Case study 1: Interview with Teacher from an East/West Corridor Secondary School

| **Speaker** | **Comments** |
| --- | --- |
| SL | Okay just tell me your name and where do you teach? |
| Teacher | My name is V Ramoutar (fictitious name) and I teach at Urban Secondary. |
| SL | How long have you been there? |
| Teacher | I have been there approximately 8 years. |
| SL | Did you teach anywhere before? |
| Teacher | Yes. Inner City, I taught there for 2 years. |
| SL | 8 years Urban, 2 years Inner City. Before that? |
| Teacher | University. After the University, I worked for about 6 months in a company called Al Rosco in Arima. |
| SL | That’s meats. |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | What did you study at University? What is your field? |
| Teacher | Chemistry. Analytical chemistry. So straight from there I got a job as lab technician at Al Rosco and just in the lab doing tests and that kind of this. I didn’t like it there much, but I didn’t stay there after 6 months, I went. I moved on to Multi-Foods Cooperation or Food industry. I forget the exact name of it. That’s a food company in Diego Martin. You know the Swiss brand of products, they do that. They also package Diary Diary milk, powder milk. They also do peanut butter. |
| SL | Okay how long were you there? |
| Teacher | I was there for probably a year. |
| SL | Okay so you worked in the private sector for about 2 years? |
| Teacher | Yes, a year and a half. |
| SL | Did you like it? |
| Teacher | I hated it. |
| SL | You didn’t like Al Rosco? |
| Teacher | At all. |
| SL | Why? |
| Teacher | I didn’t like there, the working conditions, you couldn’t leave during lunch time; they want you to stay there and purchase food from the cafeteria there. They had their own set up. So, I feel like, you know, you was in a kind of jail. You can’t be, you can’t move around people always watching you in a kind of way. I don’t know, I just didn’t like the atmosphere there. |
| SL | Alright. Did you like the nature of the work itself you were doing? |
| Teacher | It alright, it was just basically testing stuff and just, it wasn’t nothing too exciting. You just look for certain things, making sure everything falls within a particular range that kind of thing and you yes it good… |
| SL | And your next job, basically was the same thing but you know, you ‘was’ a little more how should I say it? |
| Teacher | I had a little more input. |
| SL | What made you want to leave to go to teach? |
| Teacher | First of all, to be honest, the salary wasn’t that good and to say that I wanted to go and teach. I shouldn’t say that, it was like after UWI everybody just applied all over the place. People applied to the Ministry or Education, I applied there, just normal, you just applied all over the place. |
| SL | So, you looking for work? |
| Teacher | Yes, you looking for work. |
| SL | And you end up in teaching? |
| Teacher | They called a Sunday saying there was a vacancy, a teacher went on no-pay leave or some kind of thing like that and they wanted to fill the vacancy. |
| SL | At Inner City? |
| Teacher | At Inner City, yes. |
| SL | So, you went to teach at Inner City. |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | How long did you stay at Inner City? |
| Teacher | 2 years. What happen, the teacher was on 2 years leave or some kind of thing so. She was supposed to come back to take up her spot right. So, like a few months before I knew she was coming back, I went to the Ministry and kinda try and see if they could have find a place for me after she returned. They said there was a vacancy in Urban Secondary. I wasn’t so thrilled about it. |
| SL | Why? |
| Teacher | Because Urban and everything you will hear on the news about Urban and the crime and thing. I didn’t really want to go into there, but, it was a vacancy, a permanent vacancy, a permanent appointment. A post, that was one. The second thing was that it was very close to home. So about 20 minutes’ drive from San Juan, El Socorro. I could have been in school and about 20 minutes. So that was on my mind.  Knowing that I have just gotten married, that July. September, I don’t know if I had refused Urban if I would have been out of a job for a couple… |
| SL | So, you needed to get permanent? |
| Teacher | Yes, so that was the third thing on my mind as well. So, I said alright. Although my wife was working and that kind of thing. We met in UWI and that kind of thing, so she was alright. A good job. I didn’t want to be home ah 6 months or 3 months whatever, a year. Holding on for a job. I said okay, I will go to Urban. |
| SL | So, you end up at Urban what was that like? |
| Teacher | To be honest, it was just like Inner City. |
| SL | Meaning what? |
| Teacher | Not nice. |
| SL | What were the conditions like? What did you face? Urban as a new kid on the block? |
| Teacher | I would say Urban was a little easier than Inner City. |
| SL | Alright well let us talk about Inner City. |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | Was it easy? |
| Teacher | No. |
| SL | What was the challenge like teaching at Inner City? What Form did you teach? |
| Teacher | 1-5. |
| SL | What was that like? Behaviour wise, relationships wise? Instructionally? What? |
| Teacher | At first, it was very difficult. It was a real eye opener. Culture shock as some people would say. Because going to school in St. Georges and seeing the kind of structure they had there and the respect we had for teachers growing up in that school and coming to Inner City and seeing how students talk to you and that was really shocking for me. |
