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CONTENTS

“Learning is Hard Work and Sometimes Difficult”: What Pupils With Dyslexia Say About the Difficulties They Experience With Learning at Secondary School in Barbados	1
<i>Stacey Blackman</i>	
Collaborating to Reform Science Education in Context: Issues, Challenges, and Benefits	17
<i>Susan Herbert, Joycelyn Rampersad, and June George</i>	
Reconceptualizing the Agenda for Language Education: Languages for All	41
<i>Beverly-Anne Carter</i>	
The Problem of Generating a ‘Genuine’ Social Studies	57
<i>Jeniffer Mohammed and Carol Keller</i>	
Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool in a Postgraduate Teacher Education Programme at The University of the West Indies (UWI): An Activity Systems Analysis	71
<i>Cynthia James</i>	
Teachers Professional Growth: Examining the Effect of Teacher Maturity on LOC Orientation	93
<i>Lorraine D. Cook and Tony Bastick</i>	
Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise	105
<i>Jennifer Yamin-Ali</i>	

**When Choosing Might Mean Losing:
A Mixed Method Study of Secondary School Choice in the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

131

*Jerome De Lisle, Carol Keller,
Vena Jules, and Peter Smith*

Notes on Contributors

Information for Contributors

**“LEARNING IS HARD WORK AND
SOMETIMES DIFFICULT”:
What Pupils With Dyslexia Say About the Difficulties They
Experience With Learning at Secondary School in Barbados**

Stacey Blackman

Dyslexia has been described as a lifelong burden. The validity of this view is best assessed through an examination of the qualitative judgements pupils make about their experiences of school life. Findings from a multiple case study of 16 pupils with dyslexia at two secondary schools shed light on the challenges they have with learning. The findings suggest that pupils experience difficulties with spelling, sequencing, and remembering information—these “signs” are associated with the nature of dyslexia. This paper also suggests that the teaching/learning environment and teacher pedagogy are important influences on these pupils’ learning. In particular, what teachers do in the classroom and the ways they do it present difficulties for pupils with dyslexia. In conclusion, the findings endorse pupil perspective research as a viable way to inform and transform teacher pedagogy, and highlight the importance of teaching skills as a way of addressing teacher practices that act as barriers to the learning of pupils with dyslexia at secondary schools in Barbados.

Introduction

The signs displayed by pupils with dyslexia have been well documented by researchers such as T. R. Miles and E. Miles (1990), Peer (2001), Pollock and Waller (1994), and Reid (2003). These signs relate specifically to the nature of dyslexia itself, for example, problems with short-term memory, sequencing of information, spelling, and reading. Research by Hallahan and Kauffman (2003) on the aetiology of this language-based disorder also suggest that it has a strong genetic basis, and that, regardless of language, persons with dyslexia might also show diminished activity in some parts of the brain.

Discrepancy definitions endorsed by Goswami (2003b), T. R. Miles (1978), Snowling (2000), and Vellutino (1979) suggest that pupils with dyslexia, in spite of their sometimes high IQs, fail to acquire adequate reading skills. Many researchers and theorists debated the reasons for this for decades, but explanations were not forthcoming. New and

Stacey Blackman

emerging theories from neuro-constructivist research (Goswami, 2003a; Richardson, Leppanen, Pavvo, Leiwo, & Lyytinen, 2003; Wydell & Butterworth, 1999) have provided insights that might shed light on the discrepancy between IQ and reading failure. Goswami suggests that the reading failure of pupils with dyslexia might be linked to their inability to distinguish and develop an awareness of onsets and rimes. These contribute to consonant blending of sounds and syllables, and can help researchers understand why these pupils experience reading delays or a failure to read.

The Gravity of the Situation

The persistence of dyslexia into adulthood has been demonstrated in research by Bruck (1992); Elbro, Nielsen, and Petersen (1994); and Pennington, van Orden, Smith, Green, and Haith (1990). Frith (1997) argued that “dyslexia is not a disease which comes with school and goes away with adulthood...it is a life long burden” (p. 9). In addition to this, Hallahan and Kauffman (2003) note that the morphology of languages like English and French, which have arbitrary systems for spelling, also presents additional problems with reading, unlike Italian. Dyslexia therefore makes reading a struggle for these individuals. Within the Barbadian education context, it is therefore critical to establish how pupils perceive the challenges they experience with learning, and identify how the conditions set for learning contribute to their difficulties at the secondary school level.

