Educational leadership: Reducing offending amongst incarcerated juveniles in Antigua and Barbuda

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ABSTRACT: This paper draws on interviews and focus groups conducted with fourteen juvenile students and three principals at a residential correctional institution in Antigua and Barbuda. The study demonstrates the extent to which inadequate educational leadership practices impact young male offenders' educational performance and in turn increase their likelihood of reoffending. Rooted in the conceptual frameworks of reducing the risk of offending through transformational, servitude and spiritual leadership, we determine the most prominent educational leadership factors that influence reoffending and how leadership perceptions of young male offenders impact their educational performance. The findings indicate that without a deeper awareness of the experiences of young persons in correctional institutions, the system does more harm than good. The paper argues that an educational *combo Servant Leadership style* (cSLS) increases the likelihood that young offenders will acknowledge their unacceptable behaviour and therefore desist from engagement in crime.

Keywords: Antigua and Barbuda, correctional juvenile institutions, educational leadership, rehabilitation, small island states

Introduction

Without leadership in correctional institutions, educational performance associated with desistence is unattainable. The stigma of youth incarceration on small island states like those of the Caribbean is even more intimate than the discrimination outlined in the works of Goffman (1963), Rowe (2011) and Deakin, Fox, and Matos (2020). It is not just the nature of close social proximity that everyone knows each other, or the lack of access to resources, but also the effects of young persons being muted even in the consideration of what works for them and having no say in their own rehabilitation. Much of Caribbean criminal justice administration is utilitarian in its approach. Indeed, major juvenile justice reforms have taken place in recent years through the Juvenile Justice Reform Project (2011-2022) led by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) made up of seven island states including

Antigua and Barbuda, the island state where this research takes place. The Project has seen the implementation and support for the diversion from custody, rehabilitation, and reintegration of child offenders.

Despite these reforms, there remain the problems of high rates of delinquency, and the inadequacies with the use, nature and administration of correctional institutions. Furthermore, the standard approaches that policymakers and those in authority take to deal with juvenile rehabilitation are often one-sided and not grounded in an understanding of the needs of juveniles. Notwithstanding the difficulty of small population sizes and lack of breath of specific literature to researching any social issue in small island states, this research took the position that understanding the needs of juveniles is important, and could only be determined by asking the juveniles themselves to express these needs. As such, the current study collected data from current and past resident boys from a correctional Boys Training School located in Antigua and Barbuda to find out what they needed to desist from offending. In addressing this issue, this study focused on the impact of leadership on educational performance and its association with desistence. Leadership styles emerged as the main factor that impacted on educational performance and desistance from offending.

Literature review

Criminal justice in the Caribbean depends heavily on incarceration in response to crime. Children and youths are sentenced by a magistrate to correctional institutions for status offences as well as minor offences (UNDP, 2020). These status offences are mostly related to running away from home and being 'out of control' or committing summary offences like theft, misuse of drugs, violence to the person and other unacceptable behaviours. The approaches to juvenile justice in the Caribbean have typically not succeeded, as recidivism rates among juveniles continue to be high (James, 2015). High juvenile recidivism rates find educational officials within the Caribbean exploring ways that will encourage students to desist from engaging in unacceptable behaviours.

This paper is based on a qualitative research study undertaken to explore the extent to which educational leadership practices influence young male offenders' educational performance and its link to reducing reoffending. This research adds to the research which has investigated varied risk factors associated with juvenile recidivism. It also provides an examination of social issues such as juvenile justice to address such research gaps in small island states. Juveniles with low educational performance tend to display increased delinquent behaviours and are more likely to come into contact with the justice system (Grigorenko, et al., 2013; Van der Put et al., 2010). We are not aware of research which has investigated this issue in the Caribbean; nor of any that directly enquires from juvenile residents of Training Schools about their needs, with the intent of asking them what they want and need from the institutions to aid in their desistence from offending.

Antigua and Barbuda is a twin island state, with some 15% of its population being children of school age. Access to education is limited: just over 80% of children were attending school in 2019 (UNDP, 2020), and this is data prior to the global pandemic which led to a reduction in school attendance. Its criminal justice system treats children as young as eight years old as adults since such children can be deemed criminally responsible for their actions and those under 18 can serve life imprisonment. In contrast, the age of criminal responsibility in Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados is seven years; and in Jamaica, Guyana and St. Lucia it is 12 years. Those in correctional institutions have the opportunity to get schooled; but they suffer stigma and intersectional discrimination since many of them may come from single parent families and live in poverty. Unfortunately, criminalising the actions of children may increase their chances of recidivism and embarking on a criminal career.