| SL | Give me some examples of some critical incidences and so on that strike you now when you recall. |
| Teacher | Well, I could remember in class in school in St. Georges, you were so afraid of the teacher, to talk to your friends next door; you had to think twice or even three times before you even go and do that.  Umm, sometimes I answer questions in class and thing you know. You had this fear of the teacher, not fear that you ‘fraid to talk to ask questions and that kind of thing but he ask you a question, you answer and then that was it. You know. You see him in the corridor, you see her in the corridor you show her respect “how are you?” that kind of thing. You call her out “*Sir*” or “*Miss*”.  In Inner City just like they in class, they talking when they want to, you tell them stop talking, you continue talking, they looking at you in the face, they continue talking. There was a guy walking around the classroom, I told him “*stop*” he looked at me and he laughed and continued walking around.  That was a Form 3 right and you feel helpless because what can you do? You carry him to the Dean; the Dean talk to him. Ah think even call in his parents, I think. After a week, he continued doing what he was doing before and now he know that you can’t do anything. You could talk to his mom or dad, his parents was “alright” I should not say that they were don’t care parents or that kind of thing but they were alright. |
| SL | There were a lot of discipline issues? |
| Teacher | Yes.  I don’t know if umm, the Principal had anything to do with it, like I think he was on his way out. Ah don’t know if that affected his performance, like he didn’t really care and like he just wanted to get out. I don’t know if that was why the school was how it was and the staff ah don’t know if the staff seeing that kind of attitude, they just fed on that and they started to do things on their own as well.  People come and sign and leaving. Lunch time people gone that kind of thing. After lunch, which was a total chaos. If you walked in, you thought school had dismissed. Everybody was out of class, noisy it was just a chaotic environment. I kinda fell into it too because sometimes on an afternoon I gone. |
| SL | You fit in? |
| Teacher | Yes, I didn’t have any classes after lunch, I gone. |
| SL | Were there any academic goals people had for that school and so on therefore? What happened in terms of instruction? |
| Teacher | You will ask me back that same question when we start to talk about Urban. But umm, in Inner City and I suppose but yes. Hmm, I cannot say that I was told that we have to meet this kinda criterion or this kinda of performance average and all kind of thing. Everybody was just teaching, everybody know that the children want to pass exams. But to say that we had a goal that this amount of passes and that kind of thing. |
| SL | Move forward now to Urban, how did you… you move from Inner City to Urban, what do you face? |
| Teacher | Umm, the first challenge I had there was definitely the environment in which the school was located. It is really into the community itself, so you have to go way into Urban. So, in the heart of everything, the gangs, drugs, guns, everything. Right. So, you in the heart and there is one main way in and one main way out. So, you feel like sometimes you may be trapped in there. There is a next way eh, but that will carry you deeper into Urban itself, but I don’t think much people go that way, probably people who live there will probably use that route. As teachers and as people who coming to the school, there is one main way in and out.  So, the first challenge I had was the location of the school. |
| SL | Right. But now the discipline and the behaviours, same as Inner city? What? |
| Teacher | Same as Inner City but umm, there is a little more structure in the school. |
| SL | Yes? |
| Teacher | Yes. If you come, you might still see, if you came to the school, you might still see students outside on the bench and that kind of thing. But you will still have a sense or idea that school is in progress. Right.  You might have some teachers not there/present or otherwise. So, it might have some students outside running around but you have a general idea that school is in progress, yes. In Inner City, you didn’t know what was going on.  The Principal is a little strict in terms that she checks up and that thing of thing. She doesn’t walk around much but the Vice-Principal does. Things like leaving school early even though you don’t have a class; I had gotten pulled up for that. Probably in the first month. I had left early a couple times. |
| SL | What, you have been there about 8 years? |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | Have you learnt how to handle these situations? What has been your response, how have you grown that way? Handling the behaviour issues, handling the academic issues? Have you learnt anything, have you, how have you feared? |
| Teacher | In terms of the academics, we were told during a staff meeting once by the Principal that this school don’t have any, I don’t know if she used that words, but we are not teaching students really to pass any exam. The majority of students in there, they are not coming to school to pass any exam, to be honest. |
| SL | She said so and you don’t think so either? |
