

## *Research Report for Multi-grade Leadership*

# *What are the Perceptions of Teaching Principals at Catholic Primary Schools about Leadership Roles in the Multi-Grade System in the Orange Walk District in the country of Belize for the school year 2019?*

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### **Abstract**

Leadership is an important factor in making an organization successful.

Leadership transforms the potential into reality (Pratima, K.2019). This study builds on and contributes to the importance of Multigrade leadership. Therefore, the focus of the study is the question: "What are the perceptions of teaching principals at Catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multigrade system in the Orange Walk District?"

**Key words:** *Multigrade, Situational leader, Instructional leader, Distributive leader, perception,*

### **Resumen**

El liderazgo es un factor importante para el éxito de una organización.

El liderazgo transforma el potencial en realidad (Pratima, K., 2019). Este estudio se basa en la importancia del liderazgo multigrado y contribuye a ella. Por lo tanto, el estudio se centra en la pregunta: "¿Cuáles son las percepciones de los directores de escuelas primarias católicas sobre los roles de liderazgo en el sistema multigrado del distrito de Orange Walk?"

**Palabras clave:** *Multigrado, líder situacional, líder instruccional, líder de distribución. Percepción.*

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

After completing the Leadership Certificate Program, the researcher applied for and was accepted as a Teaching Principal at a multigrade school in the Orange Walk District.

A month into the job, the researcher realized that it was difficult to serve two masters at the same time. Matthew 6:24 (New International Version (NIV) states, "No

one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” The researcher also realized that the workload for the teaching principal was immense. How can a teaching principal be an effective school leader and teacher simultaneously?

According to Harris (2003), modern educational improvement places a great premium on the relationship between leadership and school improvement. The dominant message is that effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and the achievement of students. Therefore, the researcher decided to focus on qualitative research to answer the following: “What are the perceptions of teaching principals at catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multi-grade system in the Orange Walk district?” to gain insights into the severity of the system and how it can be improved.

### **Research Background**

Why are multi-grade schools present in Belize? According to the Handbook of Policies and Procedures 2000, Chapter 2, Section 15 of 103 Staffing Schedule for Ministry and Grant-Aided Schools for Primary Schools, the reason for multi-grade schools in Belize is that the staffing of a school is determined by student enrolment. No school with an enrolment of less than 30 students shall be given a license to operate, unless in very exceptional cases; there shall be no one-teacher schools, and where one or more grant-aided schools exist in a community, no additional school(s) shall be given grant-aided status unless or until said school(s) reach a minimum enrolment of 240 students. For a school to have an administrative principal, the school needs to have a student population of 225-240 students. A school with a student population less than the aforementioned population is to have a teaching principal, and such would be the case of a multi-grade school. Therefore, if a multigrade system is inevitable, there must be a better way of assisting these schools. With this in mind, the researcher carried out a qualitative research study that answers the question: “What are the perceptions of teaching principals at catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multi-

grade system in the Orange Walk District?” The focus was placed on one district due to accessibility.

The Handbook of Policies and Procedures (2000) numbers 37, 47, 48, and 49 clearly delineates (35) thirty-five responsibilities of a principal, and policy number 40 delineates (11) eleven additional responsibilities of a teacher. These responsibilities and duties are overwhelming for a non-teaching principal, much more so for a teaching principal. The inability to meet the standards of these duties would be due to the burdensome roles of being a teacher and principal.

The role of the principal is monumental and important in multigrade schools.

However, in recent years, these responsibilities of teachers and principals have been blended, and this has consequently caused the academic demise of many senior students.

### **Purpose of the study and research question**

This study explored the perceptions of teaching principals of multi-grade schools regarding their leadership roles. This qualitative study aimed to examine principals’ perspectives and understanding of their roles in their respective schools.

### **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

The multigrade context Multigrade teaching is a practice in which students from different ages, skills, and class levels continue their education and training together in the same class. The children are taught by one teacher for various reasons, such as lack of teachers, lack of school space, and low student enrolment (Engin, 2018, p. 2). Sağ (2009) further stated that the multigrade class is a system based on assigning the responsibility of the education and instruction of more than one class within one classroom to a single teacher. Pridmore (2007) concurred that the term ‘multi-grade teaching’ refers to a situation in which one teacher has to teach students of two or more grade levels during one time-tabled period, usually in the same classroom, that and while

many may use the term multigrade, Mason and Doepner III (1998) used the term “Combination classes” which are an organizational structure in which teachers instruct students from two or more grades for most or all of the school day.