From 2016-2019, the proportion of school aged students between the ages of 12-16 in Antigua and Barbuda who were not conforming to school rules was increasing (Browne, 2018). Moreover, the Ministry of Education (MOE) via the Director of Education (DOE, 2018, p. 28) has disciplined several students for displaying "nonconformist behaviours". Part of this discipline can include being sentenced to a residential correctional institution for a period of between 2-5 years. Quite importantly, over 90% of those 'disciplined' are repeat rule breakers. In 2017, of 98 students disciplined, only 10 were first-time offenders; in 2018, of 108 students, only 11 were first-time offenders; and, for the first three months of 2019, of 45 students who were disciplined, only 15 were first-time offenders. The number of students engaging in nonconformist behaviours continues to be cause for concern irrespective of warnings to desist. For example, statistics from the Criminal Records Office of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda show that in 2014 14 minors were arrested and charged for the commission of serious crimes. This figure stood at 35 in 2015, 90 in 2016, 40 in 2017, 39 in 2018, 21 in 2019, 12 in 2020, and 27 in 2021. Youth criminality not only presents problems for the education system in Antigua and Barbuda but it also holds overarching negative effects since such youths may become more serious offenders as they get older due to the interruption in their education and a reduction in access to legitimate opportunities for upward social mobility due to stigmatization and labeling (Durose et al., 2014; Glaze & Kaeble, 2014; Miller & Miller, 2015).

Several research studies link reducing reoffending with education and good school performance (Harney and Ferrol-Hawley, 2012; Mallett, 2013; Miller and Miller, 2015; Teplin et al., 2006). A good education is essential if juveniles are to make wise choices, including those related to engagement in unacceptable behaviour, and to ensuring access to legitimate opportunities such as employment, which reduces the likelihood of engagement in such behaviour. At the helm of any institution is leadership. Yet research has not examined leadership practices in correctional institutions.

The paper engages with characteristics and attributes that indicate the type of leadership needed to enable desistence from crime. No single leadership theory captures the type of leadership styles which were described by the young male offenders at St. Michael's School (this is a pseudonym), the only boys' training school cum correctional facility in Antigua and Barbuda. Epstein (2014) argues that in educational institutions the Principal needs to embrace a wide variety of leadership skills and styles to cater to the diverse needs of students. Three types of leadership theories were explored in order to capture what the boys were describing. It became evident that an amalgamated form, what we call a *combo Servant Leadership Style (cSLS)*, emerged which comprises elements of Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2005; Russell & Stone, 2002; Yusof & Mohamad, 2014); Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Russel & Stone, 2002) and Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Hickman,1997). The findings from our study indicate the appropriateness of a *cSLS* leadership style that can transform and support desistance of juveniles in correctional institutions.

Transformational Leadership (TL) theory was introduced by Burns (1978) in his examination of political leaders in the late 20th century. Burns (1978) viewed transformational leadership as that which "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (1978:20). The proposition was that TL has the propensity to elevate followers from one level to another level of needs, as exemplified in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy. Bass (1985) furthered Burns' leadership theory, arguing that a leader is "one who motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do" (1985, p. 20). Bass (2008) identified the leader's function as having to establish order and transform institutions for continuous improvement (Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018). Motivation can be fostered if one is aware of the importance of outcomes and how they can be achieved. Bass (2008) also argued that the encouragement of leaders goes beyond self-interest, and operates for the good of the team or the organization. Bennis and Nanus (2007)

further described transformational leaders as individuals who commit people to action and embrace distributive leadership while facilitating modifications. Doody & Doody (2013) added that transformational leaders are strategic in their approach. Leaders who adopt the TL style are concerned with establishing the institutions' goals, promoting best practices, ensuring high academic standards, providing individualised support, and creating a constructive culture while promoting shared decision-making and facilitating change. Engaging with all stakeholders – including offenders – enables administrative leaders to build long-lasting and committed relationships to achieve the organisation's mission and vision.

