

Understanding the ‘mixed ability’ program in Catholic secondary schools in Mauritius: Perceptions of educators for best practice in the middle years of schooling

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ABSTRACT

The mission of Catholic Education in Mauritius is to ‘humanise’ education and pedagogies to be consistent with Catholic values. The vision of a ‘humanised’ education explicitly teaches collaboration and cooperation. In January 2005, the Catholic Education Bureau (BEC) opted for a ‘mixed ability’ philosophy whose articulation fosters inclusiveness in all Catholic secondary schools. To achieve this, schools need to re-invent and restructure themselves into learning organisations to make obvious the ‘mixed ability’ philosophy at the middle level of schooling from Form I to Form III.

The first purpose of this study is to explore an integral model for an effective education for Catholic secondary schools in Mauritius that acknowledges diversity in the classroom particularly in Form I. The second purpose is to investigate the beliefs and understandings of educators in Catholic secondary education in Mauritius of this model. For the first purpose, a review of the literature was undertaken to understand the concepts of middle schooling, differentiation, learning theories and implications for practice, the enabling structures for Catholic secondary schools to develop into learning communities and the leadership role of key actors. For the second purpose, the perceptions of educators were investigated using a predominantly qualitative, interpretative methodology around an instrumental multi-site case study.

The study found a number of challenges faced by Catholic educators in Mauritius regarding the implementation of the integral model. These challenges present a new direction for these schools to focus on the human person, leading to the development and implementation of the ‘mixed ability’ program. The study concluded with a cogent set of recommendations and directions which need to be put in place in order to improve student learning outcomes at the middle level of schooling and achieve the vision of a human-centered education within the espoused Catholic mission.