Despite the history and prevalence of multi-grade schools in many areas, research on combination classes has been limited in scope, superficially analyzed, and lacking in research design (Mason & Doepner III, 1998). Furthermore, Mulryan-Kyne (2004) concurred, stating that multi-grade schools raise important questions about the quality of teaching and learning in multi-grade classes. Proehl, Douglas, Elias, Johnson, and Westsmith (2013) revealed that there are difficulties with multi-grade classrooms. The teachers had high expectations from the students that were not met, a lack of time, difficulty in reaching the aims, non-teaching roles, not being supported, a lack of education, physical conditions, and language problems. Contrary to this, the study also provides strong evidence that multi-grade teaching and learning can be successful at a Catholic private school, where parents are family-oriented and supportive. Although there may be a few advantages to multi-grade schooling, Engin (2018) pointed out many disadvantages of the practice, such as the heavy burden of the teacher, lack of time, difficulty in showing individual attention to the students, difficulty in planning, and teaching. In addition, the research continued by adding careless parents, language problems, lack of material, not being able to receive in-service training and consultancy, dealing with non-teaching tasks, not being able to comply with the environmental conditions, not being able to individualize the teaching, and not gaining the necessary competency in teacher training education. Mason and Doepner III (1998) further asserted that combination classes create a complex and challenging learning environment, such as a diminished curriculum, instruction, and attention to individual students; require extensive teacher effort in developing curriculum and in coping with the management demands of students from two grades; and hasten the expression of concerns from teachers and parents. Mulryan-Kyne (2004) added that teachers were frequently critical of the teacher training courses, claiming that they did not prepare them to teach in a multi-grade class. Mulryan-Kyne (2004) concurred with the aforementioned disadvantages and added that there were time constraints, and the quality of teaching and

learning was compromised. Older children lost out both academically and socially by having to share their teachers with younger children. There were disciplinary and classroom management problems, the resources and support for multigrade teaching were inadequate, and there was curriculum overload.

Why do we have multi-grade schools in Belize? According to the Handbook of Policies and Procedures 2000, Chapter 2, Section 15 of 103 Staffing Schedule for Ministry and Grant-Aided schools, the reason for multi-grade Schools in Belize is that the staffing of a school is determined by student enrolment. Schools with an enrolment of less than 30 students shall not be given a license to operate unless in very exceptional cases; there shall be no one-teacher schools, and where one or more grant- aided schools exist in a community, no additional school(s) shall be given grant-aided status unless or until said school(s) reach a minimum enrolment of 240 students. For a school to have an administrative principal, the school needs to have a student population of 225-240 students. A school with a student population less than the aforementioned student population is to have a teaching principal, and such would be the case of a multigrade school.

### *Leadership*

Are leadership skills important for these multi-grade schools? Notwithstanding the many ways in which leadership has been theorized, the following components can be identified as central to the phenomenon: leadership is a process; leadership involves influence; leadership occurs in groups; and leadership involves common goals (Northouse, 2016). While some researchers have hypothesized leadership as a trait or behaviour, others have viewed leadership from an information-processing perspective or relational standpoint. Northouse (2016) notably defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (p 23).”

*How does Belize ensure that its leaders possess these necessary skills?*

According to the Handbook of Policies and Procedures for School Services, sub rules 64 (3), (4), and (5) state that principals, vice principals, primary school, or secondary- level school or institution shall possess a valid license to teach at the level. It further states that the aforementioned leaders shall possess certification from a teachers' college or institution of higher learning showing successful completion of a program of studies in educational leadership or management recognized for this purpose by the Chief Education Officer before they are hired as principals or leaders of a school. In accordance with this, many principals are furthering their studies to satisfy the job requirements and effectively carry out their duties. Bradley, M. J., and Baker, J. M. (2019) claimed that obtaining an advanced degree may help validate credibility and secure some job positions, but it is not a sure way to the top. Professional certification establishes that one has the basic understanding needed for certification and highlights their interest in the profession. “Credibility must be developed through knowledge and solid experiences that prove you can handle the variety of experiences common in our field, Bradley and Baker (2019) p 2”. Therefore, certification could help you become a better candidate when the position becomes available.

This leads me to question what the principal’s and teachers’ job descriptions are. The Handbook of Policies and Procedures (2012) numbers 37, 47, 48, and 49 clearly delineates (35) thirty-five responsibilities of a principal, and policy number 40 delineates (11) eleven additional responsibilities of a teacher. These responsibilities and duties are overwhelming for a non-teaching principal, much more so for a teaching principal.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Figure 1- *Theoretical Framework*

