedly asked the same questions about an assignment despite receiving detailed written instructions. Initially, I attributed the issue to students not carefully reading the assessment brief. While that was undoubtedly true for some, I eventually realized that the more significant issue was clarity. Consequently, I redesigned the assessment by simplifying the instructions, unpacking the rubric during class, and sharing exemplars of previous assignments. The difference was immediate. Students approached the task with greater confidence, submitted higher-quality work, and required significantly fewer clarification via email. Looking back, I realized that it was not simply the exemplars nor the rubrics themselves that made the difference, but the conversations surrounding them. Discussing exemplars, clarifying expectations, and inviting students to interrogate the assessment criteria helped make the often-tacit standards of quality more explicit - a process that research suggests strengthens students' understanding of assessment expectations, increases confidence, and supports higher-quality work (Carless & Chan, 2016; Nicol, 2010).

That experience reminded me that transparency is one of the simplest, yet most overlooked, features of inclusive assessment. Students cannot demonstrate what they know if they do not fully understand what is expected of them. Making expectations explicit makes assessment fairer.

Transparency alone, however, is insufficient. Inclusive assessment recognizes that assessment should support learning, not simply measure it (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Similarly, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argued that feedback should help students become self-regulated learners. Consequently, I now incorporate structured progress check-ins into authentic assessments, enabling students to receive formative feedback and refine their work before submission. Students also complete a self-assessment checklist aligned with the rubric. Together, these strategies have improved students' confidence and the quality of their work by making assessment a part of the learning process rather than merely its endpoint.

This philosophy also shapes my methodology courses. Before students undertake graded microteaching lessons, they participate in rehearsal sessions during which peers provide structured feedback using the same rubric that will later guide the summative assessment. These rehearsals enable students to refine their questioning techniques, strengthen lesson delivery, and improve classroom interactions before their performance is formally evaluated. The assessment itself has not become easier; rather, students have been given a meaningful opportunity to learn before being judged.

Flexibility Without Compromising Standards

Contemporary perspectives on inclusive assessment emphasize that fairness is achieved not by requiring every student to demonstrate learning in the same way, but by ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes. This requires designing assessments that offer multiple means for students to express their learning while maintaining common academic standards (Carless, 2015; CAST, 2024; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Tai et al., 2022). Flexibility, therefore, is not about lowering expectations; it is about removing unnecessary barriers by focusing on *how* students demonstrate learning rather than *what* they are expected to learn.

This principle guides my Adult Facilitation Methodology course, where students develop a profile of themselves as adult learners. Rather than requiring a traditional written autobiography, I invite them to choose the format that best communicates their learning. Over the years, students have submitted podcasts, documentary-style videos, animated presentations, digital autobiographies, infographics, and letters to their future selves as educators. Although the formats vary considerably, every submission is assessed against the same learning outcomes using the same rubric. The emphasis remains on critical reflection, the application of theory, and demonstrated learning, rather than the medium through which that learning is communicated.



Students consistently produce work that is more creative, authentic, and reflective than when restricted to a single assessment format. More importantly, this experience has demonstrated that providing meaningful assessment choices does not compromise academic standards. Instead, it exemplifies the principles of inclusive assessment by enabling students to demonstrate achievement through approaches that reflect their strengths while ensuring that every learner is assessed against the same transparent criteria and learning outcomes.

Authentic Assessment for Inclusive Practice

While transparency, feedback, and flexibility help remove unnecessary barriers to learning, inclusive assessment also requires students to see value and relevance in what they are being asked to do. Emerging scholarship suggests that assessment is not simply a mechanism for measuring learning; it also shapes students' identities, sense of belonging, and participation within higher education. McArthur (2022) argued that authentic assessment should promote well-being, participation, and social contribution rather than merely prepare students for employment. Similarly, Nieminen (2025) and Nieminen and Boud (2025) contended that assessment becomes more inclusive when students can connect learning to their identities, lived experiences, and future aspirations. Viewed collectively, this scholarship suggests that inclusive assessment is strengthened when students can recognize themselves, their experiences, and their future professional identities within assessment tasks.