Despite its appeal, the literature generates some key arguments against TL (Berkovich, 2016). For example, Yaslioglu and Erden (2018) question a lack of specificity, citing ambiguities with the conceptions of individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation. They consider that these concepts do not quite define or address issues that specifically consider the leader in specific situations – such as correctional institutions as in our study – where the juvenile offender is compromised by a legitimised lack of power and agency. In the context of our study, TL also does not provide specific sources of behavioural action that can be recognised as inspiration and harnessing inspiration within the organisation. This study finds that, although some criticism of TL is justified, it has proven helpful when taken in combination with other leadership styles. Transformational leadership served to aid our description of the type or style of leadership that supports reducing offending and engendering desistence as it enabled us to seek out and capture specific values and attitudes that could not be accounted for in the servant and spiritual types of leadership.

Servant Leadership (sL) focuses on developing a climate that is fair and indicative of service (Greenleaf, 1977). Liden et al. (2008) add that sL embodies being fair and honest with students. They see this as advancing the reciprocation of free and open communication which will result in students building confidence and trust. A servant leader puts the needs of others first, thereby focusing on others instead of self and approaching the task of leadership as a servant (Greenleaf, 1977; Russel & Stone, 2002). The main goal of the servant leader is to serve and ensure others' needs are met (Russell & Stone, 2002). Such leaders empower individuals, supporting them as they strive and flourish (McMinn, 2001).

Alongside the empowerment characteristic or attribute, servant leaders need to listen. Spears (1995) describes servant leaders as keen listeners. They state that, as the leader listens, they hear not just what the student is saying but they also grasp those inner unspoken words. Students need to feel valued; having a leader that listens boosts self-confidence (Spears, 1995). Empathy is another important feature of the sL style. Empathy emerges from listening extensively. The leader listens and puts themself in the place of the student or offender, resulting in the understanding and appreciation of their circumstance (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Spiritual leadership (SL) is the last element of the cSLS approach. It brings with it personality attributes of vision, hope, faith and altruistic love. In Fry's (2005) conception of spiritual leadership, leaders are compassionate, empathetic and show altruistic love to followers. Fairholm and Gronau (2015) argue that harmony, cooperation and compromise are hallmarks of a spiritual leader. Such leaders see it as their responsibility to achieve the broad vision developed for the organization and gain commitment from followers by showing interest and commitment (Fry, 2005; Fry et al., 2017). Spiritual leaders acknowledge the need to consider the interests of their followers and in turn provide hope, bringing energy and motivation to the institution, which in turn empowers followers (Abdizadeh & Khiabani, 2014; Chen & Li, 2013; Fry, 2005).

Vision is another important component of the SL style. Fairholm & Gronau (2015) argue that a clear and adequately specified vision for the institution is imperative to improving performance in institutions. Fry & Altman (2013) argue that, when leaders create a vision,

followers' lives become purposeful with meaning and they in turn will make a difference as a sense of calling is experienced. Under the SL style, subordinates perform well since there exists a clear vision for the institution which sets clear targets and means to achieve that vision (Cerasoli & Ford, 2014; Menges et al., 2017).

The final characteristic of the SL style is altruistic love. Spiritual leaders create a climate where altruistic love is exhibited by valuing self and others, providing care and respect (Fry, 2005). Those who view altruism as that which considers the well-being of individuals explain that it is exemplified by leaders being cautious, grateful, and showing concern for others within the organization (Menges et al., 2017). According to SL theory, altruistic love is also given by leaders to followers to achieve the common vision that reduces fears and anxiety that are associated with worry, anger, jealousy, selfishness, failure and guilt (Fry et al., 2017). Altruistic love provides a sense of belonging whereby everyone feels understood and appreciated.

The findings from the current study suggest that a combination of elements from these three leadership styles – spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership – could form a leadership model which may prove superior to each of the individual models. Rooted in this conceptual framework, our study indicates the appropriateness of a *combo Servant Leadership Style* (*cSLS*) as a leadership style, that if applied, can transform and support educational performance and desistence of juveniles in correctional institutions.

Methodology

The data used in this study is derived from narrative interviews, focus groups and a review of the boy's school records. The participants were young boys from varied low income and deprived socio-economic backgrounds. Between July 2019 and September 2020, 14 boys and three Principals of the Training School were interviewed. Known as Principals rather than Governors in correctional institutions, they are responsible for all the education activities that the boys are exposed to and it is their leadership and decisions that directly impact education in these setting. Of these 14 boys, six were past residents and eight came from the 21 boys who were resident at the time at the only Boys Training School in Antigua and Barbuda, hereafter referred to as St. Michael's School. Of the remaining thirteen boys needing consent there were eight under the age required to give consent and for the other five, their consent forms were either not returned or for varied reasons they did not make their scheduled interview times.