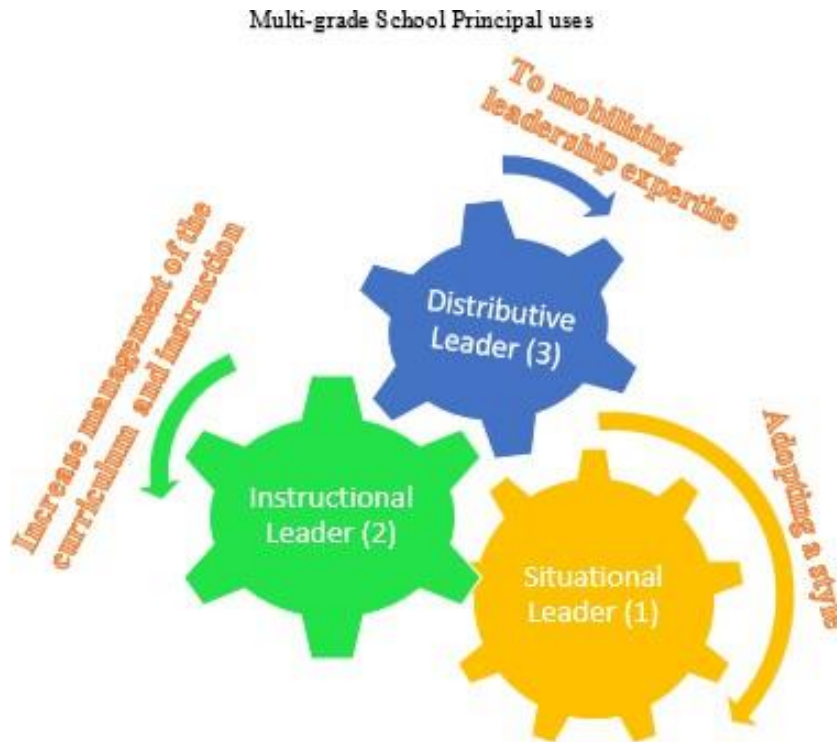


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the relationship between variables

In Figure 1, Duke, D. (1982) stated that there is no single leadership skill or set of skills that is alleged to be right for all schools or all instructional situations within a school. Therefore, the theoretical framework includes situational, instructional, and distributive leadership. According to Northouse (2016), the belief behind situational leadership theory is that different situations demand different kinds of leadership. In other words, being an effective leader requires that a leader adapt their style to the demands of different situations.

Another leadership style is that of the instructional leader. Instructional leadership is generally defined as the management of curriculum and instruction by school principals. Duke (1982) recommended six jobs of instructional leadership related to teacher and school effectiveness: staff development: recruitment, in-service education, and staff motivation; instructional support: organized activities to maintain an environment geared towards improving teaching and learning; resource procurement

and distribution: adequate learning materials, appropriate facilities, and skilled support personnel; quality control: evaluation, supervision, rewards, and sanctions; coordination: activities that prevent cross-purposes or duplicate operations; and troubleshooting: anticipation and resolution of problems in school operation.

Finally, Solly (2018) explained that this distributed leadership is not allocated. Delegation is having your staff do your work for you. If leaders continuously delegate, work is pushed down the chain of command. The drive of distributed leadership is to increase the leadership capacity within a school so that the school can improve and grow reliably. This allows a school to become a more effective educational institution. The leaders within the group collectively pull in the same direction and are guided by the same vision, values, and goals. It creates a sense of autonomy, capacity building, and accountability. In the end, distributed leadership is about giving leaders in schools ownership by authorizing them to lead their teams and drive forward their strategies that contribute to the whole-school priorities.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The researcher drafted a letter and distributed it to various principals at a meeting. At the initial meeting, all principals present agreed to participate, and a schedule was compiled. Unfortunately, due to the death of a family member of the researcher, the scheduled dates were postponed. The respondents were very understanding, and a new schedule was created based on their free time. Three principals were interviewed at their respective homes in their villages, except one respondent who met the researcher after school at the school. The interviews lasted for approximately 30–45 minutes. The researcher conducted a semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, one-on-one interview with each participant. The interviews were transcribed and returned to each participant for member checking and to validate the research findings.

#### **Sampling**

Table 2 *Respondents' Demographic Data*

Demography	School A - principal A	School B - Principal B	School C – principal C	School
Gender?	Female	Male	Male	Male
Age?	51-55	51-55	51-55	36-40
Ethnicity?	Mestizo	Mestizo	Mestizo	Mestizo
What is your home district?	Orange Walk Town	Orange Walk	Orange Walk	Orange Walk
What is your educational Background?	ACP and 2 plus 1 program	Bachelor's In Primary Education	Trained teacher – 2 plus 1 and a certificate in leadership	Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education
How many years of teaching experience do you have?	37 years	31 years	38 years	19 years
How many years of teaching	5 years	3 years	30	5
Number of teachers on staff, including principal	5	4	5	4
Classes/ Grades	Standard 5 and 6	Standard 5 and 6	Standard 5 and 6	Standard 5 and 6

