

OERU PUBLICATIONS

Student Attitude Survey in the OECS

The attitude that secondary school students bring to the learning environment influences the meaningfulness of the learning that occurs. In recent times there has been some concern expressed about the poor attitude that students tend to display toward academic achievement. Educators and parents have been concerned also with the apparent deterioration of discipline evident in some schools throughout the OECS countries.

The OECS Education Reform Unit (OERU), as part of the Reform Strategy, has been involved in designing and conducting a survey of student attitude throughout the sub-region. The survey is one of the initiatives in the Eastern Caribbean Education Reform Project (ECERP) and is being undertaken by specialists in the OERU, together with two consultants, one from the University of the West Indies and the other from Ekos Research Associates in Canada.

Benefits of the Survey

It is expected that the survey will produce results that will help to inform: -

- the curriculum renewal and harmonization processes across the sub-region;
- the inclusion or strengthening of teachers' skill in academic counselling of students;
- guidance and counselling and remedial services within individual countries;
- strategies to increase the level of parental involvement in their children's education;
- strategies to encourage students to display positive attitudes toward schooling and academic achievement;

The survey itself will attempt to find out the following about the students:

Psychological outcomes

Feelings about and liking for school; sense of academic competence and self-esteem; sense of purpose and perceived value of school in relation to life goals; level of aspiration.

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Behavioural Outcomes

Active engagement in school activities; level of effort put into school work; attendance; desire to drop out from school.

Achievement Outcomes

Current level of academic performance.

The research is also interested in identifying the factors that are related to or that may lead to the outcomes stated above. After thoroughly reviewing relevant literature the research team hypothesized that the following factors may be critical in the development of students' attitude to schooling:

Quality of school experience

Quality of teacher/classroom environment

Parental support and involvement

Peer support and influence

Activities Done

1. Preparation of the research design by the Research team.
2. Visits by research team to three OECS countries (Grenada, British Virgin Islands, Dominica) to meet and discuss relevant issues with students, teachers, education officials, parents and employers.

Some of the issues of concern raised by the stakeholders visited were:

Family instability caused by the absence (migration) of parents;

Quality of parental supervision;

Level and quality of parent-child communication;

Influence of peer pressure on students' academic behaviour;

Degree of access to learning resources (libraries, laboratory facilities etc.)

Degree of linkage between school curriculum and students' life experiences;

Extent to which students perceive school prepares them for the world of work;

Effect of class size on students' opportunity to learn;

Degree to which the authority structure of the class/school influences student behaviour;

Extent to which students feel safe/comfortable in school and

in the community.

These ideas assisted the research team to refine the design and also in the preparation of the relevant research instruments.

3. Preparation of the research instruments (student questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and student interview protocol) by research team.
4. Holding of a workshop in St. Lucia for Counterparts (mainly Guidance and Counselling Officers) from the sub-region. The following were achieved at the workshop:

Familiarization of Counterparts with the overall purpose of the survey;

Discussion of survey instruments and design with Counterparts;

Training of Counterparts to administer the survey in their respective countries;

Training of Counterparts to communicate electronically;

Conducting sample pretest of instruments and focus group interviews with a small group of secondary school students.

5. Pilot testing of student questionnaire in two secondary schools in St. Lucia. This exercise which was conducted by the Guidance Officer in the Ministry of Education St. Lucia has been successful.

Activities to be Done

1. Administering survey to approximately five thousand secondary school age students in nine OECS countries in September 1998.

2. Analysis of data and preparation of reports by February 1999. There will be a general report as well as reports for individual countries.

Dissemination of reports to all relevant groups by March 1999.

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