The two focus groups comprised (1) the current inmate residents and (2) the past male residents at the institution. Juveniles had to be aged 16 years or over as required by law so that they were eligible to give consent (OECS Education Act, 2009). Of the Principals who were interviewed, two were former Principals while the third was the current Principal.

The focus groups and interviews covered three main areas. These were: the participants' experiences at the institution; their reflections on their interactions at the institution; and what they would change at the institution if they had the opportunity. Each interview lasted approximately one hour while the boys' focus groups were each approximately three hours. All the boys as well as the current Principal were interviewed face-to-face, while the two past Principals were interviewed via Skype and telephone respectively.

The qualitative data was transcribed and analysed by means of *Atlas-ti* (2016) using line-line coding to separate and label the data and utilized participants' own language (Saldana, 2013). Transcripts were shared with and validated by the participants to ensure accuracy. Participants were able to discuss and clarify interpretations of the data, which ensured that their voices were effectively represented.

The intentional use of reflexivity – the continuous questioning of taken for granted assumptions and acting on that revisited position – is a vital hallmark of black feminist researchers, meant to mitigate the possibility of not hearing or misrepresenting respondents. It

served to increase the likelihood that there was no forcing of the data into pre-existing frameworks at any stage in the collection, analysis and dissemination of the material (Hagley-Dickinson, 2017; Harding, 1993).

Hill Collins & Bilge (2002, 2016) and Day and Gill (2020) show how intersectionality is connected to the way we design, conduct and publish our research. Intersectionality is a concept that describes how a person's social and political identities of inequality such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality intersect within social structure and systems to create different types of discrimination and/or privilege. Recognising in our research both our privilege and our shared minoritisation with our participants connected to the way we designed, conducted and published our research. In fact, the rationale to study the training school in Antigua and Barbuda occurred because the primary field researcher was native to the island state; this acts to ground her positionality, improving the opportunity to focus on and do impactful research for and with her community. Such positionalities also connect our work to resistance and social justice within small states which, although privileging gender in the analysis, are inclusive of men (in this case, boys). This study moves beyond research that explores and answers theoretical and practical questions, but also seeks to advocate for social change (Milne, 2016).

Ethical permission was sought and obtained from the Ministry of Education (MOE) to conduct the study. A letter of authorization from the institutional Principal granted permission for the use of the institution's facilities for the study's focus group sessions. From an ethical standpoint, we are writing ourselves into the research; this stance gives epistemological permission to be reflective and to address our ethical considerations which include the need for confidentiality, anonymity, respect, voluntary participation, informed consent, trustworthiness, credibility and integrity. Here is where an intersectional standpoint aids research in small island states to identify and embrace the nuances of encountering boys in the facility who you know or whose parents/relatives you may have a village connection with to be able to account for and be expressed as part of your motivation rather than just an unsettled ethical dilemma.

The primary field researcher also included her work as an educational official working for the MOE. This meant that we could reflect from a position that was privy to complaints made by the public about experiences of juveniles as it relates to educational leadership, among other factors. These complaints usually made by parents were reported to the MOE as well as aired frequently on the media of the island state. Therefore, of utmost importance to us was to present an honest representation of the reflections and to capture the main substance of the experiences of the participants. We also aimed to ensure that the voices of the young men were heard and could be influential to changes in social justice. Not only did we endeavour to be accountable for the ways in which the study was undertaken, but we were also aided in access, having familiarity with gate keepers and the status in the various ministries and in the data collection to consider the experiences of the researchers to reflect as we collaborated to write this project. Herein lies both pro and con of researching in small island state. The pro is that your status and knowing can be a privilege, but it comes with the ethical challenges which require standpoint epistemology as exemplified in this study.

Study Participants

St. Michael's School, which functions as a correctional facility, provides residential accommodation for boys aged 12-21. It is governed by a Principal. The appointment is made by the MOE; but the facility utilizes a prison regime and is staffed by correctional officers whose background and training are prison-related. Such a hybrid criminal justice arrangement requires its own analysis; this is however not possible here; but it speaks to the dearth of research in criminal justice administration in the region. The 14 boys participating in the study were either present or past students of St. Michael's School (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics of juvenile male participants.