**Figure 2:** *Description of the participants*

The teaching principals of four of the five multigrade schools participated in the research. One principal was on Long Leave, and although efforts were made to contact the principal, it was to no avail. Three participants were male, and one was female. The participants' ages ranged from 36 to 55 years. One was between the ages of 35 and 40, while the others were in their fifties. Although all participants were from the Orange Walk District, two lived in the village and two commuted to the community they served.

respondents' educational backgrounds were as follows: Principal A from school A had an ACP certificate and a Two-Plus-One certificate; Principal B from school B had a Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education; Principal C from School C had a Two-Plus-One Certificate and a leadership certificate; and Principal D from school D had a Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education and was pursuing a leadership certificate. The respondents' teaching experience ranged from 19 to 38 years. Principal A had thirty-seven years of teaching experience, Principal B had thirty-one years of teaching experience, Principal C had 38 years of teaching experience, and Principal D had 19 years of teaching experience. However, their teaching leadership experience varied from 3 to 30 years. Principal A and D had five years of experience as a teaching principal, Principal B had three years of experience as a teaching principal, and Principal C had 30 years of experience as a teaching principal. The respondents' staff consisted of 4 to 5 members. Principals A and C had five members on their staff, including themselves. Principal B and D had four staff members, including themselves. Lastly, all principals were responsible for teaching Standards 5 and 6 in their respective communities.

#### **Chapter 4 Data collection**

Sampling was performed using a non-probability method. Purposeful sampling was used to conduct the research. This study involved multiple stages of data collection. An introductory phase begins with initial person-to-person contact at a principal's meeting. Data collection began after approval was obtained from the four selected teaching principals. Through discussions with the primary contact, a schedule was devised for the interview. The second stage was focused on data collection during a semi-structured face-to-face interview with 14 open-ended questions. The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. A descriptive demographic data collection was completed for research purposes before the interview began. Before the commencement of the interviews, the researcher had to bracket her biases, as the researcher was a multi-grade leader as well. All interviews were conducted individually, face-to-face, at three participants' homes and one at the participant's school. All interviews began with an introduction of the researcher, an explanation of the research, an overview of the general

purpose of the study, an explanation of voluntary participation, and a reiteration of the consent form for recording the interview. Interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcribed version was given to the participant for member checking and for validity and reliability purposes. The researcher took notes during all the interviews throughout the data collection process. A follow-up telephone interview with one participant was conducted to clarify and complete the data collection. Data collection continued until sufficient material was obtained to saturate relevant ideas.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The primary methods of data analysis used were consistent with qualitative case study methodologies, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). Over 2 hours of interviews and notes were used for analysis. The researcher listened to the recordings several times and read and re-read the transcribed version of the interviews. The limitations of the research were that during the interview, the researcher had to rephrase several questions for the participants to understand. In addition, pseudonyms were used to protect anonymity. A chart was created based on the interview responses. The researcher adopted a thematic analysis approach with an inductive approach to extract and interpret the data. The data were arranged in patterns or coherent categories. In other words, the data were carefully sorted, coded, structured, and restructured to draw thematic conclusions. The researcher thoroughly, systematically, and intensively analyzed the data through constant comparison and organization to derive meaning from complex information. Member checking was performed to ensure reliability and validity. The data were analyzed based on the participants' and the researcher's interpretation. Five themes with subthemes were extracted from the interviews.

Figure 3 (a) Themes

Theme 1: Multi-grade definition and perception	Theme 2: (a)C (b)advantages	Theme 3: (a) (b) (c)Impact on health	Theme 4: Coping Strategies	Theme 5: (a)Teachers (b) (C)
<p>*teaching more than one grade</p> <p>*teaching students at different levels</p> <p>*teaching two classes in one classroom</p> <p>*Doubling the work load of teaching</p> <p>* finding the mid-point to teaching 2 classes</p> <p>*teaching aids</p> <p>*works little when it comes to teaching similar concepts</p> <p>* end up simply complying</p>	<p>(a) *Time Management</p> <p>*Planning/ Teaching and evaluating</p> <p>*extra-Curricular activities</p> <p>*commuting</p> <p>*meeting community and management expectations</p> <p>*teaching techniques</p> <p>*end up complying and neglecting something.</p> <p>*discipline</p> <p>*coping with interruptions during the day</p> <p>* dealing with parental issues and visitors during the day</p> <p>(b) *being able to prepare the lower level for the next level as a teacher</p>	<p>(a) *It is a call</p> <p>*the person in charge</p> <p>*Captain taking a ship on a journey</p> <p>*The person who knows where</p> <p>* has a sense of direction</p> <p>* Is a motivator and can convince teachers</p> <p>* administrative work done at home</p> <p>* create trust/ team</p> <p>* build communication</p> <p>* many roles from maintenance, janitor to leadership</p> <p>*ensure that children learn and teachers work together with leader to</p>	<p>(a) Role</p> <p>*splitting up</p> <p>* assigning projects to take home and complete- students stay home</p> <p>*Assign seat work and do supervision of teachers</p> <p>(b) Health</p> <p>*too many responsibilities their health</p> <p>*stress levels are high</p> <p>* teaching principals usually retire with pressure and diabetes</p>	<p>(a)</p> <p>*trust that they will do their work</p> <p>*teachers report what occurred when leader was absent</p> <p>(b)</p> <p>*limited assistance</p> <p>*Moral support only</p> <p>* need for more supervision at the schools</p> <p>(C) Training</p> <p>*No formal support from management</p> <p>*No training for multi-grade leadership except for a succession in one school</p> <p>* MOE workshop on</p>