The foregoing suggests that when pupils with dyslexia are not given the opportunity to realize their full academic potential, it can have deleterious effects on future career aspirations. Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars’s (2000) study of adults with dyslexia suggests that a lack of early intervention at the school level, in combination with teachers’ low expectations, negatively impacted pupils’ need to achieve at a high level and their self-esteem. On the other hand, family support and high teacher expectations were associated with success in higher education and career goals. Research by Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars further suggests that past experiences in school predicted the level of success that pupils with dyslexia experienced at the tertiary level and in their future careers.

In Barbados, early intervention is still determined by parents’ knowledge and familiarity with their child’s progress and stage of development in reading. The socio-economic status of the family should also be considered as it plays a pivotal role in determining who accesses private diagnostic services for dyslexia. To date, at the primary and

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

secondary level of schooling, there is no definitive programme to identify and make “provision”; in examinations, for example, for readers and access to technology for pupils with dyslexia. What can be noted is that these pupils are likely to experience frustration if teachers remain unaware of their existence in the classroom and how to adapt their teaching to facilitate these pupils’ learning. For those educators who are familiar with the signs that pupils manifest, the means to meet their learning needs can still be elusive.

Dyslexia at School

Pedagogical Issues

This study reports on the views of secondary pupils with dyslexia, and it is important to understand how dyslexia influences the learning of pupils at this level of schooling. Research by Cogan and Flecker (2004), Mortimore (2003), Peer (2001), Peer and Reid (2001), and Stowe (2001) links the problems with school work to the nature of dyslexia itself.

According to Cogan and Flecker (2004), difficulties have been identified in subject areas at secondary school, for example, in mathematics some pupils experience problems with their times tables, sequencing of numbers, and remembering formulae. In geography, directions and map work present a challenge. In English language and literature, pupils with dyslexia find it difficult to master the reading-intensive nature of these subjects, spelling, selecting important points from passages, and articulating ideas. Other practical difficulties alluded to by Mortimore (2003) include difficulties remembering class schedules and books to be brought to school on a day-to-day basis.

When these challenges are taken into consideration, teachers’ pedagogical decisions should not create additional barriers to learning. What kinds of pedagogical issues arise when teaching pupils with dyslexia? It can be argued that one of the key issues that secondary school teachers face surrounds the kinds of strategies, decisions, and skills needed to instruct dyslexic pupils in the classroom.

What do we mean by pedagogy? Lewis and Norwich (2005) define pedagogy as the decisions, actions, and strategies employed by teachers to promote learning in the classroom. According to these researchers, pedagogy ought to be dynamic and respond to classroom situations and student needs. They suggest that “effective pedagogy is an ideal that the practicalities of classroom life may threaten or perhaps foster in unpredictable ways” (p. 7).

Stacey Blackman

In this study, I suggest that a broader framework be utilized to discuss pedagogical issues. In particular, the conditions set for learning by teachers in the classroom can be included as part of the pedagogical decisions that influence the learning of all pupils in general education classrooms. Findings in this study suggest that the conditions set for learning produce additional challenges to these pupils' learning. Another aspect of pedagogy that has been implicated by pupils' responses is teacher strategies (Lewis & Norwich 2005). According to pupils' responses, teachers' approaches to teaching created additional problems apart from those associated with the nature of dyslexia itself.

The literature on teaching pupils with dyslexia has traditionally focused on multisensory approaches to teaching. These approaches were viewed as specialist oriented, and perpetuated the view that general education teachers were not "equipped" to instruct pupils with dyslexia unless they were specially trained.

Reid (2005) classifies pedagogical approaches to teaching pupils with dyslexia into four broad areas:

1. Individualized programmes – These are highly structured, for example, Alpha to Omega, Bangor Dyslexia Teaching System, and the Hickey Multisensory Language Course. These require that teachers be specially trained before instruction can occur.
2. Support approaches and strategies – These have some features of individualized programmes but may be used selectively by teachers and can be integrated into a normal school curriculum.
3. Assisted learning techniques – These programmes place a heavy emphasis on learning from others and could involve peers and adults to model effective strategies, for example, paired reading, cued spelling, and peer tutoring.
4. Whole school approaches – Here, dyslexia is viewed as a whole school concern, and policy frameworks and early intervention are key features of this pedagogical approach. Consultancy, literacy projects, and study and thinking skill programmes are examples of whole school approaches.