| Teacher | Yes. I agree with her. We are not academic school, we don’t have any goals like we this amount of students to pass with this amount of grades. We not looking for any kind of scholarship from CXC and that kind of thing. That is not the goals of the school. Probably we still have to develop them into individuals who could fit into the society or some kinda training or trade that kinda thing. |
| SL | Would you say you’ve grown as a teacher in teaching them? Have you grown as a teacher? Have you learnt to help them in any way? What? Do you feel you have just been what? Not achieving anything with them? What? |
| Teacher | It is not motivating, just trying to get them to sit down to take out a book. Sometimes that might take up so much time that the teaching time is 5-10 minutes you have. So, it is not really motivating you to go and teach really narr. You have to really bond with them |
| SL | Would you say you had any academic success at all? |
| Teacher | Since I have been there for the 8 years. |
| SL | Not necessarily success in the exam but would you say in terms of strategies or anything you have tried to help them learn, have you made any headway at all? |
| Teacher | [*long pause*] Headway, it’s difficult. It was really difficult. |
| SL | Some people tell me… |
| Teacher | Seeing the environment, they come from…you really have to try with them and just keep behind them all the time and your teaching methods has a lot to do with it. Because they don’t really like to write and listen to you talk and that kind of thing. |
| SL | Do you try things like that? Have you been able to do that? |
| Teacher | Honestly, no. I have not, I have just been trying to get them to complete work on the syllabus. Because as the teacher I want to make sure that I did what I was supposed to do. Cover this amount of work and try and see as best as I could how to put it forward to them, probably umm, some kind of activity or some kind of thing. But, nothing like what I have been exposed to within this last year. I never used to use media. I never used to use role play. |
| SL | Have you been using it now? |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | It working? |
| Teacher | Yes, it is. |
| SL | So alright would you say then what you have learnt now in the DipEd has been helping you? |
| Teacher | Yes. Tremendously from where I was before to now I have grown tremendously as a teacher even though if I don’t pass DipEd, the amount of skills I have picked up over this year. |
| SL | Alright, so these skills, you feel they will help you back in Urban? |
| Teacher | Yes, because they were fun. |
| SL | And you didn’t know these things before? |
| Teacher | Honestly no. |
| SL | And you feel now you will be more able to reach them? |
| Teacher | Yes, I am excited now to try some of these things in the classroom. |
| SL | Serious? |
| Teacher | Yes. Media them real like technology now. |
| SL | And you didn’t know that before? |
| Teacher | It never really occurred to me to use these things before. |
| SL | Alright so what you are saying now is the sense of frustration and failure you had experience you now feel you could, you may not get them to do all these, make great achievement but you feel you will make more headway in the classroom? |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | So, you feel if you had gotten this kind of exposure before, some of that negative kind of experience might have been in subverted? |
| Teacher | Yes, I would say so definitely. I went to ah think was the first august vacation, after I started teaching there was a beginning teacher’s training workshop that was held at Waterloo High school. I think was a 2-weeks programme, I did go to that programme but they never exposed us to anything like this. The programme was kind of long and people was getting tired and people just couldn’t wait to leave this thing. |
| SL | So, you never had colleagues in Urban who doing any of these things? That you have been able to share with them? |
| Teacher | That they were able to share with me to use? No there was, when I first started at Urban there was a teacher there she was retiring now she kind of showed me some of the things and that kind of thing. I wouldn’t say she was a mentor but she kinda help me along. Seeing the fact that I took over one of her classes. But she never really told me like try this or try this method. |
| SL | Now let me ask you a question. You feel if more people knew these things that the school need not be as dismal as it is? |
| Teacher | No, I think these kids would really appreciate using media in the classroom and role playing, trying different kinds of strategies. |
| SL | So, there is hope if people knew more of what to do with them? |
| Teacher | Definitely yes. And you are saying that somehow the DipEd has been able to equip you somewhat to function you with difficult circumstances. |
| SL | There is another issue I need to ask you because it has come up with other people. One person tells me that to succeed in schools like Urban, they didn’t call that school that is not where it came from, you have to become numb. You have to numb yourself. What you think about that? Not feel, not care just survive. |