	<p>( *too many responsibilities their health *stress levels are high * teaching principals usually retire with pressure and diabetes</p>	<p>make that happen * builds trust because there is not enough time to supervise *Leniency b)* *not enough time *</p>		<p>teaching in multi-grade *there is need for training *</p>
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## Chapter 5 Findings/Results

The themes that emerged from the perceptions of teaching principals at Catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multigrade system proved and explained how the four leaders found their leadership roles in the research study. The leaders in the study confirmed that the multi-grade system is challenging due to several factors. Throughout the interviews, all participants made statements that described the multigrade system, the challenges of the multigrade system, the advantages of multigrade teaching, leadership, the effectiveness of leadership, coping strategies, and support needed, which affected their leadership development and career trajectories.

The following excerpts from the participants' narratives reflect their definitions and perceptions of multigrade teaching. All participants had similar definitions of the multigrade system.

### Theme 1: Multi-grade definition and perception

Participant A: Multigrade means that you are teaching more than one grade at the same time.

Participant B: For me, it is a system whereby we teach students at different levels, for example, we might be teaching 2 or 3 classes.

Participant C: It means that the teacher has more than one class physically.

Participant D Well, to me, multi-grade means having 2 classes in one classroom.

I mean two levels, like Infant 1 and Infant 2 in one class.

The participants' definitions concurred with (as cited in Engin, 2018, p. 2) that multigrade teaching is a practice in which students from different ages, skills and class levels continue their education and training together in the same class. The children are taught by one teacher because of various reasons such as a lack of teachers, a lack of school space and a low number of student enrolment. Little (1995) further defines multi-grade teaching as the teaching of students of different ages, grades and abilities in the same group. Multigrade is referred to variously in the literature as 'multilevel', 'multiple class', 'composite class', 'vertical group', 'family classes, and, in the case of one teacher schools, 'unitary schools'.

### **Theme 2: (a) Challenges (b) advantages (c) impact on health**

All participants, whether junior in the profession or senior, explained that being a leader in the multi-grade system is very challenging. Challenges presented were planning and teaching, completing administrative work at school, dealing with issues that arise during the day and health issues. However, there is one advantage for the students. Students become aware of the topics covered by the next level. Take, for example, these participants' responses when referring to the leadership role responsibilities and teaching responsibilities as challenges.

Participant A (a) It entails planning and all the thinking about the two classes that you have to teach. The planning is quite a challenge as it is. Then on top of that, you have your administrative work to do. So, it is a challenge because you need to teach the curriculum; you cannot skip it. The Ministry of Education cannot accept that you just jump and teach; maybe focus on the Standard 5 or Standard 6 curriculum. It is a lot of work. So that is where the challenge comes, because finding the focal point for two groups is very difficult. And even when you have two classes in your class, then you have to be doubling what you do. You have to do 2 tests, 2 planning... 2 of everything. Although it is a small group of children, the work still has to be done. So it is really

difficult.

(b) One good thing is that, for example, with me, I have standards 5 and 6, so I teach them at the same level, only the expectation differs. So standard 5 is getting exposed to a standard 6 level, only that what I expect from them is, for example, when I give a test. If I give 10 questions, I would ask them to answer the first 5, the standard 6, and the 10. The expectation will vary. But they get exposed to it. Some children I have seen in standard 5 are very bright, and they would catch everything that I teach. That's an advantage for them for the following year as they will not find it hard.

(c) Well, it does pound on your health a lot. Especially if you want to do your work correctly. Because you get stressed and whatever. I finished with diabetes and high blood pressure which I still have. So I have had diabetes for about 5 years right now. I had diabetes but the blood pressure was from when I was there. I felt that I didn't stress out but it still bothered me. When I was teaching, I did not feel that I was sick but that I was. So it does affect my health.

Participant B (a) I took long to accept this post because I knew the responsibilities that were behind being a principal after teaching for so long. It was time consuming.