Research by Lewis and Norwich (2005) seems to suggest, however, that there is a need to closely examine claims that there are groups of pupils who really do require a "specialist" and individual approach to teaching. If, for example, one accepts the argument that pupils with dyslexia are a distinct category from other peers who are poor readers, then it can be suggested that an individualized approach to teaching—

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

separate and distinct from others in the classroom—is warranted and even justified. If, on the other hand, approaches used for these pupils can in fact be incorporated as part of a whole school approach, or seen as part of a continuum of teacher strategies, then all pupils in the classroom can benefit.

Within our own Caribbean context, whole school approaches to dyslexia and assisted learning techniques seem to offer the more attractive way for teachers to feel empowered to teach these pupils in their classrooms. However, how these strategies will be integrated into the teachers’ repertoire, the curriculum, lesson plans, and instruction time must be part of the pedagogical decisions alluded to by Lewis and Norwich (2005).

Reid’s (2005) framework for whole school approaches has been called dyslexia friendly strategies (Peer & Reid, 2001) because all pupils can benefit from them. To illustrate, thinking skills, which include metacognitive training and mind mapping, are said to help pupils better organize and reduce information to facilitate its later recall. Teaching thinking skills, however, would require that teachers model such skills on a regular basis for their pupils.

In addition, study skills such as planning assignments and time management are said to help pupils complete assignments and tests within a set time frame, without feeling overwhelmed. Other accommodations that can be made for pupils with dyslexia include:

1. photocopying material to be distributed in class;
2. highlighting important pieces of information;
3. placing headings in bold to signal their importance;
4. providing pupils with a structured overview of content to be covered in the lesson.

This paper seeks to answer the question: What difficulties do pupils with dyslexia experience at secondary school in Barbados?

Methodology

The Research Strategy

This section of the paper will offer an overview of the research strategy used in the study. A multiple case study approach was utilized in the research to investigate the views of pupils with dyslexia at two secondary schools in Barbados. An overview of the case study approach is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Case Study Approach

Cases	Setting	Data Collection Methods		
16 pupils – 8 females from Mallory High and 5 males and 3 females from South West High School	Context – 2 secondary schools focus on whole class teaching and classroom interaction. Pupils' perspectives of teachers' strategies	Interviews	Observations	Documentary Evidence
Age group – 11-16 years old	Boundaries – limited to whole class teaching and learning	(Site 1) Pilot study –Three types of interviews: pair, individual, and group	Participant and non-participant observation methods were utilized	Student assignments

This research is a multiple case study (Yin, 1981), which reports the views of 16 pupils with dyslexia ages 11–16 years old at two secondary schools in Barbados. Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) qualitative and constructivist frameworks were utilized in order to come to an understanding with pupils about the ways they interpret and understand their classroom experiences.

Pupils were a heterogeneous group with respect to the difficulties they experienced, and therefore it is difficult to argue that they represent “typical” pupils with dyslexia. Difficulties that pupils experienced included problems with spelling, reading, writing, recall, and memory (T. R. Miles & E. Miles, 1990; Pollock & Waller, 1994; Snowling, 2000). Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis, contingent on pupils’ permission and parental consent being given (Masson, 2000) to take part in the research for one term.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews and observations were the main tools used to collect data. These were supplemented by contact summary sheets and a researcher’s journal—used to manage data and cross-check pupils’ responses during

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

interviews. Narrative accounts of what took place in the classroom were kept and this was used to engage pupils in discussion.

Ethical Considerations

Lindsay and Lewis (2000) suggest that researching the perspective of children can be an intrusive process. One issue which this raised was the level of confidentiality that was provided for the student. In order to minimize the likelihood that students could be identified and to ensure that confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, pseudonyms were used, so that the names which appear in this paper are not the real names of the students who participated in the research.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed using data reduction procedures recommended by M. B. Miles and Huberman (1994). This process involved first- and second-level coding, memoing, audit trails, display format (partially ordered meta-matrices), and interpretation of the data.

The real strength of this approach is that it allows within-case and between-case analyses to be done in the meta-matrices almost simultaneously. Investigations of what individual pupils said about their school experiences and those of the group were easily distilled and analysed for a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged.

In addition, comparisons between pupils' perspectives could also have been facilitated to see how similar experiences of school were across institutions.

Descriptive Codes

The process of data reduction was started by grounding the codes within the data. An initial set of descriptive codes were produced from a pilot study conducted during the first two weeks at Mallory High School. This approach to forming codes is called an inductive approach to data reduction (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Inferential or Pattern Coding

The next stage of the analysis clustered the descriptive codes into larger, more abstract categories, based on inferences and assumed linkages between coded materials in the data. Inferences were informed by patterns that emerged from pupils' responses to certain questions in the transcripts; phrases and ideas were repeated sometimes and these similarities were later abstracted at a more general level.