| Teacher | Yea, I will probably agree with that to an extent. Because to survive yea. Sometimes I see things I could pull up students on discipline wise but the majority of the time, honestly, I just walk pass. Wrong earring sometimes I might see students gambling. There was a day, on the stairs I coming down I walk like if I didn’t see anything.  Because, to me you have to value your safety as well in that school and that environment. I don’t know if I pull up somebody, the consequences. I don’t if somebody might be waiting outside the gate. I don’t know, there is so much ah guns in that environment and gangs I don’t want to be faced with a situation where I discipline a student strongly in school and I have to face some kind of consequences. I just got married about 8 years now? No, less than 10 years and I have a young son. I don’t want to be faced with any danger… |
| SL | But instructionally, there is room for improvement and people could if they knew more? |
| Teacher | Yes. |
| SL | The numbness need not extend to instruction in the classroom? |
| Teacher | No. |
| SL | Being a effective teacher that way. |
| Teacher | Because in the classroom I really pull up on them take out the earring that kind of thing take out your book. I am at you. In the corridor if I see you and doing something I pretend I did not see anything, I move pass, right. In the classroom yes. I have a more sense of responsibility and more management in my classroom because you can’t let them take you over and pretend that you don’t care, and they could what they want then anything, everything else will just be up to chaos and no learning will take place. |
| SL | Okay.  Last question, you are an Indian fellah, you are Indian. You are an Indian boy in this area, in this school. Is that a factor? Do you feel it is a factor? Because this school, the area is about a 100% people of African descent, the school population might be as well. |
| Teacher | I will say 99%. |
| SL | How does that play out your ethnicity, your being East Indian and so on? |
| Teacher | Honestly, No. |
| SL | No? Why do you say that? |
| Teacher | It has never come up? In Inner City I think there were more East Indians. But sometimes you might hear comments like “*Sir, you racial*” in Inner City because there was more East Indian, and they might think you favouring an East Indian child. But in Urban they can’t throw that at you, everybody is of the same race. So, you can’t say that you favouring one over the other. Everybody is the same and umm, |
| SL | Your ability to relate to them to speak to them, does that affect you? |
| Teacher | Somewhat yea. Because their family structure is probably different to me. Mines, that I know of. How they grow up and their kind of culture and that kind of thing. Yes, sometimes I might be difficult to relate to yes? |
| SL | Because you would have come from … are you Hindu, are you? |
| Teacher | Yes, practicing Hindu. |
| SL | Would you say your cultural, your traditions, your background, do you feel you could relate to them, understand them? Do you feel that’s a…? |
| Teacher | No, I don’t feel like I made a connection with them. |
| SL | Do you feel other teachers of African descent make the connection? |
| Teacher | Yes. Because sometimes you see them dress a particular way and that is a way for them to connect to the teacher. They might have on their African wear, like on a Friday; they put on a little something and tie up their hair. So, you know that they kind of bond with that teacher and that kind of thing. And they are probably able to identify… |
| SL | But largely you feel comfortable, you don’t feel that is a real issue in your ability to function and work in this school with these children. That is not a big issue? |
| Teacher | For me personally, for what I have encountered and through my experiences no. It has not affected me. |
| SL | Right. And your George’s culture however, is the issue that, the first thing that kind of shock your heart… |
| Teacher | Because I can’t remember walking around the class, the corridors and there was not a teacher in the classroom. Just how like you talk to teachers, I never experience that or did that in my school days. |
| SL | In any of those schools were there any kind of support system for you as a teacher coming in? As a new teacher? Induction, mentoring |
| Teacher | No, no, no nothing like that.  Where I used to sit in the staffroom right next to me there was a teacher in my same department and he kind of help me around but to say that there was a programme, No. no programmes in the school, he just interact with teachers and they kind of help you based on their experiences and they probably might be a little more senior than you so….they help you to fit in but no. No formal programming. |
| SL | Thanks a lot. That was helpful. |

**Assignment 1: 20%**

1. Which two key experiences influenced Mr. Ramoutar on his journey “to becoming a teacher”? **2 marks**
2. If accountability for student learning were a significant aspect of the school’s culture at Inner City, what possible impact could this have had on the teacher’s professional development? **5 marks**
3. Mr. Ramoutar faced ethical dilemmas, one of which concerned student indiscipline on the corridors; in this case he chose to just “walk pass”. Select an ethical dilemma that you faced during your teaching experience thus far. Explain how you dealt with it and give a rationale for your choice of action. **5 marks**
4. As you reflect on your journey on “becoming a teacher”, in what ways is this teacher’s journey similar or different from yours. **5 marks**

Demonstrate technical requirements (spelling, grammar, punctuation) **3 marks**

**(Word limit is 1000 words; Penalty for exceeding 1100 words is minus**

**5 marks)**