Participants' pseudonyms	Age	Status of re-offending	Reason for being in the institution
Past students: 6			
Paul	19	Y	History of drug sentences for assault, illegal drugs and truancy
Patrick	19	N	Larceny and wounding with intent
Percy	18	N	Assault
Pluto	19	Y	Assault, marijuana use
Peter	17	Y	Using marijuana, causing bodily harm to another student and breaking and entering
Panjo	18	N	Involved in fights, regular marijuana use, cannot read, sentenced for assaulting and wounding another student
Current students: 8			
Tom	16	N	Assault
Terry	17	Y	Breaking and entering, destruction of school property, destroyed the test papers, wrote graffiti on office walls. History of truancy and use of marijuana.
Tyrone	17	Y	Twice institutionalised and returned to the institution after violating probation and committing larceny.
Tye	17	N	Bullied at school, sentenced for aggravated assault.
Tyke	16	Y	Second sentence to the institution, his third stint for violating his probation, fighting and marijuana use.
Toby	16	Y	Being truant and upon initial release violated his probation and committed larceny
Tobias	16	N	Larceny, graffiti and escaping from police custody
T'Quan	17	Y	Possession of illegal drugs
Average Age	17		

Source: Fieldwork, 2020

The boys were given fictitious names, starting with P to represent past inmates, while those serving time at the time of the study were given names starting with T. Of the past students, four had graduated in the year prior to conducting this study. The other two past students completed their sentence and were released from the institution two months before the study was conducted. Three were rearrested less than six months after leaving the institution. One was sentenced to Antigua's lone prison and two, because of their ages, were sent back to the institution. Data on reoffending were obtained from the boys; but their length of stay at the institution was corroborated by official records. Of the six boys returning to the institution, only two had completed their full maximum stay. The length of time spent by the six boys returning to the institution ranged from 5 to 25 months. The eight current students have all been at the institution for at least six months; five of these were repeat offenders. All but one of the boys were far below their grade level of literacy when compared to their chronological age. The boys had major reading issues; however, only Percy was diagnosed at an early age with a reading disability.

Findings

Themes of empathy

Themes of empathy, trust and listening were frequent recurrences. Of the14 boys who told their story, 13 explicitly expressed instances when they alleged that the Principal's leadership was lacking or inappropriate. Their words such as 'don't study us', 'no assistance', 'no trust', 'no interactions', 'not motivated', 'not loved' and 'no empathy' were prevalent:

I have to make out, I have to live so it is what it is, it is life. I just have to survive. Empathy? ... All day I can hear shouting of orders and what will happen if the orders are not carried out. There is no help but fear. They do not care how you feel … I do not trust anyone in here (Tyke).

They don't trust me … I am not motivated … I am telling them that I am not well, and they are saying, it is not true, I am up to something. There is no empathy. I was once told that I can only fool my stupid mother (Tom).

Most of the boys during the focus group sessions expressed similar anguishes: that their education was not supported at the institution; and that they were treated as adults; and that they were verbally abused daily. The boys all described the leadership at the institution as a far cry from what they had expected and desired:

The Principal never listened, no trust no empathy … forced to serve and satisfy others throughout my stint, no one cared, I am being bullied ... This place is of no help in anyway (Panjo).

I am in here again for six months now and all I hear is them telling me I will go to big prison. I do not get any help with schoolwork. They just boss me around. No one listens to me (Tyrone).

Strict discipline. Principal does not listen. No support given to students. No interest in helping in educational programmes (Paul).

In telling their stories, most of the boys mentioned that the Principal never listened to them:

The only time the Principal talk to me is when at assembly when she is calling out names of persons to be punished. I am here because my friend and I broke into a school (Toby).

There is no dialogue between principal and students; hence no relationship. This is contrary to (cSL), which places great emphasis on valuing individuals.

Negative labels and emphasis on discipline

Views of the boys

The interviews with present and past students as well with present and past principals indicated that all was not well at St. Michael's. The students appeared to believe that leadership practices could help them become more disciplined individuals; but over time the boys began to regard it as punishment. Only one past boy, Paul, agreed that he had learned a new skill (agriculture). Paul also indicated that, because of his experience at the facility, he now farms for a living. However, the students agree that if more emphasis was placed on education, and only if they were treated with love and if they had gotten the guidance desired, they would have benefitted much more from their experiences at the institution.