Table 2. Data Analysis Procedure

Procedure	Description
Descriptive Codes – first level analysis Definition – a code is a tag or label assigned to units of meaning in a transcript	These codes emerged from the data in the pilot study and were applied to specific phrases, expressions, and paragraphs in the data
Inferential/Pattern Coding framework – first level analysis Definition – a label that identifies an emergent theme	These codes classified and reduced data in descriptive coding framework into superordinate categories based on the relationships found in descriptive codes. Assumptions were made about how these codes may be related to each other in the context of the study.
Memoing – first level analysis Definition – the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships	Memos documented ideas that came to the researcher about themes that emerged and their relationship to each other as data were further reduced. This procedure was used for both descriptive and inferential/pattern coding
Partially Ordered Meta-Matrix – second level analysis Definition – charts that assemble data from several cases in a standard format	The data were further reduced to a display format across the cases and research questions asked. This would allow for further cross-case analysis to continue
Partitioning of Themes	Research questions and data in Meta-Matrix further broken down and displayed individually, to make inferences and understand how cases were influenced by any factors that emerged from themes

Memos

Memos were used in two ways: 1) to document my thoughts about how data were linked to wider theoretical constructs in the literature, and 2) to keep track of patterns that emerged from ideas raised by pupils in the data. This exercise was used at the descriptive and the inferential stages of the analysis.

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

The Audit Trail

An audit trail was used to locate coded sections from the interviews in the main body of the transcript. It included the name of the school, name of the student, the year group that pupils were in, and a page number. This simple means of tracking data is recommended by Huberman and Miles (1994).

Partially Ordered Meta-Matrices

A partially ordered Meta-Matrix is a table that gives an overview of cases studied and data compressed in a précis format. The partially ordered meta-matrices utilized in the study marked the first attempt at understanding the linkages, patterns, and ideas that arose from the data. M. B. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that meta-matrices are “master charts [that] assemble descriptive data from each of the several cases in a standard format...the basic principle is the inclusion of all relevant data” (1994, p. 178).

Trustworthiness of Data Collected

In qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness are important to ensure the credibility of data. Checking interpretations with pupils on a regular basis was managed by using contact summary sheets to ask pupils about things that they said in previous interviews and things witnessed during observation. Recapping what took place in classrooms and previous interviews provided me with the opportunity to get their feedback on the meanings and interpretations that I gave to what was said and what took place in the classroom.

Findings

This section of the discussion will examine the difficulties that pupils experienced with learning in the classroom. As noted earlier in this paper, the origins of these challenges can be thought of in two ways: first, those associated with the nature of dyslexia; and second, difficulties related to pedagogy.

The Nature of Dyslexia at Secondary School

The findings indicate that pupils experienced difficulties in writing and reading intensive subjects like English language and literature. Word substitutions, remembering how to spell familiar words, and sounding out syllables were problems that pupils experienced in both of these

Stacey Blackman

subjects. For Carrie, her frustration in spelling was pronounced in subjects like English literature:

[it was difficult to have] a word in your head but you can't spell it. MH/Carrie/Year 5/p. 33

A similar experience was noted by Annabelle:

Well its not like I have a bad memory if I want to write something that I know is correct but I can't spell it I have to change around the answer to suit the word I can't spell. MH/Annabelle/Year 1/p. 22

In both of these excerpts, it is important to emphasize that pupils were confident of their ability to answer the question, but their poor spelling skills prevented them from doing so in a satisfactory manner. This is not surprising given that research by Frith (1981), Goswami (1991), T. R. Miles (1993), and Pollock and Waller (1994) suggests that phonemic awareness is a prerequisite skill for the development of reading and spelling skills.

Turner (2001) notes that spelling in English literature is a challenge even after reading difficulties are ameliorated. They also argue that pupils are likely to view their inability to spell as evidence of a major handicap and tangible evidence of a learning difficulty.

Poor memory skills are another well-documented difficulty associated with the nature of dyslexia (T. R. Miles, 1993; Snowling, 2000). At school, Carrie noted that recalling information in a precise way was not something that she could do easily:

Q: What subjects are you confident about?

Carrie: Chemistry no way [laughs] cause I guess like with Chemistry you have to learn things off by heart. I hate learning things off by heart. MH/Carrie/Year 5/ p. 35

Carrie's difficulty with learning information by rote is not surprising. Rote memorization can be cognitively challenging and a burden if the information is too pedestrian and if the student is unable to devise a strategy to correctly remember the information.

