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## TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Beginning teachers' challenges in their pursuit of effective teaching practices

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**Abstract:** This article explores the context and experiences of three beginning teachers in their effort to improve their teaching and to implement and align themselves with their schools' expectations of effective teaching practices. Research findings emerging from a sociocultural-ethnographic framework revealed that participants challenged their own beliefs about effective teaching practices in aligning themselves with their schools' expectations. In complying with routine expectations, they embraced predominantly teacher-centred practices, rather than a student-centred approach. Given the ongoing effort to augment the quality of education in the Seychelles, beginning teachers' implementation of and access to evidenced-based practices could be recognised as part of this endeavour.

**Subjects:** Continuing Professional Development; Education; Educational Research; Social Sciences

**Keywords:** beginning teacher; teaching practices; sociocultural theory; ethnographic framework; secondary schools

### 1. Introduction

This paper reports on a component of a doctoral sociocultural-ethnographic study involving three secondary science beginning teachers, their heads of departments (HOD) and deputy head teachers (DHT) in their respective schools' context. The study was aimed at understanding the notion of

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I am a lecturer at the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education (SITE). As well as being a registered teacher, I have previous experience as a researcher and deputy head teacher. My research interest lies in the area of learning and teaching, both students' and teachers' learning. I have a particular interest in beginning teachers' learning to become professionals. I am interested in exploring the challenges they encounter in their school-based contexts in this endeavour, and how policy and support resources can facilitate their pursuits.

#### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Support for beginning teachers could be seen as a vital part of the attempt to improve the effectiveness of teaching practices. Research findings within the local context of the Seychelles revealed the quality of teaching in the education system in Seychelles as an area of concern. Nolan (2008) argued that unless the standard and quality of teaching in the Seychelles classrooms significantly improved, it was unlikely for the standard of the Seychelles workforce to improve. The study argues that the dominance of effective teaching practices is dependent on improved teacher learning and support, which would in turn impact students' learning and achievements. It is pertinent that the education system embraces effective support policies and structures for all teachers. This research has great value for stakeholders within the local context as well as a wider context. The notion of facilitating teachers' access to effective practices should be the concerns of all those advocating quality teaching in schools.

effective teaching practices in these contexts, the beginning teachers' access to these practices and how their contexts influenced the manner that they framed and implemented such practices in their classrooms. Beginning teachers would have a vision of effective teaching practices if their pre-service preparation has been successful. They should essentially possess an assortment of approaches to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment, as well as the disposition to learn in and from practice (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). Therefore, a primary focus of support at school level is to facilitate the adaptation of beginning teachers and to employ their skills in consideration of their students and contexts (Hammerness et al., 2005). A comparison of the support mechanisms across the schools, these beginning teachers' challenges and their teaching practices is important to inform practices and policy changes within the predominant centralised education system of the Seychelles.

Danielson (1999) pointed to the erroneous belief that beginning teachers have acquired all that is required to successfully carry out their responsibilities in their context. Thus, any shortcomings in terms of classroom delivery are seen as their fault. This situation is worse for beginning teachers who fail to seek the necessary support from experienced teachers and school leaders, mainly because such a move might be seen as a sign of weakness (Flores & Day, 2006). An alternative view is to depict beginning teachers as professionals, and support them from this position. In this way, beginning teachers are perceived as intelligent and possessing a philosophy relating to ideas concerning teaching and learning which can be communicated and justified (Langdon, 2001). This professional view of beginning teachers moves away from a behavioural stance, to a teaching and learning focus (Langdon, 2001), where students and teachers are co-creators in the learning and teaching process (MacGilchrist, Reed, & Myers, 2004). Such a view mirrors the complexity that depicts teaching in today's world. A behavioural stance of teaching has been described as anti-intellectual, given that it renders the complexity of teaching to a technical remedy, and reduces teaching methodology as a means to an end, instead of something that facilitates students' learning (Kincheloe, 2005). Feiman-Nemser (2001) argued that when beginning teachers are viewed as professionals, learning is then recognised as inherent to teaching. In this instance, serious conversation around teaching becomes an essential resource for developing and enhancing practice. Learning from practice demands skills of observation, interpretation and analysis. Feiman-Nemser (2001) points to the development of skills by professional engagement in: analysing examples of student work; examining curricular materials; questioning students to reveal their thinking; illuminating the impact their instructions have on their students' learning and studying the manner by which different teachers arrive at similar aims. These activities, when carried in the company of others, can facilitate the expectations for professional discourse, including respect for evidence, receptiveness to questions, consideration to alternative views, a pursuit of shared understanding and agreed standards (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The general perception of teachers concerning the process of teaching is referred to as the "conception of teaching" (Gao & Watkins, 2002). Conception of teaching can be described as a series of categories of teachers' views and descriptions on how they experience the teaching process. A teacher's conception of teaching serves as a lens through which the teacher interacts, views and interprets the teaching context (Gao & Watkins, 2002). Therefore, the use of certain teaching practices can be adopted depending on the teacher's conception of teaching (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999). These categories have been identified as consisting of either student-centred on one end to teacher-centred on the other end or a combination of the two with one being dominant (Gao, 1999). Teacher-centred teaching (which is linked to a behaviourist approach to teaching) has been described as entailing a focus primarily on the curriculum, not the students, and aiming to meet curriculum and assessment targets, not individual student needs (Weimer, 2013). On the other hand, student-centred teaching (which is linked to a constructivist approach to teaching) is described as: engaging students in their learning; promote collaboration; entailing specific learning skills pedagogies; and encouraging students to reflect on the content of what they learn and how they learn (Weimer, 2013). Successful teacher training is often described as equipping beginning

teachers with an array of effective student-centred strategies (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). However, current research has revealed that with inadequate support, the teaching practices of beginning teachers skewed towards teacher-centeredness (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). This is in line with the notion of conceptions of teaching as context dependent (Gao & Watkins, 2002). For example, high-stake accountability policies (Valli & Buese, 2007), contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1991) and other job stressors (Veenman, 1984), to name a few, may encourage contexts that require teachers to relate to their students differently and implement pedagogies that conflict with their views of best practices. If beginning teachers are to align their practices with a student-centred conception of teaching and teach from a place of authenticity, then learning from practice has to occur within supportive professional learning communities (Sewell, 2011).