This understanding has significantly influenced how I design assessment across my courses. Rather than relying on decontextualized or hypothetical scenarios, I intentionally create assessment tasks that invite students to draw upon their own experiences, cultural knowledge, and professional aspirations as they demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

In my Curriculum Studies course, for example, students explore the national conversation surrounding the phrase “fully dunce” following the widespread discussion generated by the dancehall song *Dunce Cheque*, a popular Jamaican song that celebrates financial success while using the term *dunce* (traditionally meaning unintelligent) in ways that sparked public debate about education, literacy, and social values. Rather than treating it as simply another media controversy, students analyze the issue through the lens of curriculum theory by asking two questions:

What does this reveal about the relationship between society and curriculum? and *What messages are learners receiving through the hidden and phantom curriculum?* Given that the issue is familiar and culturally situated, students enter the discussion from different perspectives and experiences while engaging with the same theoretical concepts and assessment criteria. The assessment does not lower expectations; instead, it provides multiple entry points into complex curriculum theory by allowing students to connect academic ideas to individualized social and cultural realities.

I adopt a similar approach in my Assessment in Education course. Rather than critiquing hypothetical assessments from textbooks, students evaluate authentic teacher-developed classroom assessments and recommend practical improvements using recognized principles of quality and inclusive assessment. Many adopt observations from their practicum placements, prior teaching experiences, or their personal schooling to justify their recommendations. Although students bring different experiences to the task, they are all assessed against the same learning outcomes and rubric. The assessment therefore values the diversity of students' experiences as a resource for learning while maintaining consistent academic expectations.

These experiences have reshaped how I think about inclusive assessment. Educators do not achieve inclusion simply by providing accommodations or offering assessment choices. It requires designing assessments that enable students to recognize the relevance of learning to who they are, where they come from, and the teachers they aspire to become. In teacher education, making this connection carries particular significance because every assessment serves a dual purpose: it evaluates today's student teachers while modeling the kinds of inclusive assessment practices they will one day design for their learners.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my journey as a teacher educator, I have come to realize that inclusive assessment is not achieved through a single strategy or accommodation. Rather, it emerges through a series of intentional design decisions that shape how students experience learning long before assessment is submitted or graded. These decisions create assessment environments in which students have equitable opportunities to demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do while maintaining rigorous academic expectations.

For teacher educators, this responsibility is especially significant because assessment serves a dual purpose. It evaluates today's student teachers while modeling the assessment practices they will carry into tomorrow's classrooms. Every assessment we design communicates what we believe about learning, fairness, and success.

Perhaps the next time we design an assessment, we should pause and ask ourselves three simple questions:

Am I assessing the intended learning outcomes or something else?

Have I removed unnecessary barriers before students begin?

Does this assessment model the kind of inclusive practice I hope future teachers will adopt?

These questions remind us that inclusive assessment is not about lowering standards or treating learners differently. It is about intentionally designing assessments that enable every student to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

If we continue to equate fairness with sameness, our graduates may do likewise. If, however, we embrace assessments that are transparent, supportive, flexible, authentic, and relevant, we prepare teachers who understand that equity is achieved not by treating every learner identically, but by ensuring every learner has a meaningful opportunity to succeed. Ultimately, if teacher education is to prepare graduates who can create more equitable classrooms, we must first reconsider the assessments we design today.



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Impact Demonstrate value for the individual professional impact each of us chooses to pursue across our careers

Growth Create contexts that support our learning through sharing, collaboration and action research

Dignity Provide the conditions for us to learn, teach and lead without compromising or sacrificing our honor

Passion Acknowledge and nurture the reasons we entered the profession and help us fan those flames

Support Allocate programs, services and resources that feed our bodies, our minds and our souls

Respect Treat us with the esteem, regard and consideration accorded to those who teach our children

Integrity Engage us in our work without commercialization, politicization or any other cynical agenda

Wellness Prioritize our health and well-being over the endless demands of the institutional status quo

Innovation Ensure safe, supportive environments that promote experimentation, rigor and risk-taking

Recognition Celebrate our learning, growth and success as we model the journey on which we launch our students

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"I want students to see themselves as mathematicians... to see math as the concept that helps move all other contents. Connecting what is happening in the world around us to the content being taught is one of the fastest ways to help students think critically, ask deep questions, and see the purpose of mathematics. "

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