Lynn and Sue's comments revealed difficulties with sequencing of information. Lynn experienced difficulties with formulas, especially putting numbers in their correct order for measuring the gradients of mountains in geography:

Q: Why is calculation more difficult than writing down the formula?

Lynn: Remembering the formula is different cause I can tell you how to do it, then when I put the numbers into the formula its gonna mess me up. MH/Lynn/Year 4/ p. 71

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

Lynn’s difficulties were more procedural in that she found it harder to remember the sequence of numbers for formulas and the steps for putting this information down correctly.

Sue also had similar difficulties with sequencing, but these were related to remembering her times tables for an equation she needed to figure out in mathematics:

Q: Do you have problems remembering your times tables?

Sue: Yes

Q: So is this what made this calculation hard?

Sue: Yes.

Q: At the board you seemed to have had some problems doing the calculation?

Sue: I forgot to cancel down and had to erase it...but the experience was okay. MH/Sue//Year 3/p. 30

Mortimore (2003) suggests that for pupils with dyslexia, times tables and following a set of mathematical steps, as Sue had to do, is a problem likely to affect pupils’ self-esteem because they are likely to struggle with things that seem automatic for other pupils in the classroom. Although I did not witness pupils in the study being belittled by their peers in light of their difficulties, the focus group interview, which was conducted prior to undertaking data collection as part of the larger PhD study, revealed that such events were not uncommon.

Q: Why somebody like you, why is it that somebody else who is good can’t help you?

Dawn: Because they wouldn’t understand where you are coming from...they would say you don’t understand that? MH/Dawn/Year 4/p. 3

Lynn: some of them would be like, Lynn is dumb let me help her, you know they have that sort of attitude. MH/Lynn/Year 4/p. 2

These comments add another dimension to the challenges that pupils encounter because they are not likely to approach peers if it means that they will be ridiculed. They are likely to seek out alliances with other pupils with learning difficulties to provide a source of comfort and support. The excerpt reveals that the nature of social interaction in this classroom was not always conducive to supporting the learning of pupils with dyslexia. This suggests that there is a need for awareness among

Stacey Blackman

peers in the classroom about how they can positively facilitate the learning of their classmates with dyslexia.

Difficulties Related to Pedagogy

What do teachers do that present challenges for pupils with dyslexia? The findings indicated that teachers' choice of strategy contributed to the challenges that pupils experienced with their learning. From my observations in classrooms, it was evident that a considerable amount of time was devoted to copious notetaking in some subjects. Dictation, however, presented a number of challenges for pupils: holding words and phrases in mind, thinking about getting the spelling correct, and choosing relevant information to note down.

Natalie expressed this sentiment well:

Q: Okay let's look at the dictation today and what did you think of that kind of instruction particularly when there are words that are difficult to spell, what did you think about that today?

Natalie: I don't really like dictation, am its sort of hard to spell the words and remember them and also am, go back over it you forget and you go like "oh, should I go back over it or forget." I guess it was okay today cause she actually slowed down a bit and actually spelt the words. SWH/Natalie/Year 3/p. 51

Turner (2001) and Pollock and Waller (1994) argue that dictation is not the best method to use with these pupils in the classroom. They note that "many dyslexic children do not absorb any of the content as they are so busy dealing with the actual process of holding the words in their memories, spelling and writing" (Turner, 2001). In addition, Charlene and Lynn's comments about writing down the relevant points of the lecture are also pertinent concerns, especially when revising for examinations.

Charlene's comments give some insight regarding the cues she looked for in order to determine what is important to note down during the teachers' instruction in English literature class.

Q: What do you think is the best way to write notes and what the important points are?

Charlene: I guess how she said it, if she talking and says head up so and so and stuff so I can know whatever, continue and then she...instead of talking, talking, talking and you have to write, that does get us messed up. MH/Charlene/Year 4/p. 55

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

These comments indicate that the cues ranged from the precarious—intonation of teachers’ voice to see where she places emphasis—to the certain—a clear indication given when the teacher says “head up” or gives subheadings to be noted down. Without these cues, Charlene is lost as far as writing the important points, because it is difficult to navigate through what seems to be an “endless sea of words.”

Another area of concern related to difficulties pupils experienced with understanding concepts and their interrelationships. Knowing how and why teachers arrived at particular answers in subjects like mathematics and geography made engagement with these subjects more difficult. Nichole’s comments clearly demonstrates this point:

Q: Do you think that in some way you could see where he was going?