Current research holds that on entering schools, beginning teachers should also be seen as empowered individuals who should also look to themselves for continued improvement in their effectiveness within a nurturing context (Onafowora, 2004). In the same vein, European Commission (EC, 2009) acknowledged the need to facilitate beginning teachers' lifelong learning, but argued that the challenge of furthering these teachers' effectiveness should not rest solely with schools. Requirements on the teaching profession are changing quickly, necessitating an evolution in strategies on the part of teachers. Effectiveness in teaching, the ability to adjust to the changing needs of students in a world of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological change place new demands on teachers (EC, 2009). This means teachers themselves need to reflect on their personal learning needs in their specific setting and take an increase responsibility for their personal lifelong learning. Given this, the EC report (2009) states that at minimum, beginning teachers should possess specialist knowledge of the area they teach, in addition to the required pedagogical skills. Furthermore, these teachers should be able to teach heterogeneous classes, make efficient use of information and communication technology (ICT), and help learners to acquire transferable competencies. However, such endeavours are facilitated by a backdrop of key professional values namely: autonomous learning; reflective practice; participation in research and innovation; collaboration with colleagues and parents; and an engagement in the progress of the whole school (EC, 2009).

### **1.1. The quality of teaching in the Seychelles**

The quality of teaching throughout the education system in Seychelles has been described as an area of concern (Nolan, 2008; Purvis, 2004). The prevalent teaching styles within the Seychelles school system has been categorised as teacher-centred and traditional approach-oriented, one that is atypical of comprehensive schools and which does not cater for all abilities (Purvis, 2004). This supports the view identified by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in relation to schools' weaknesses in efficiently catering for all ability needs (MoE, 2003).

The national school improvement programme launched in 1995 and based on the British model was one of the most significant projects aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (SIP Secretariat, 2004). This was done through the institutionalisation of development planning and professional development in all state schools. The school improvement programme was meant to encourage a culture of self-evaluation, and collaborative work ethics and planning in school. However, it has been pointed out that practices will be transformed only when improvement in support takes place in parallel to other aspects such as improved leadership (Purvis, 2007). Campling, Constance, and Purvis (2011) shed some light on the challenges to improvement in education quality in the Seychelles. They noted the major challenges as being a shortage of local teachers, the level and quality of training for teachers, scant resources linked to budgetary limitations and a general view from parents that support "the old grammar school system of colonial times" (p. 95) as the most appropriate model of practice. This has implication of how parents interact with their children with respect to their learning, as well as parents' expectation of schools. Campling et al. (2011) concluded by noting that, "the system is still unable to effectively cater for all abilities and ensure success for all" (p. 95). This study is, therefore, crucial in understanding beginning teachers' implementation of effective teaching practices and the factors influencing their attempts.

## 2. Methodological approach

The study was conducted within a sociocultural-ethnographic framework aimed at understanding the factors influencing these beginning teachers' attempt to implement evidenced-based teaching practices. It was, therefore, important to gauge their understanding, and that of their HOD and DHT with respect to the expectations and meanings attached to effective teaching practices. In addition, the classroom teaching of these teachers was observed to establish an understanding of the influences and to allow a picture of their practices to be formed. The qualitative phase presented here produced data through interviews (with the three beginning teachers, deputy heads and HOD), document analysis and classroom observations in three schools across the main island, Mahe.

Nationally, most students follow the British International General Certificate of Education at the end of secondary 5 or grade 10. They then move on to other institutions where they continue with their secondary or post-secondary qualifications. Of the 10 schools that reflected the small size of the Seychelles secondary school system, three were chosen. The sizes of the co-educational schools ranged from about 700 to 1,000 students each with more or less equal number of boys and girls. The teaching staff of each school averaged around 60 members.

The sociocultural theory employed in this study provides a lens for examining how beginning teachers become expert in their profession, and how they learn to appropriately teach students. The theory serves as a means of understanding and examining how beginning teachers are supported in this endeavour. Such a lens also allows for a comprehension of the settings where teachers learn and practise their profession. The aforementioned can be achieved, for instance, by gauging their interactions with colleagues, students, mentors, administrators and subject specialists in their environment. All these influential factors in beginning teachers' contextualised challenges, learning and support are viewed with a sociocultural lens. In sorting out pedagogical issues, for instance, collaborative approaches necessitate a view that teachers' development and learning does not occur in isolation (Putnam & Borko, 2000). The learning that stemmed from teacher support is socially driven and gives rise to professional growth within the confines of existing social settings (Valsineer & Van Der Veer, 2002). Given this, support at school level also determines teachers' future development. For beginning teachers, this means the array of activities in which they participate as learners and professionals in schools mould their thinking, which then serves as a foundation for their reasoning as teachers. This reasoning is first used as an instrument to think about the nature of their involvement in activities that they are engaged in (Valsineer & Van Der Veer, 2002). Second, it serves as an ingredient in the development of activities with advanced complexity and creativity (Valsineer & Van Der Veer, 2002).

Ethnographic methods provide the means of capturing participants' experiences and provide thick descriptions of these experiences. Through the use of an ethnographic framework, that provide for observation, informal conversations and structured interviews, it is possible to understand the contexts, processes and meanings that are crucial to the studied participants (Whitehead, 2005). Data collected in the study were in the form of structured interviews with each of the beginning teachers (Felicity-school A, Ryan-school B and Meg-school C), their respective HODs and DHTs. It was also important to gauge the unpacking of these beginning teachers' practices within the classroom context; therefore, six classroom unstructured observations using field notes were conducted.

The semi-structured interviews were aimed at ascertaining the meaning of effective teaching practices from these participants and the influences to the implementation of such practices. The interviews with the beginning teachers focused on six main areas: (1) training and background; (2) perceived effectiveness of their teaching; (3) the process of induction they experienced at the school; (4) their views on the school culture; (5) the mentoring and monitoring process; and (6) the opportunities for professional learning and development at the school and in the departments.

The researcher opted for non-participant observation. Additional semi-structured interviews after observation allow the capturing of the beginning teachers' description, clarification and meaning of classroom. It was important to understand these beginning teachers' philosophies and reasoning in using specific teaching approaches. Document analysis was also carried out to encompass the schools' mission, vision, recent schools' external evaluation report and the school development plans for their improvement agendas. The expectations were that these documents would provide data around the schools' governing principles, expectations and accountability.

