

Chapter 7

Becoming a Principal: Exploring Perceived Discriminatory Practices in the Selection of Principals in Jamaica and England

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ABSTRACT

Becoming a principal is not an easy feat. Principals are the custodians of a nation's education future and development. As such, they should represent the "best" of the stock of experience, skills, and capacities that exist within a school. Whereas this chapter does not consider the quality of principals in post, it spotlights the perceptions of discrimination in the appointments and promotions process of principals in both Jamaica and England. Drawing on data from a small-scale two-phase exploratory study, the chapter compares the process of appointing principals whilst contrasting the perceived discriminatory practices in getting an appointment as a school principal. The chapter calls for further detailed research of the issues identified and for changes to process for promoting and/or appointing a principal so that actors in the system, teachers especially, can feel confident of putting themselves forward for suitable positions where these may be available.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

Principals are the chief custodians on a nation's educational outcomes. They are, by virtue of their position, the guardians of a nation's future in the form of children and young people and their schools. That said, being appointed to the rank of a school Principal is not an easy feat; and nor should it be. It should not be easy, because schools

and by extension the education system and society need to be assured that the most suitable person is given the job and therefore all appropriate steps have to be taken to recruit this person on board. However, a range of factors: legal, institutional, socio-cultural, task or role related, personality and experience related, and others *invisible*, have made an appointment to the rank of Principal not a straightforward enterprise.

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There are approximately 23,330 state funded schools in England; 3,446 state funded secondary schools and 16,884 state primary schools. In Jamaica, there are just over 1,000 state funded schools; 206 state funded secondary schools or equivalent and 973 pre-primary, primary and equivalent types of schools. There are approximately 448,000 teachers in the state funded primary and secondary education sectors in England and approximately 25,000 teachers in state funded primary and secondary education sector in Jamaica, including approximately 23,000 principals in England and approximately 1,000 in Jamaica.

Effective leadership is arguably the most vital ingredient for a school's success, and given the amount of teachers compared with the number of posts available for Principals, there is a noticeable gap in terms of what is aspirational and what is realistic in terms of being appointed a principal. Similarly, well-motivated, experienced, highly skilled, and qualified teachers are needed in appropriate numbers, to support and lead school initiatives and programmes aimed at achieving the best possible educational outcomes for all students. Goal 6 of Education for All underpins these imperatives by highlighting the need for quality education. Quality education however, requires inputs in the form of human (strategic, technical, operational), and financial resources (including networks and physical material), and for these to be aligned to expected outcomes. In this regard, students at all levels of education, and in whichever country they live, need the best possible support so as to increase their life chances; and schools need the best available skills and talents, in the form of teachers and principals.

Educational policy reforms in England and Jamaica have intensified in recent years. For example, since the Coalition Government came to office in the United Kingdom in 2010, there have been changes to the design and delivery of teacher education, changes to the secondary curriculum and massive changes to the structure and organisation of schooling more noticeably through the

introduction of Academies and Free Schools. On the opposite side of the Atlantic, the then Jamaican government in 2004 launched the Education Sector Transformation Programme (ESTP) which led to the introduction of a National College for Educational Leadership, a National Education Inspectorate, a National Council on Education and the Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission. ESTP was followed, in 2010, by the launch of 'Vision 2030: National Development Plan Jamaica', an ambitious multifaceted programme of activities and initiatives aimed at scaffolding the country's ambitious goal of achieving "developed" country status by the year 2030. The Education Sector Plan of Vision 2030 identified the need for an excellent cadre of teachers and principals to be in place to realise many of the objectives of the National Development Plan (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2010).

In England, the first and only comprehensive study to examine the selection process of principals was conducted by Morgan et al. (1983). Termed the *POST* project, the study's authors found several challenges associated with the appointments' process ranging from unclear job descriptions to unfair practices which led them to conclude, 'the selection of headteachers is carried out in an arbitrary and amateur way' (p145). Three decades later, Miller (2013) conducted pioneering work on principal appointments in Jamaica which led to the publication of a Research Report, "*The Politics of Progression: Primary teachers' perceived barriers to gaining a Principalship in Jamaica.*" In this report, Miller concluded that the process for appointing of principals was flawed and did not always make use of the best talents available and was premised around an in-group and an out-group manifested in terms of various discriminatory practices. This chapter will explore the process that is involved in becoming a principal in both England and Jamaica, as is set out as follows: section one provides an introduction to the issue of appointment and promotion a leadership positions in schools; section two describes the requirement

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