Everything will fall on me. Whatever happens good things or bad things, rumours, criticisms and praises; everything is on me. I knew that was one of the challenges that I would face.

(c) In regards to my health, yes. I have less time for me to do anything. I will tell you. I used to do physical exercises every afternoon as an assistant teacher which I enjoyed. 4:30 to 5, I change and I would go do exercise because suffer cholesterol and triglycerides. So exercise would be one of the best things to do to release your stress and release the fat in the body. So because of that I found that I was very helpful. I was at ease coming to school free. I felt myself athletic. I felt energised. But taking this role for the past three years I have found that I have less time. When I leave school, like how you saw me today, 5:30 I am going home and the season has changed so what time do I

have to do my exercise

Participant C (a) the challenge was that the road was not as it is today and also when it rained, I had to see what I would wear. The road was muddy. The road was not good. Some days I had to change over. Sometimes I would reach wet. So I think that was one of the most challenging experience. . Not only that but the principal has to teach and administer at the same time and look after all the administration and management of the school which is a lot.

(c) Hmm. That is a very good question because that is real reason I stepped down because I was reaching a point...The thing is that I take my job seriously, very seriously and dedicate myself to it. That took a toll on my health.

Participant D (a) It absorbs a lot of time. So I believe that it takes more time from you. We are not at the office we have to be teaching. So everything else that I have to do is after 3:30. So it is very, very challenging.

(b) In addition, well I believe that ... my perspective would be that it works a little. For me it is good because I am a Standard 5 and 6 teacher and I see it in a way that when Standard 5 reach Standard 6... because more or less what I give is similar work to standard 5 and standard 6. So when they reach Standard 6 they are more prepared because I have them in Standard 5 and 6. So I see that it works. So when they get to Standard 6 they are familiar with what they have seen with Standard 6. It is easier for me so I just kind of review with them and I shows because my school more or less is not doing so badly.

(c) Well, up to now not much. I believe that I am not at that age where you are in the 50's. But imagine that you are going to that age, our body will get tired and so forth. It will be stressful. Yes, sometimes I reach home and I am tired. I am stressed. But it is dependent on the day. Some days are very good. Some days very stressful. So it depends on the day.

There has been broad research conducted into understanding the leadership role of the school principal. However, little of this research has focused on the challenges, issues and concerns of teaching primary principals in devolving school systems. Teaching principals, with their dual roles of teaching and administration, find themselves in a situation where they are caught in the “slipstream syndrome” in which they are required to interpret and adapt changes imposed with larger school contexts in mind Murdoch (2018).

### **Theme 3: (a) Leadership (b) Effectiveness of the leadership role**

Once the challenges and advantages were established, the leadership role had to be taken into account. The participant described what it meant to be a leader, what their leadership role was in a multi-grade setting, and its effectiveness in the multi-grade school. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of teaching principals at Catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multi-grade system in the Orange Walk District. Take, for example, these responses by the participants in this regard.

Participant A (a) I would say is the person that is in charge. You are in charge of ensuring that everything runs smooth. Everything that is asked of you from Ministry or whoever, what the parents expect from you that you are there to ensure that all of that is being catered for. It is you as the leader is responsible that your school runs the best way that is possible, for your teacher, for your children for the community. Because the community expects a lot of you as well and for Ministry.

(b) Well, that is ... it is not very effective because as I mentioned you have to focus on one and leave the other one of the other side and try to do it on your extra time. Because in the leadership you have to do reports and might have to do other things that you might have to bring home do later on.

Participant B (a) Leadership for me will be like ... being a guide. It is like a

captain taking a ship on a journey. You are the one that should be knowledgeable, in that all the aspects that the ship should be going through. Whatever storm is there you have the ability to take it on. (Challenge). So in a school setting it will be that challenge. Whatever teachers, students or parents or community that you have, you will have to be that captain. So you will have to be strong. You have to be strong in whatever course your school is going.

(b) The only part that I find very challenging is the supervision in the classroom. That is the one that I find very challenging. Yes financial problems yes we did have it. At the moment we are not having it because we received these gifts. But to maintain them, that is a challenge. So for now it is not a challenge. But in the future it will be.

Participant C (a) I have always seen leadership as somebody who knows where he/she is going. The person has a goal. You don't go blind.

(b) As a teaching principal it is how much you can do is a challenge.

Participant D (a) In our schools we have a leader and we call it school leaders. So if the school has a very good leader, the school will go in the right direction. It all depends on us as leaders. So we need to set those examples to our teacher and make sure they work. And plus as a leader we need to convince and motivate our teachers so that they can give that step forward and not backwards, you see.