An inductive analysis approach (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used for analysing the emerging qualitative data of the study undertaken. Patton (2002) described inductive analysis as, "immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships; begins by exploring, then confirming; guided by analytical principles rather than rules and, ends with a creative synthesis" (p. 41). Therefore, an inductive approach is aimed at allowing important patterns identified from the cases being researched to surface from the data, rather than presuming what these dimensions will be (Patton, 2002). An inductive analysis approach was seen as effective in capturing data from and across cases to better understand the influences on beginning teachers' practices and teaching philosophies and how these challenged the implementation of effective teaching practices.

### 3. Results

This section presents a brief overview of results stemming from the practices, views and experiences of the three beginning teachers. The other sections that follow combine leadership views, factors that impacted on the communities of practice where these beginning teachers were located and the influences of these factors on the practices and experiences of these beginning teachers.

#### 3.1. The beginning teachers

Ryan (school B) was commencing his second year at the school. As with other student-teachers who undertook teaching as a career prior to 2009, he completed his two-year diploma in the Seychelles. This was followed by a two-year conversion education degree in an Australian university, where he majored in Biological sciences and Chemistry.

Ryan claimed to having experienced limited support at the school. Within his department, he reported to an amicable atmosphere, but noted that this did not extend to professional dialogue on pedagogical matters. He claimed, "you are a bit alone with regards to your teaching. I think we don't share enough, teachers are reticent in discussing teaching issues". The absence of a formal mentorship programme at the school meant that Ryan had to rely on approaching his colleagues and HOD for guidance. However, Ryan reported that he rarely did so. He explained: "Sometimes you are reluctant to approach them when everyone is treating you as if you should know all your stuff". He pointed to missed opportunities to learn from his colleagues which would have also given him a chance to share good practices, saying, "I tend to do a lot of research on my own and preparing my own materials, hand-outs, and worksheets. It would have been nice to share these as well as discuss what goes on in my classroom". Therefore, while Ryan was motivated during his first year of teaching and was willing to work collaboratively with his colleagues, his teaching became an isolated endeavour. His challenges, in particular, the teaching of low achievers was not fully resolved. Therefore, he felt that the school could do more for beginning teachers:

Perhaps my training was inadequate in that regard ... perhaps it is more of a professional development issue ... the school should have gathered information about handling those classes and help the new teachers as they enter the profession, to deter them from getting helpless and discouraged.

However, being an effective teacher was important to Ryan. He claimed to appraise his effectiveness by getting students to participate in evaluating his lessons. This meant being responsive to students' needs as well, "Sometimes you just have to ask the students. At the beginning they will be reluctant,

not a lot of teachers do it, but eventually they will ... it is not a perfect indicator but no one indicator is". Another way of gauging his effectiveness was to balance his expectations with management's criteria of an effective teacher. As Ryan explained, "it is important to see whether the gap is reduced between what they want and what you have set for yourself, if you exceed, so much the better".

Felicity (School A), on the other hand, began her career with a higher Diploma in Science education. She was in the beginning of her second year at the school. She was, then, waiting for the University of Seychelles to formalise the local degree so that she could enrol in it.

Felicity explained that she had to rely on her own initiative, without an initial orientation phase from either her department or her school as part of her induction and transition. In fact, Felicity revealed that she was unaware if the school had an induction programme. She speculated that the school might have assumed that she had knowledge of procedures and documentation. She explained, "maybe, because I went to this school when I was in secondary myself, the teachers were thinking that I know my way around". A lack of a formal subject-specific induction or early orientation period meant that she had to learn some procedures by trial and error. She cited an example: "the lab technician told me that you do not come today and ask for equipment for later during the day, you had to request well ahead".

Felicity's description of the senior management's involvement in her teaching revealed minimal direct contribution. She stated that, "they do go around for classroom observation but unfortunately they have not come to any of my classes". Apart from one of her classes that was observed by the HOD at the beginning of her first year and the subsequent feedback process, Felicity had not received further mentoring nor had any of her classes been observed after that. She pointed to the usefulness of that earlier feedback, which supported her teaching and classroom management in her low-academic classes.

Felicity attributed her transition and adaptation to her past experiences as a student and student-teacher at the school. These were reported to have eased her ability to approach her colleagues. This was important given she acknowledged some gaps in her subject matter knowledge. She explained, "Whenever I am teaching the chemistry part of the syllabus. I sometimes go to her [fellow teacher] for help with some concepts". This relationship also extended to other teachers in her department.

Effectiveness in teaching was an important notion for Felicity. She placed an emphasis on students' achievement as a way of gauging her effectiveness. She described effective teaching as entailing a consideration of students' voices, effective classroom management and teaching of meaningfully and relevant topics. Felicity also reported classroom management as an issue, especially in low-achieving classes. Therefore, conversations with Felicity around teaching effectiveness portrayed classroom management skills as crucial.

Meg was in the beginning of her second year as an advanced diploma teacher at the time of data collection. She anticipated her future enrolment in the B.Ed. programme at the University of Seychelles, once the programme was formalised. A good part of her experience as a student-teacher was gained at her current school (school C).

Meg explained that she had not gone through a period of induction at the school. Her teaching practices had been observed once as a basis for gaining qualified teacher's status. She appreciated the feedback in spite of the fact that it did not amply detail the specific successes or failures of her teaching approach, or indicate how her teaching could be improved. Overall, she found her support to be wanting.

Meg revealed to have a positive relationship with other colleagues in her department. A collegial atmosphere allowed Meg to discuss her teaching in both formal and informal settings. For example, she claimed to share resources, and her management skills, which she identified as her strong point.

As a beginning teacher, Meg was pleased that she could engage in some sharing with more experienced teachers. However, greater exchange around pedagogical practices was limited. She explained: “We shared how the class was, what we’ve done ... the good things that happened or shared a little joke or talk about something we did not like”.

Meg’s explanation of effective teaching portrayed the concept as having elements of student-centred teaching. Eliciting students’ contribution in their learning around practical activities they found interesting and relevant was important for Meg. She explained that teaching low achievers was a challenge for a number of teachers, and that identifying an effective teacher was presumed on their ability to successfully teach these students. Adjusting her teaching approach based on student’ feedback was something Meg reported as pertinent to effectiveness in teaching.

### **3.2. Results**

The data from and across each case study were analysed in order to extract and interpret issues that arose for the participants. The research questions focused the issues to foreground the influences on these beginning teachers, as well as what constituted the effective teaching practices for the school and teachers, and what expectations guided their teaching practices in light of those understandings. Themes were identified from within the individual case studies, as well as across the three cases studies (Stake, 2005). Differences and similarities between issues were also captured through the generic inductive qualitative analysis approach (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this paper, the themes have been further condensed into three categories namely: Effective teaching practices: perception, standard and expectation; Teaching Practices; and Resources and Curriculum.