All the boys except one expressed instances when the educational leadership was lacking or unsuitable. Conversely, good leadership is embedded in an unassailable persona and unselfish commitment to the institution (Jenkins, 2013). Correctional institutions necessitate a leader that is supportive, can model positive behaviour, and is able to motivate followers. Here, the focus of principal leadership that embraces educational leadership should be on building a relationship that connects all students. Peter, one of the past students, said that he spent two years at the institution and the Principal spoke to him only twice. Indeed, as each student communicated, they were not motivated to discuss matters that could prevent them from offending or improving their education performance.

All participants were at ease and willing to talk about their stories to the researchers. They expressed their disappointment that being at the institution had not helped them in any way. Terry said that for the first month he cried every night, and this was the second time he was an inmate. Phrases such as 'loneliness' and 'crying' and 'no-one to talk to me when I am feeling sad' were frequent. Many of the boys mentioned that it was the first time they were telling their story. This researchers offered a voice to the boys who were willing and able given the research parameter to talk. Their narrative might most likely represent and resonate with others who were unable on this occasion to speak. As the boys shared their stories while at the institution, it was apparent that they felt that discipline was overemphasized. For example, T'Quan was locked up in a dark room for 24 hours after riding a donkey that strayed into the yard. Many boys spoke about everything else being prioritized over education. For example:

> I just need a little help with calling some hard words (Terry).

> I sometimes cry a lot. I am shouted at many times. I have heard them referring to me as a thief many times (Tye).

> I tried to do school assignments, but it was so difficult. When I asked for help, I was shouted at and called names so I feel ashamed and stopped doing all schoolwork. I really don't like the schoolwork (Tyrone).

> I am left on my own to do the schoolwork and I can't do it so I do the dishes instead (Tobias).

Each of the boys' stories is unique and yet, they all described the leadership at the institution as a far cry from what they felt was needed. The boys viewed leadership at the institution as unsupportive, emotionless, aggravated, punishment-oriented, based on orders, not attentive to their needs, forceful, bullying, exhibiting a lack of caring and having no empathy.

Views of the Principals

The stories of the Principals on their understanding of leadership practices at the correctional institution were not diametrically opposed to the narratives of the boys; but they did amplify the focus on discipline that the boys described. On the issue of leadership their stories were unanimous about discipline and opposite to what their students articulated of the leadership style that they needed. All three principals agreed that a type of leadership that displays 'strict discipline' was most appropriate for the boys: to keep them in line, to conform to institutional standards, and to enable them to contribute positively to society in the future. The principals were of the belief that if students were not disciplined, their negative behaviours would continue, and so would their offending. They also outlined challenges which included the lack resources, training in leadership skills and limited punishment available to ensure compliance. Figure 1 illustrates the main themes identified from the interviews with principals.

Figure 1: Main themes and sub themes raised by Principals.
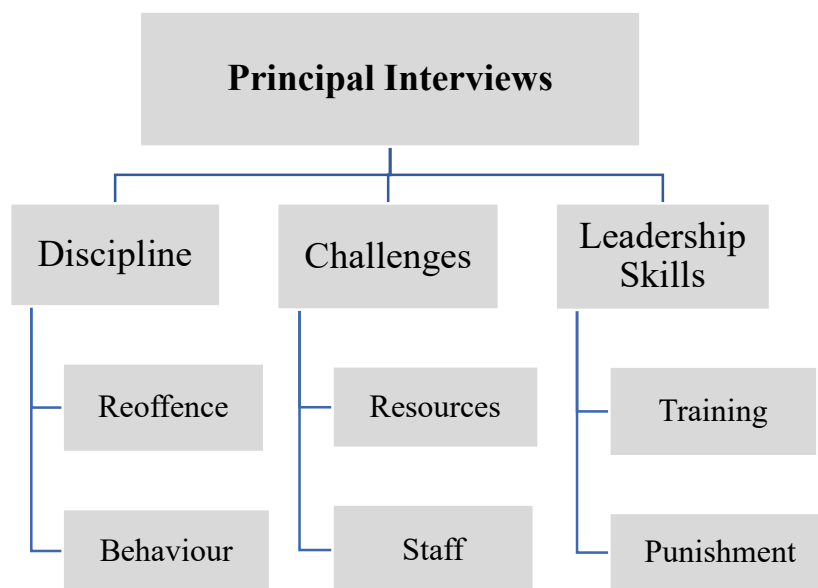
Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Punishment

The principals interviewed accounted altogether for 13 years of experience working at St. Michael's School. The present Principal (PRS1) was in her fourth year at the institution. Before taking up the position, she was employed outside the educational sector. In response to the question of how effective the institution was, the answer was that the whole system needed to be redefined if it was to satisfy the needs of offender students and aid in their successful rehabilitation. PRS1 added that offender students today think differently and what seemed to have worked in the past was not working now. PRS1 stated that, academically, the boys lacked problem-solving skills and most of them could not read. PRS1 added that it had been a challenge to deal with the students since they often showed a blatant disregard for the rules of the institution.