(b) I believe that we are trying to be very effective in our teaching and also in the administrative work. Murdoch (2018) further explains that teaching principals are finding it difficult to find equilibrium between the demands of teaching and management responsibilities. On one hand, they feel a strong sense of responsibility to their class of students and their learning needs, knowing that the parent community will judge them according to student well-being and progress. Murdoch's (2018) research confirmed that teaching principals are struggling to maintain their focus on the classroom and instructional leadership. The result was feelings of guilt and frustration. Prolonged

feelings of guilt and frustration are a recipe for high stress levels and burnout. The bulk of principals in this study, regardless of experience, commented on the impact that the teaching principalship was having on their health and well-being (Murdoch, 2018).

#### **Theme 4: Coping Strategies**

As leaders, there are important meetings to attend and other school business to look after. Therefore, the participants described the various strategies they employed to be able to cope with the administrative duties, such as attending meetings. However, all principals responded that they completed their administrative paperwork after 3:30 p.m. or at home.

Participant A Because when you attend meetings, if you have one class... you have to divide your class and really it's just leaving them there and like other teachers will only baby sit. You leave work and they will only baby sit. So children are still missing out.

Participant B Well students are usually given work/ projects because I cannot be with them. I have tried to divide the students among the teachers but in consideration that the teachers that are there very good to supervise the set of students that are in their classroom besides having their children. I cannot send them to the next teacher who is overloaded. So the only option for me is to give them some project, some work and send them home. Sometimes the project is something that we will cover in the week's lesson or next week. Sometimes it is a reinforcement activity so that they don't lose. But since I know the level of work that I am working, I can give them enough work to keep them busy for the whole day, at home.

Participant C It depends on the class that I have. So I better give them work and let them stay home. That is the best thing because I don't want anything to happen meanwhile I am not here and it will still be my responsibility. I usually have a teacher who will be responsible for anything during my absence.

Participant D What I do right now, presently I have to give them work most of the time. In the past I used to send them home. So they are in school. A teacher is supervising them. Sometimes I distribute them in different classes. So they go to the different classes and that is how it works. Five in each class. I have tried sending them home. But before that I have to explain to parents. So in my class meeting I told them straight and direct. It is better for them to work at home and not to be in their class alone and something else might happen that can be worse.

**Theme 5: Support: (a) teacher,(b) Management,(c) training**

Participant A (a) Well, I believe that when you give your teachers that autonomy or that trust, I always think that they will work along with you because they empathize with you as well because you have a lot of work. Whenever there are things that are not working so well, all you need to do is to talk to them and remind them about what they should be doing and to tell you the truth in my school I didn't have much difficulties with plans, being late. We were always together.

(b) Hmmm. I think that the support given to us by management is very poor. May be you get support from calling, if you really need help. But from .... In my case ... I believe that

... to tell you the truth I didn't have any visit from management during my 4 or 5 years that I was there. If I had one time I was a lot. . So the support might be only maybe verbally but not there to ensure that you were doing that you were doing. I got the moral support when I called but it was me that had to be asking for whatever. However, I think Ministry is doing what they can. They understand what the multi-grade situation is. They have tried to assist us in the past by providing workshops as how we can integrate the classroom. They have tried their best in putting multi-grade grades together for planning. So I think, it just needs to be strengthened more.

(c) I believe that it would be great to get training on this but not verbally but with actual demonstration and practice.

Participant B (a) Well, I have developed a system in which I try to be approachable. I try to be friendly. I try to be close to them. I try to have them feel comfortable in their classrooms. I always try to communicate and be with them. But being a teaching principal, I have a class to take care of as well as responsibilities to be with them as well. So I think that they look up at me as that. That they can come and they can talk.

They can ask. They can come to me. It is not like I fear authority that he is going to scold me. I try to make them feel comfortable.

(b) Very minimal. . Because before all this happened I had told management about this situation and asked management what we were expecting? So I told management that we were going to have this vacancy. I told management because I didn't want this to occur. They are the only ones who could have everyone in place come September. So I could be able to carry out my duties. Therefore, very limited assistance from management.

(c) I guess it is an eye opener, theoretically. But realistically when you are in this situation everything is different. I think I will be beneficial for anyone who will want to be a leader, school leader, principal. I would recommend training. I did not receive any training but like I tell you, I smelled more or less what it was about because of the years that I have been in teaching at various school.

Participant C (a) . I have not seen somebody who would challenge me in something that I propose to do that is good for the school. Possibly it is the way I do it, or possibly they see how I work. I believe in working very hard. So they see that as the leader, I work. So they will have to work. I lead by example. My leadership is by example. I will not demand from you something that I myself won't be able to do. So everything I ask from them, I show them that it can be done. So that is how I have been a leader throughout the years.