#### *3.2.1. Effective teaching practices: perception, standard, and expectation*

Overall, individual school case studies and cross-case analyses revealed the notion of effective teaching practices as complex. The concept of effectiveness was seen as changeable depending on school, class and individual student’s learning needs (HOD—school B). Emerging from the definition of effective teaching practices within these three secondary were: effective classroom management; maximising students’ engagement; and use of pedagogical practices that provided for a range of abilities.

Teaching effectiveness was seen by one DHT (school B) as encompassing the holistic development of all students. This was also recognised by other participants when they expressed their attempts to make students aware of the need to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour. In order to foster students’ holistic development as a component of effective teaching, the DHT from school B cited key qualities required for teachers and the need for key resources. For instance, effectiveness was perceived by the DHT as conditional on factors relating to resources, planning and relationships between staff members. While access to scant resources was acknowledged, effective teachers were seen by the DHT as being able to adjust and improvise to meet holistic expectations, rather than using limits as an excuse to lower these expectations.

In general, the expectations for effective teaching practices from middle and senior management across all schools were generally pragmatic. They understood the challenges teachers faced but felt that the fundamentals were yet to be met. In addition, school C linked effectiveness to teacher responsibilities that were not confined to the classrooms. The ability to communicate with stakeholders, for example, exchange by teachers with parents about students’ learning was highly valued.

However, while pragmatic, contradictions in the responses from management participants (HOD and DHT) about their expectations for effective teaching practices were evident at the same schools. Disagreements were more common when participants were asked to give specific examples. Experienced teachers (school A) were reported to discourage recent teachers at the school from

undertaking fieldwork (DHT—school A). Similarly, at school C, the idea that the senior management did not support curriculum activities outside the classroom setting (HOD—school C) was contradictory to the DHT response. The expectation from senior management was that fieldwork could be undertaken but that students' behaviours should be consistently appropriate within and outside the school environment. This meant that teachers needed to encourage and facilitate positive behaviour and relationships with their students.

Another contradiction identified was with regard to recent teachers to the schools who were discouraged by experienced teachers to incorporate ICT into their lessons. In school A, the recently appointed DHT reported her intervention, and expressed that there were challenges to encouraging innovative practices. In fact, this DHT saw innovative strategies and approaches in teaching certain topics as encouraging students' learning and motivation. These contradictions over specific pedagogical ideas indicate some disagreement over what constituted best teaching practices. Reluctance to incorporate some teaching practices by some experienced teachers showed possible resistance to evidenced-based practices. However, in school A, the DHT was more privy to the specifics of the senior management vision of effective teaching practices. That beginning teachers had encountered contradictions revealed that management intentions had not been effectively shared with teachers.

In the three participating schools, management saw the teaching standard of teachers as having potential for improvement. Some of these improvements were recognised as being within the abilities of staff. The use of routines and basics strategies to involve students and to capture their attention was cited as examples. The DHT at school A explained that, "these are the little things that I wish they would improve on ... to have class control in terms of seating arrangements or [not] having the same group of boys at the back of the class" (DHT—school A). When this was lacking from teachers' practices, the DHT considered that the teachers had set themselves up for failure, since they were not implementing what should come naturally given their training. There was a sense that this did not need management intervention. In the worst-case scenario, absenteeism of some teachers on the day they had difficult classes was reported (DHT—school C). The DHT saw this as preventing some teachers to explore and use diverse teaching strategies, which she considered key to improving the standard of teaching at the school. Therefore, the inability of a few teachers to master management skills, and to access required help, intensified the disciplinary problems they encountered.

A focus on gathering data to allow teachers to account for their performance and improve their practices did not prevail. Both the beginning teacher and the DHT at school B reported that instead of regular mentoring and monitoring, too much focus was placed on teachers' professional obligations in carrying out their roles as teachers (DHT—school B; Ryan—school B). Ryan, and the DHT at school B, explained that teachers' neglect of their responsibilities would result in losing students' respect, and the respect of colleagues and management. Therefore, they anticipated that most teachers would make an effort to meet these reasonable expectations (Ryan—school B). As they saw it, a teacher who did not plan and teach effectively ran the risk of losing students' respect, thus eroding any improvement in the relationship established with students and their subsequent engagement. This risk, therefore, served to encourage thorough planning for teaching (Ryan—school B; DHT—school A).

Other participants considered that management was acknowledging the professionalism of teachers by placing a focus on professional obligations, and that the expectations that came from this focus were reasonable (DHT—school C; DHT—school B; HOD—school B); however, acknowledging the professionalism of teachers does not mean leaving them alone with their teaching. In practice, the notion of providing space and flexibility appeared to limit the ability for school leaders to systematically identify, and to follow up on the developing needs of beginning teachers. In all participating schools, feedback and support were crucial for these beginning teachers given their learning requirement to integrate into the profession, and in many cases, this appeared to be inadequate.

For participating beginning teachers, the degree to which students were involved in their learning served as an indicator of their effectiveness. This involvement entailed the inclusion of feedback from students. This meant that students were encouraged to provide their opinions about choices in their learning—such as tasks or activities they felt they could connect with (Meg—school C; DHT—school A). Similarly, Felicity cited the need to amend and update teaching resources and teaching approaches to suit students' learning, based on a consideration of each student's assessment results and responses in class (Felicity—school A). Thorough planning was seen as pertinent when teaching low achievers, given that these students were seen as the most challenging to teach. How planned lesson unfolded into actual teaching practices that engaged and motivated these students was seen as important in gauging whether or not a teacher was effective (Meg—school C). Therefore, these beginning teachers were cognisant that a dimension of effective teaching practices entailed the inclusion of student feedback, thorough planning and enactment of the lesson plan. Classroom observations and interviews revealed an attempt in Meg's classes to include students' voices around activities that they preferred, but also revealed science inquiry activities that were confirmatory in nature. Overall, there was still a gap between what participating teachers were accomplishing and what research says about evidenced-based teaching.