When asked what leadership practices PRS1 used to engage students so they could do better academically, she looked up and in a low monotone voice said, "strict discipline". PRS1 added that the boys were at the institution for several crimes and to get them back on the right path they needed to be disciplined. The Principals all mentioned that the boys skipped classes under various pretences and even escaped on occasion. PRS1 explained that such situations

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created added pressure to make decisions to tighten security rather than support the boys. She indicated that she does her best. Probing to find out what that meant, special reference was made to having the boys working in the garden and teaching them a trade so that they would be able to feed themselves. However, she agreed that based on her experience, she does not feel that the institution is a place where leadership should be "too friendly with inmates" since this can be mistaken for weakness and the boys would then not carry out orders.

Past Principal 1 (PP1) had led the institution for six years. Prior to working at the institution, he had served as a senior probation officer for the court. PP1 informed that much more could be done to help the boys but lack of resources greatly hampered the institution and made it impossible to achieve goals. PP1 stated that the boys were not academically inclined and principals were rarely trained in educational leadership skills. Therefore, it was a challenge to help students with their education. The focus was more on getting the boys to see the wrong that they had done and to be so treated that they may not want to commit them again. PP1 expressed the view that the boys "needed firm discipline". This was referred to as tight schedules and punishment when rules were broken. PP1 stated that most of the boys did not obey rules, and this forced leadership to implement stronger measures to keep them in line. This was done in the hope of preventing escape rather than using education to rehabilitate. While PP1 viewed education as important, he said that the boys would often complain of being sick to avoid attending classes. PP1 added that the boys showed no interest in the daily educational lectures. PP1 added that the boys did nothing that was deserving of praise or love: "The boys are not angels, and they are not sent to the institution to be pampered." PRS1 explained that some of the boys would seek every opportunity to run away or to start a fight. To prevent this, leadership had to incorporate tighter measures which included strapping or corporal punishment.

Past Principal 2 (PP2) had been a principal at the institution for three years; she had never taught in a mainstream school and had no knowledge of educational leadership. However, she quickly pointed out that she spent several years working at other correctional institutions in the Caribbean and was praised by her employers for the way she carried out her duties. PP2, like the other two, argued that the institution was a correctional one and the boys were "on punishment", when referring to the vision and mission of the institution. She added that the institution had many challenges which included a shortage of essential resources and staff. After a long pause during the telephone interview, PP2 declared that principals at the institution must perform in such a way that students get the message that they have done wrong and as a result their freedom had been taken away.

PP2 also stated that most of the boys seemed to have difficulties with schoolwork even before coming to the institution. She added that the boys did not conform to educational institutional standards. PP2 admitted that at the institution fights among the boys were prevalent, and as leader she was constantly trying to settle disputes. When asked about leadership practices, PP2 viewed 'discipline' as critical in getting the boys back on track. PP2's strategies were to employ schedules and she saw leadership at the institution as necessarily rigid. PP2 strongly believed that a principal in correctional institutions should be strong on discipline, but agreed that having some knowledge of educational leadership was useful. PP2 argued that there was no need to treat the boys differently, since it was hardly likely that they would change. She however admitted that, despite all the punishment, educational performance was still below acceptable standards, and recidivism rates were climbing.

Discussion

None of the principals who served at St. Michael's School have worked as educators in other educational settings. They all indicated that there was a lack of essential resources within

the institution. This included trained members of staff. All the principals admitted that most of the boys in their care were not academically inclined. They also mentioned that many of the boys did not conform to the rules of the institution and were frequently involved in conflicts with each other and even escaping from the institution. The principals agreed that the offender students had been sent to the institution to be rehabilitated and understood that this mission required firm discipline. This discipline was essentially coercive, rather than one that aimed to build self-discipline. It is punishment to include doing time and cutting all leisure time, and having tight schedules which were described as getting up at 6 am every morning, followed by a list of chores concluding at 4 pm. However, all the principals interviewed confirmed that in spite of all the strategies employed, the boys' educational performance remained below acceptable standards while reoffending and recidivism rates continued to increase.