(b) Their support is mostly moral support. That has been throughout the years that

they have always said that they are behind you when you speak about certain problems.

They support you. But when it comes to finance, it does quite often occur. So that is why I say that it is mostly moral.(c) I don't see that there is much training in that area. Yes there are some strategies, come techniques but it is not in dept. What they tell about some of these things in theory and when you go and try to implement you will that it is something else. . So basically, it is an on the job experience.

Participant D (a) My teachers really are engaged in anything that I try to bring to them. Why? Because I think that it is the way I approach them really helps me. So I think that the approach I use is convincing. If the community sees that you work then they will help. But if they don't see that they are working, they will say aww those teachers are not working ...this... and that

(b)Well, the support is not what more or less we expect. Especially towards the contributions towards our school. We need as principals to see how we run our schools. Plus I believe we are not the owners of the school. We are just sent there to try to run the school as the principal. And many a times we ask for assistance and it doesn't reach from the management. So we have find the ways of making fundraising so that we can get something for our school. The assistance is not much.

(c) Training ...Well for multi-grade teaching, I have not seen much in happening. To be a leader, well I am just doing the leadership course and I see that it is very good. It is a lot of work, a lot of reading but it is helping me. And I am just getting the first course. I see that it is a lot. As the multi-grade leader no leadership training at all. For someone to tell me that you should be working like that, because you are a multi-grade. These are the leadership skills that you need... no I have not had any training at all. It is an on the job training. I learnt everything on the job.

Mulryan-Kyne (2004) claimed that teachers were often precarious of the teacher training courses, claiming that they did not prepare them to teach in a multi-grade class. Proehl,

R. A., Douglas, S., Elias, D., Johnson, A. H., & Westsmith, W. (2013) revealed that there are difficulties with multi-grade classrooms. The teachers had high expectations from the students which were not met, lack of time, difficulty in reaching the aims, non-teaching roles, not being supported, lack of education, physical conditions, and language problems.

Hodge, E. M. (2003) defined Management as the entity that own the school (such as Catholic management which owns and oversees Catholic schools). Local manager is the person who oversees the operations of a specified number of primary schools in that management (p4).

### **Chapter 5 Discussion, Recommendation and Conclusion**

According to the research findings, all participants had a clear understanding of multi-grade teaching and learning. Most of the participants learnt and are learning to be a multi-grade leader on the job since training for such a role was not given. Bradley and Baker (2019) stated that, “A truly credible professional has the tools to handle daily situations, certifiable knowledge and a proven record of success developed from field experiences (p2).” Due to this, “on-the-job learning” and increased responsibilities, the levels of stress and burnout increase, causing a significant impact on the health and well-being of teaching principals (Murdoch, 2018). Teaching-principals rely on more than just one leadership style. It was evident that instructional leadership, distributive leadership and situational leadership were used.

#### **Recommendations:**

Murdoch's (2018) research stated five recommendations, but only two apply to Belize: that for teaching principals to manage their dual roles, school system authorities need to provide increased levels of administration release time and clerical assistance and greater flexibility to arrange their role in a manner that suits their leadership style. If there must be a teaching principal, the interests of providing quality induction and ongoing

professional support for teaching principals, school system authorities and higher education institutions provide school leadership programs tailored to the needs of teaching primary school principals.

The recommendations gathered from this research suggested were as follows: that there should only be administrative principals in all schools even at multi-grade schools; shared planning can be done among the principals within the same denomination; standardization of the yearly-units for the multi-grade schools; implementation of a shift system; a zoning principal; change in hours for the principals class i.e. the principal and his class are to come in at 8:00 am and students are dismissed at 1:30p.m. so that principal can have time to supervise and complete administrative work and if all else fails amalgamation. However, the possibilities of these suggestions need further research.

### **Conclusion**

According to the Ministry of Education (2018), there are 102 Multi-grade primary schools in the country of Belize. The Orange Walk district has sixteen multi-grade schools. Of the sixteen, five are in the catholic management. The other eleven are either government schools or denominational schools. The research aimed at answering the question: What are the perceptions of teaching principals at catholic primary schools about the leadership roles in the multi-grade system in the Orange Walk District? Out of the four Catholic schools interviewed, the findings are concerning and much attention and emphasis need to be placed on the multigrade system. The research findings may be a representation of what the other schools are experiencing.

More research needs to be done in the field. Notwithstanding the history and occurrence of multi-grade schools in many areas, research on combination classes has been limited in scope, superficially analyzed, and lacking in research design (Mason and Doepner 1998). Wright (1993) pointed out that there was a need for training in multi-grade teaching, a being essential for effective teaming in multi-grade classrooms in Belize. Although there was some training in 1993, the efforts were discontinued.

Leadership in multi-grade schools need further in-depth study.

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