Responses from the beginning teachers indicated that they felt a degree qualification would contribute towards certain aspects of their teaching effectiveness. For example, a degree might augment their subject matter knowledge (Meg—school C; Felicity—school A diploma qualified). Classroom observations also indicated that Ryan (degree qualified) expressed more confidence in his subject area in comparison to Felicity and Meg. On the other hand, Ryan pointed to the importance of experience, skills and the time needed to improve his teaching practices, and he was of the view that a teaching degree did not represent automatic effectiveness and expertise. Meg pointed to a degree qualification as limited in allowing her to improve students' discipline and attitude (Meg—school C). She felt that while it would empower her with subject matter knowledge, it would not make changes in these areas without communal and parental involvement. This perception, perhaps, stemmed from Meg's view that some of the qualified and experienced teachers at her school were experiencing the same problems as she was, and in some instances worse classroom challenges than her own. Therefore, Meg's view was that external elements (parents, MoE, and community) could do more to improve students' behaviour and their attitude towards their learning. A pattern emerged where the participants tended not to look upon their own school-based professional community to address their professional challenges and learning.

The schools' end-of-year teacher appraisal did not adequately enable these beginning teachers to capture the shortcomings and effective aspects of their teaching practices. Meg explained that the end-of-year appraisal provided her information as to what management thought of her effectiveness as a beginning teacher (Meg—school C), and that these reports pointed to her ability to get along with her students. However, in these reports, she was unable to specify other attributes of her effectiveness as identified by management. Therefore, while the appraisal process provided these teachers a general sense of their performance, it also revealed that management's knowledge of their teaching practice was cursory. However, through discussion with senior management and HOD, teachers emerged from the process of evaluation with a set of improvement targets to work on the following year. In their classrooms and with colleagues at department level, beginning teachers are better prepared to meet these targets as they articulate and ascertain the specifics of their teaching practices together with colleagues and the HOD.

### **3.3. Teaching practices**

All three beginning teachers reported that they were mainly using student-centred approaches in their teaching. However, as evident from the lesson observations their teaching practices had the potential to incorporate more student-centred approaches. For example, teachers were observed: opting for class demonstration rather than group work due to undeveloped classroom management skills; using practical inquiries that were confirmatory rather than explorative in nature; and working from a view that students' learning had to be tightly controlled. These teachers acknowledged

missed opportunities to focus their teaching more towards a student-centred approach, but rationalised this as resulting from factors outside their control. Meg's expressed view was that the notion of student inquiry, as espoused by the teacher training institution, did not reflect the realities of day-to-day existing school context and practices (HOD—school C; Meg—school C). Given that these beginning teachers were, for the first time, fully responsible for teaching their students the designated curriculum, they became more aware of the limitations in their settings. Ryan gave the example of the challenges he faced in gaining greater access to curriculum resources (Ryan—school B; HOD—school A). Beginning teachers also cited a more realistic understanding of students' attributes. Examples such as student discipline and mediocre performance (HOD—school C; Meg—school C), and unwillingness on the students' part to actively participate in their learning were cited by teachers as impediments to student-centred learning (Ryan—school B).

Such contextual factors led these teachers to make compromises in their teaching approaches. This entailed negotiating between the forms of student-centred approaches encouraged during their teacher training to approaches that considered their students' disposition, and other contextual factors. Teachers felt that these factors restricted their ability to challenge students, and to allow those students to explore materials on their own. In one instance, the inclusion of research work as part of students' learning was seen as having the potential to confuse students' learning processes. As Meg noted, "for low achievers I will not encourage that since sometimes they will come across information that will confuse them and this will make your life as a teacher difficult" (Meg—school C). The teachers also believed they were required to cover as much material as possible, and as a result, they favoured direct instruction in order to cover the material. Therefore, their methods tended to favour a transmission model rather than a co-construction of knowledge (Meg—school C). Restriction of student-centred teaching in some instances was justified by these teachers as an attempt to align with the school expectations for effective teaching practices. The view was that student-centred learning as encouraged by the training institution conflicted with management expectations (HOD—school C; Meg—school C). The form of student-centred learning advocated by teacher training institutions was seen by these beginning teachers as requiring students to have more choices, greater freedom and autonomy within the classroom, which meant teachers losing their perceived control over students (HOD—school C; Meg—school C). Meg framed this as a risk to her own classroom control.

Senior members of management commonly advocated for student-centred approaches (DHT—school A; DHT—school C). However, participants taking classes (teachers and HODs) better articulated the compromises they had to make in enacting student-centred teaching. The HOD also pointed out that senior managements' focus was not prioritised towards teaching and learning (HOD—school C). In general, management members had a cursory rather than in-depth knowledge of ongoing classroom practices, as evidenced by the surface feedback teachers received on their work. Given a reliance on management for feedback data, this meant that teachers could not act effectively on such data. It also meant that the senior management did not support specific professional needs beginning teachers had. Senior management, however, considered that HODs should be the ones to lead their department, especially with respect to teaching and learning. In one school, the HOD was seen as falling short in leading improvement needs in her department (DHT—school C). Essentially, these inconsistencies hindered the process of getting much needed support for teachers to better shape their teaching practices to the schools' expectations. This lack of clear leadership from senior management hindered the potential for improving beginning teachers' teaching practices, especially in reducing the gap between a perceived need for direct teaching and one that advocated increased student-centred teaching.

During the systematic observations of the classrooms and teachers, this research revealed missed opportunities for teachers to encourage or support their students to think critically. These missed opportunities were possibly related to beginning teachers' limited expertise with student-centred teaching, expertise which was still developing. There were also occasions when teachers did not link the material covered within class to the students' own experience. Even Ryan, who had a

more advanced qualification, dominantly employed direct instruction approaches. On one occasion, it became apparent why Ryan adhered to teacher-centred rather than student-centred approaches. In this example, Ryan had completed thorough planning, including the devising of worksheets. He had also prepared practical group work for his students, but on this occasion, he could not command his class attention and the students were not fully engaged in the lesson. Ryan, therefore, opted for a demonstration of the practical work, followed by individual work in place of group work. Meg, though less qualified than Ryan, was more effective at getting her students' attention throughout the six lessons observed.

Another missed opportunity for more student-centred teaching was the tendency for beginning teachers to hold the view that they had all the knowledge, and that students required teachers to direct them towards "correct responses" (e.g. Meg). Consequently, the types of question teachers used during their questioning sessions were designed to elicit only one word or short phrase responses. Teachers were also concerned about the low-academic performances of their students, and wanted to ensure that they elicited the right information. As Meg explained, "minimized confusion" was the aim (Meg—school C). In addition, Meg did not want to fall behind on curriculum coverage. Ryan was the exception, in that he taught materials outside the curriculum, because at the time he was able to meet curriculum coverage. Essentially, these teachers were trying their best to excel in developing effective teaching practices within the confines of their developing skills and given the concerns over classroom management.