There are gaps in the leadership style that are not grounded in *cSLS*. The features and attributes of this leadership style emphasise the importance of appreciating and valuing, listening, loving and caring, trusting, showing empathy, serving, providing faith and hope, mentoring or teaching, and empowering followers. However, the general perception garnered from the boys was that there was a lack of educational leadership and the principals' only vision was implementing discipline within a punitive discourse. The main findings from the narratives of the principals mirrored that of the participants' lived experiences of a lack of educational leadership and guidance. Three key needs emerge from the principals' responses: training in leadership skills; resources; and responding to the behaviour of the boys in the institution.

In conclusion, the students felt that their Principals' leadership was synonymous with discipline and punishment; as a result, they became rebellious. These narratives indicate that the boys were not being given the attention needed, such as listening, mentoring and empathy. Their stories suggest that if leadership can display these qualities, then students would have been better motivated to change. These qualities find relevance in the conceptual theories of leadership styles and resonate with the formulated *combo Servant Leadership style* (cSLS) that would reform educational leadership practices at correctional institutions so that they would better contribute to achieving desistance among delinquent juveniles.

Principal leadership practices could get delinquent juveniles to improve their education performance and avoid recidivism. But current Principal leadership is cheating the institution from attaining its mission and vision, which is based on rehabilitating students so that they are less likely to reoffend and rather contribute positively to society. These are the expressed goals of the DOE. This failure has been seen in the rising rates of recidivism and continued poor educational performance of the students, despite spending extended periods at the institution.

The conceptual framework of cSLS which was presented seems to best fit the type of leadership that may be effective for students at the institution. The 'combo Servant Leadership style'(cSLS) incorporates components of spiritual, servant and transformational leadership, and places emphasis on the importance of appreciating and valuing people, listening, mentoring and empowering followers through trust, empathy, vision, hope, faith and altruistic love. This amalgamation of theoretical models suggests what type of leadership is needed to promote increased educational performance that enables rehabilitation and reduces reoffending. cSLS emphasizes a need for re-addressing youth-focused criminal justice in the Caribbean by adopting, or at least considering, this leadership style. The hallmark of cSLS is to serve and ensure others' needs are met: a key inspiration for leaders at correctional institutions. Such leaders empower individuals, supporting them as they strive and flourish (McMinn, 2001). This is a far cry from what was found at the institution which was examined.

Limitations

Several limitations are worth noting. The recruitment of participants was more about willingness to be involved rather than by way of a purposive or random sample. While there were over one hundred students who had left the institution, only a small number of students were reached by way of information from community members, MOE, the Institution, and Criminal Record Office (CRO) and consented to participate. The small sample, as well as the non-randomness of the youth who participated in the research, affects the generalizability of results. Despite the small sample size, the research team was able to capture rich and detailed data which we believe allowed us to reach data saturation with the topics of interest.

Another concern relates to the small size of the jurisdiction in which this study was caried out. Antigua and Barbuda has a population of around 100,000, and as such, the level of familiarity would potentially be high among students and staff. The boys involved in this study, the three principals, and even the researchers themselves could easily be known to each other, thus framing and impacting on their statements and responses; perhaps even muting or toning down their criticisms to avoid eventual reprisals (Matheson et al., 2022). Despite this, the interviewers were suitably trained to build rapport and develop trust in order to secure accurate data, and made every effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all participants.

A final limitation relates to using only students and school principals in the study. Teachers also represent another useful population who could comment on leadership styles at the institution. It is suggested that teachers could be included in future studies.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of educational leadership on juvenile offenders' educational performance and their propensity to reoffend. The study suggests that principal and educational leadership at St. Michael's School was unsuitable: it failed to meet the needs of students and did not achieve the mission and vision of the correctional facility. The study also explored the link between education and desistance, suggesting that adjustments in leadership practice may be needed to improve educational performance and reduce reoffending.

The cSLS conceptual framework presented can be adopted by principal leaders to ensure that juveniles' educational performance is improved. Principal leadership must possess qualities that would allow them to understand students' plights. This paper suggests that the use of the cSLS leadership style would help to satisfy the needs of students, thereby increasing motivation and quite likely academic performance. This leadership style emphasizes qualities such as trust, altruism, love, empathy and praise as hallmarks to empowering and motivating individuals, especially vulnerable students that need encouragement to conform to rules, thereby improving educational performance and aiding desistence.

Disclaimer

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