Participating teachers' approaches in instructing low achievers differed from the manner in which they taught other students. In the Seychelles, the senior secondary classes follow the British general certificate secondary programme, which presents materials for extended and core students with corresponding examinations. Students who struggled with learning had the option of following the core programmes in all subjects. In contrast, the national curriculum for junior secondary students does not make that distinction. In all three cases, these teachers used their personal judgement in selecting what to teach students with low achievements. Their view was that some of the concepts were too abstract and therefore beyond the ability of these students. It was also in these classes that their classroom management skills were tested the most. The overwhelming view was that the low achievers had the most social problems resulting in a prevalence of disconnection to their learning and the display of inappropriate behaviour. Most teachers of low achievers engaged in code switching or code mixing between English and Seychellois Creole, in part to break down and explain complex terms and concepts. The use of the local language was due to a perception that students had a limited grasp of English. These students' limited English skills were seen as a barrier to their learning as well.

Instructions in classes where students were struggling with learning were even more teacher-centred. Curriculum materials were simplified, and students were not challenged but guided towards "right answers". Meg used more effective classroom management and routines, compared to Felicity and Ryan. Her students appeared to be more engaged with the material presented to them. She had numerous student activities in those classes, which demonstrated consideration of her students' contribution to their own learning. Nonetheless, the practical work undertaken was confirmatory in nature and did not challenge the students enough to augment skills acquisition.

### **3.4. Resources and curriculum**

Overall, the participants in this research reported that more could be done to improve their access to the quality and quantity of curriculum resources. Given that resources were centrally controlled, participants reported that the inadequacy was the MoE's responsibility. Generally, participants were not optimistic that there would be improvement in the quality of resources, given that schools were still struggling to obtain adequate core resources. As Meg explained, "in my department, for example, chalk is a core material we need but you find yourself not getting enough" (Meg—school C). Schools were also facing an issue of vandalism that resulted in loss of resources such as chairs and

tables, as well as damage to buildings, which hampered progress made in renovation. Ryan elaborated further: “we have major issues like keeping a budget for the basic stuff; furniture, renovation, and books. These are lacking and they take precedence over quality” (Ryan—school B).

The beginning teachers reported that these issues around resources partly hindered their ability to effectively provide for their students’ learning needs. Resource limitations also impacted on the ability of teachers to meet curriculum requirements. The participants believed the lack of resources hampered some students’ ability to fully tackle some international examinations with confidence. As an example, a reference was made to students taking “alternatives to practical” international examination in the Sciences. The HOD in School A reported that teachers were limited in their ability to fully prepare senior students in this area, due to lack of science resources (HOD—school A). Given this, management recognised that teachers had to improvise (DHT and HOD—school B; HOD—school A). In school A, beginning teachers were encouraged from the onset to improvise in the face of these inadequacies. Management in school B was also cognisant of this situation, and encouraged their teachers to make the best of what they had. In school B, it was recognised that some teachers had devised worksheets and handouts to support their teaching. This was seen as having the potential to encourage collaboration amongst teachers. In trying to meet their own expectations of quality resources, Ryan and Felicity opted to compensate for the inadequacies at school level by relying on personal resources. These included connection to the Internet for additional curriculum materials (Felicity—school A), and incorporating resources into learning materials for students such as worksheets and handouts (Ryan—school C).

There was variation in the manner that these beginning teachers viewed and implemented the curriculum. Their choices were partly influenced by their philosophy of what students’ learning should entail, and by influencing issues in their settings. Ryan did not confine his teaching to the curriculum, in order to extend students’ knowledge by exposing them to more materials. In a number of practical set-ups in science, Ryan personally assisted the laboratory technicians because they were not used to some of the set-ups and practical work Ryan designed for his students. Therefore, in addition to providing for his own learning, Ryan was also empowering staff around him. However, this engagement did not extend to other teachers in his department. Ryan attributed this to the existence of isolated practices and a view that his degree training had equipped him for his responsibilities. While all three teachers selected aspects of the curriculum in teaching low-achieving students, Meg was more focused in keeping to curriculum coverage and in using specified curriculum-based materials. Meg’s teaching philosophy was that information not controlled by her would confuse students, and would negatively affect students’ performance. Some of the variabilities in these teachers’ approach to curriculum delivery, such as Meg’s notion of controlling students’ learning, are reflective of weak support, where the entire burden of teachers’ learning and development is on their shoulders. It is worth noting that schools did not rigidly confine these teachers to the curriculum in terms of content delivery or teaching approaches. However, this flexibility was within a context that created few opportunities where risky philosophies and teaching approaches that influenced beginning teachers’ curriculum choices could be rectified.

### **3.5. Summary**

The analysis of the three case studies has revealed the interplay of a range of factors that influenced the challenges, support and teaching practices of three beginning teachers. While there were contextualized factors specific to each teacher, and to their own school-based context, commonalities existed across the cases. In the researched schools, there was a sense of conservatism around teaching. Therefore, beginning teachers did not enter collaborative contexts with colleagues where examples of effective teaching practice might be discussed, or teaching approaches debated. The opportunity for beginning teachers to access and emulate what constituted effective teaching practice in their context was restricted. This conservatism around teaching was encouraged when access to teachers’ classrooms was restricted to school leaders, who retrieved data primarily for monitoring and evaluative purposes. This constrained the possibility of effective informal and formal opportunities of mentorship from both colleagues and school leadership.

The researched schools had the flexibility to decide on the expectations for effective teaching. Concerns over students' disengagements and misbehaviour in these contexts informed the demands for effective teaching practices across the different schools. These demands included a necessity to incorporate effective classroom management, and pedagogical practices that provided for a range of abilities in order to maximise students' engagement.

The beginning teachers' classroom practices were marked by teacher-centred approaches. Given the conservatism around teaching and the nature of support, the attempts of these beginning teachers to align with their schools' expectation were challenged. While there were elements of student-centred teaching, overall the patterns in their teaching revealed a tendency to closely control the implementation of curriculum material and to rigidly structure students' learning to minimise confusion and disciplinary issues.

#### 4. Discussion and implications

Consistent with the argument of Blanton, Sindelar, and Correa (2006) that there is an absence of a single definition of effectiveness with regard to teaching, the schools and teachers in this research did not articulate a common definition of effective teaching practices. This issue arises from the different views of teachers and principals pointing to various and diverse features of effectiveness (Blanton et al., 2006). For the participating teachers in this study, the expectations and definitions of effective teaching practices were informed by different demands across different schools (e.g. a commonly held view was that effective teachers maximised students' engagement, incorporated effective classroom management and used teaching practices that provided for a range of abilities). The prevailing view of what constituted effective teaching practices influenced how teachers taught, and teachers' and school leaders "concerns over students" disengagement and misbehaviour frequently drove these views and expectations. Therefore, teachers and school leaders saw effective classroom management and differentiation in teaching as important to improving students' engagement. The diversity in responses around effective teaching practices should have been seen as opportunities to: exposed these beginning teachers to other teachers' professional expertise developed over years of education; provide ongoing professional learning and development; and create learning opportunities through their own pedagogical practice. Chong, Rotgans, Loh, and Mak (2012) argued that rectifying concerns around beginning teachers' effectiveness can have a domino effect, resulting in positive outcomes ranging from improved student learning to a possible lowering of teacher attrition rates. Working with others on tasks relating to teaching and thinking, and talking about challenges, exposes teachers to a divergence of ideas. Knowledge of what underlies the practices of others and self provides a way of altering beliefs and gaining knowledge of other instructional practices (Uhlenbeck, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002).

In this study, there was no indication of students' achievement data being used as a means of improving practices within collaborative settings. While these schools and beginning teachers had concerns over students' underachievement, this was attributed to student disengagement and poor attitudes towards learning. The onus was generally placed on students, the MoE, parents and the community rather than on the effectiveness of teaching practices. This could be attributed to the limited opportunities for reflection on teaching. Some students' continued disengagement in learning was ascribed by teachers to their difficult social background, hence the reported poor performance of students by teachers. However, it is likely that poor student engagement and achievement resulted from beginning teachers not accessing the best teaching and assessment practices. As argued by Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001), limited and ineffective support for teachers can impinge on both students' achievements and teacher retention.

In these researched contexts, isolated classroom practices were evident. So, although the schools had the flexibility to decide on the expectations for effective teaching practices, examples of what constituted best, evidence-based, practices were not easily shared among teachers. A collaborative context as a pertinent component in supporting teacher effectiveness has been argued by multiple researchers (Flores, 2004; Uhlenbeck et al., 2002; Williams et al., 2010), and in this study, beginning teachers did not enter collaborative contexts with colleagues where examples of effective teaching

practices could be discussed. Given a collaborative context, the expectations for effective teaching practices could better be aligned with what constituted exemplary teaching practices, effective ways of nurturing relationships with students and engaging them in their learning.

Limitations were evident in the monitoring process that was in place in these secondary schools, which impacted on management ability to efficiently identify and evaluate teachers' effectiveness. A focus on data generation by management to allow teachers to account for their performances did not feature strongly as a component of the monitoring and evaluation process. For example, the feedback teachers received from management tended to be superficial, in that it allowed beginning teachers to articulate a general picture of their teaching, but meant that school leaders did not facilitate critical discussion or debate with beginning teachers around the specific components they believed represented effective practice.

Another limitation in identifying teachers' effectiveness was due to the broad expectations within the teacher evaluation process as experienced by these beginning teachers. The specifics of effective teaching practices need to be better articulated by school leaders, and made known to all teachers in order to allow all to aspire to these. In addition, a relatively full range of indicators for teacher performance could become available for evaluation. As Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijse, and Robinson (2004) reasoned, the fuller the range of expected teacher-sampled effective behaviour, the more robust the evaluation would be. This fuller range would also give teachers valuable data for self-reflection, and serve as a basis for improving their practices.

My research indicated that there were limited possibilities for beginning teachers to access, explore and embrace diverse teaching strategies that would have benefitted all students. Limited formal and informal discussion on teaching practices was one example. Associated with this, a weakness in recognising beginning teachers as still learning has also been revealed in this study. Danielson (1999) and Flores and Day (2006) explained that a perception of beginning teachers as competent, capable professionals with mastery of all the skills and competencies to be effective professionals could discourage them to seek the necessary support, as they would see this as a sign of weakness. Accessing, improving and sharing expertise were eased when, in some instances, teachers were valued for their professionalism. An example can be seen in the mutually beneficial working relationship between Ryan and the laboratory technicians, who assisted him when he introduced new ideas around practical activities with his students. As this study showed, the reluctance Ryan had in accessing expertise from other teachers in his department stemmed from a belief by leaders and other teachers that he could display the qualities of an expert; an issue for beginning teachers also noted by Danielson (1999) and Flores and Day (2006). As Langdon (2011) explained, recognising beginning teachers' professionalism is crucial but it is also possible to support them from this position. It is within a supportive environment that these beginning teachers would have more likely understood the shared expectations for effective teaching practices and been able to access evidence-based practices. In addition, their personal philosophies and ideas around teaching and learning could have been better communicated and justified (Langdon, 2001).

An embrace of teacher-centred teaching was evident in these beginning teachers' classrooms, over and above the inclusion of elements of student-centred practices, and inquiry-based activities. The beginning teachers saw incorporating more elements of student-centred teaching as a mismatch with the schools' expectation for teachers to possess effective classroom management skills. In addition, the concerns of these beginning teachers over students' standards of behaviour within the classroom further encouraged them to skew their practices towards a custodial form of teaching. In this way, they felt they were more in "control" of both the students' and their teaching. As Wanzare (2007) and Feiman-Nemser (2010) explained, a lack of support mechanisms hinders beginning teachers' development of classroom procedural knowledge. They may attempt to tackle their challenges with poor student behaviour by being disciplinarians, authoritarians and custodians in an environment with a non-supporting school culture (Little, 1999; Wanzare, 2007). Given that the depth and range of beginning teachers' classroom procedural knowledge is generally not fully

developed (Feiman-Nemser, 2010; Wanzare, 2007), it is not surprising that the beginning teachers in this study were challenged to encourage and facilitate positive behaviour and relationships with their students, and the outcomes were not always to their expectations. Therefore, the teacher-centred approaches that exemplified these teachers' practices were attempts to *control* student learning because these approaches were seen as better aligned with the schools' expectation that they display effective classroom management skills.

The beginning teachers' philosophy of what teaching and learning should entail influenced how they interpreted and then enacted effective teaching principles and practices within their classrooms. In these schools, they had relative flexibility in identifying the curricula they introduced to their students, as there was no requirement to adhere to a highly scripted curriculum. These beginning teachers saw this as providing them with the flexibility and autonomy to determine what materials they presented to students and how they presented them. However, there was a greater focus by these beginning teachers in understanding their subject rather than on understanding learners and their learning. This greater focus could stem from these beginning teachers' developing philosophy of teaching and learning. It has been pointed out that in certain circumstances, beginning teachers focused their efforts on staying in control of the classroom situation, and therefore might plan and enact their lessons in order to reduce behavioural issues (Langdon, 2001; Wanzare, 2007). However, using this approach, while there may be evidence of reducing behavioural problems, students' learning may not be encouraged (Wanzare, 2007).

To some degree, there was an encouragement from school management for teachers to better involve students in their learning by connecting teaching to their context and incorporating means of motivating students in their learning. Ironically, though, encouragement advocated by management did not automatically augment beginning teachers' acquisition of skills to further involve and motivate students. As Uhlenbeck et al. (2002) explained, beginning teachers' practices, beliefs and assumptions need to be more exposed and shared with others in order for them to develop a better understanding of what effective teaching practices entailed and how these practices could be better applied. Knowledge of what underlies the practices of others' and oneself provides a means for altering beliefs (Uhlenbeck et al., 2002), with the greater feasibility of increasing understanding of effective teaching practices. In the research context, restricted opportunities for the development of teachers' teaching skills with others, and a view of student-centred learning as a risk-taking endeavour resulted in limited intellectual challenge for students. If students are to acquire and develop tools to support their learning, then support and opportunities must be provided to these beginning teachers to become ambitious in their learning as well.

Management and colleagues' involvement in augmenting quality feedback to beginning teachers on their work is vital to improving planning and developing professional discourse (Feiman-Nemser, 2010; Langdon, 2001). These beginning teachers recognised feedback on their work as a means of allowing them to improve their practices. Cheng and Cheung (2004) explained that principals must not only convey expectations, but also detect for beginning teachers or highlight aspects of work they see as needing more attention.

Feedback from school leaders on beginning teachers' lesson plans, classroom teaching and end-of-year teacher evaluation did not provide sufficient data to guide improvement endeavours in beginning teachers' teaching practices. Research indicates that it is more likely for beginning teachers to benefit from feedback that is ongoing and based on authentic day-to-day teaching practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Access to such quality and quantity of feedback can best be improved through professional discourses in their contexts (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Improvement in the quality and frequency of feedback necessitates a greater participation on the part of colleagues.

Resnick (1991) pointed out that beginning teachers' interactions with colleagues in their settings was a key determinant both of what was learnt and how learning occurred. Professional discourse with colleagues, therefore, could consist of serious conversations around teaching, which, as argued

by Feiman-Nemser (2001), are indispensable means for evolving effective practices. The discourses could be seen as enabling beginning teachers not only to receive feedback from colleagues, but to also equip beginning teachers to learn how to elicit and utilise feedback from their own work to improve their practices.

## 5. Conclusion

The beginning teachers in this study entered their workplace with a passion for teaching. They were eager to embrace teaching as a profession and commence their work in a local school, endeavouring to augment their effectiveness as professionals. Their quest for improved effectiveness in their teaching practices has been framed as a complex one. This complexity is evidenced by the insufficient support they received within their work-based contexts, and in the school-specific contexts where colleagues and management did not fully understand or gauge beginning teachers' continuous professional learning needs. The teaching practices of investigated beginning teachers skewed towards teacher-centeredness as teachers attempted to meet the school's expectation for effective teaching practices. In contrast, beginning teachers did not often focus on student needs as their starting point for effective teaching practices. The findings from this research indicate that in order to reverse the aforementioned trends, the education system needs to address the challenge of disseminating effective teaching practices, build supportive contexts, and formulate policies for the development and use of teaching practices with the purpose of allowing effective teaching practices to reach all teachers and students. That is, if these beginning teachers' passion for teaching is to be sustained, then the support system needs to facilitate their development and professional competency so that all students can also benefit.

The notion of effective teaching practices as one of the most cogent contributors to student learning could serve as an impetus for all teachers to act as agents in the sharing of best or most effective evidence-based teaching practices. This would entail an assortment of appropriate school activities that could emulate the needs of the diverse student population within each school, and assist students to recognise the relevance of their education in relation to their strengths, ambitions and interests. It is generally acknowledged that the combined knowledge and expertise within is more than the total of its discrete parts. A reflection of this is a requirement by schools to provide the means to increase teacher collaboration, collective inquiry and learning opportunities to improve pedagogical practices for all. It has emerged from this study that these beginning teachers embraced predominantly teacher-centred pedagogies. The role of teacher education is crucial in empowering student-teachers on how to reflect, how to self-assess, how to support their own going professional learning and development needs and how to ask for help. These qualities are important in allowing teachers to develop student-centred pedagogies, propagate contemporary pedagogies to others in their context and to justify their reluctance to embrace teacher-centred pedagogies.

Many current experienced teachers as evident in this study are the product of didactic methods of teaching that are inconsistent with constructivism and derived from alternative theories. Given these findings, professional development and learning may *also* be viewed as an integral part of the life and culture of the school. School leaders and teachers in the Seychelles schools need to be convinced that the conservatism that exists around some teaching practices inhibit innovation, and subsequently, teachers' effectiveness and their students' learning. Creating a professional learning community with the school context may provide beginning teachers with more opportunities to better identify and understand their evolving needs alongside colleagues. This is crucial in order to challenge and erode the conservatism in work relationships and to facilitate all teachers to access local knowledge of practice. In doing so, teachers have a greater potential to experience, and to implement, multiple models of contemporary practices.

In light of these findings, policy formulation and implementation around beginning teachers' induction, and professional development and learning, all need to be re-examined through the participation of all concerned stakeholders. Teachers need clear evaluative procedures and

specificity in expectations for effective practices to occur. To address this need, a detailed policy initiative that incorporates a teacher accountability requirement may allow beginning teachers to show competency in a concrete and assessable manner. Given the prevailing conservatism around teaching identified in this study, the introduction of professional learning communities as a means of facilitating teachers' success as professionals has been argued. Research into other mechanisms that can serve to challenge the conservatism and encourage teacher learning, support, and improvement in teaching practices could be considered.

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