Nichole: I could see what he was talking about and showing and what he was trying to get at. But sometimes it is difficult to grasp even though...say in Maths like you can see oh how he got the answer but you still don’t understand why its there. SWH/Nichole/Year 3/ p. 29

Nichole might only have partially understood the concepts and this presented a difficulty with following the teacher’s line of reasoning.

Comments by Margaret suggested that she found it difficult to understand certain topics in biology, especially when she had to relate it to information that she had encountered the previous term. She referred to her experience as one that “throw me all about.”

Q: What is it that you think you are not understanding?

Margaret: Everything.

Q: Like topics?

Margaret: Yes like certain topics I don’t understand, like today she gave a ... on the board and from....and that throw me all about and it was like so why is it not this anymore, and then she is like why is it that we haven’t learnt anything, like its not understanding. MH/Margaret/Year 5/ p. 37

Clearly, Margaret’s comments reveal a need for greater attention to be paid to how teachers proceed with new information and concepts, especially during the beginning of the school term and perhaps even the academic year.

Both of these pupils seem to have understood concepts independently instead of as part of an integrated whole. Ritchie (2001) notes that “if [dyslexic pupils] find it harder to understand the links between ideas [in

Stacey Blackman

science] their learning can be more of a patch work of concepts that may never link up” (p. 56).

Conclusion

The findings in this paper suggest that teachers’ pedagogical approaches, in particular the strategies they use to teach in the classroom, are important elements in helping pupils with dyslexia learn and negotiate challenges to their learning. The conditions set for learning should enable pupils to rise above the challenges they experience with dyslexia rather than add to them. In light of this, it is important that teachers review their use of dictation, and how they seek to facilitate understanding of concepts and their interrelationships to these pupils.

Within the Barbadian context, pupil perspective research can give teachers the leverage they need to really positively influence the learning of pupils with dyslexia. What pupils say about what teachers do and the ways they do it can be viewed as valuable data to inform pedagogical decisions. In particular, what is to be learnt and approaches teachers can use to promote the learning of dyslexic pupils in the classroom can provide indigenous solutions that best fit the individual needs of secondary school pupils in Barbadian classrooms.

At the secondary school level, Peer (2001) argues that subject teachers ought not to exempt themselves from the responsibility of helping pupils with dyslexia participate in different subjects and access the curriculum. Knowing how pedagogical decisions facilitate or hinder the learning of their pupils can give pupils with dyslexia greater access to information across different subject areas. This is a first step to actually helping teachers become responsible for these pupils’ learning.

Teaching study and thinking skills is another way that teachers can help pupils deal with the difficulties associated with the nature of dyslexia. In addition, this kind of training should help pupils correct other deficient or ineffective skills so as to improve their ability to do well in academic subjects. Clark and Uhry (1995) argue that teachers should use direct instruction to teach thinking and study skills because it is difficult for pupils with dyslexia to develop these skills on their own.

Other questions raised by this research and in need of further investigation concern the kind of classroom climate and contextual factors that might have played a part in determining pupils’ responses in the study. This research was conducted at two schools and, therefore, the findings relate only to these schools. However, it would be interesting to look at the experiences of pupils at other schools to see if findings would be similar to or different from those noted here.

“Learning is Hard and Sometimes Difficult”

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Stacey Blackman

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**COLLABORATING TO REFORM
SCIENCE EDUCATION IN CONTEXT:
Issues, Challenges, and Benefits**

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Within recent times, the call for collaboration among stakeholders in education has been made with increasing frequency. In current thinking, community building and collaboration are posited as critical elements in school reform. The literature reveals various models for initiating collaboration. There is the model that describes the initiative for collaboration as undertaken by “researchers”/university personnel. A second model describes the perspective in which schools as organizations invite researchers to collaborate on a project. The Reforming Science Education in Context (ReSEC) project is an example of the first model. This paper reports the issues that emerged in forging collaborative relationships among two lower secondary science teachers at a selected New Sector High School in Trinidad and three members of staff from the School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine, during the period September 2005 to July 2006. It also presents the benefits and challenges associated with the process of collaboration, which aims to achieve a school-based agenda for education.

Introduction/Background

Reforming Science Education in Context (ReSEC) is a project that was developed out of an expressed need by teacher-participants attending a mini-symposium hosted by the School of Education (SOE) at the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI), which was held in February 2005. The purpose of the symposium was to discuss the findings from an investigation of the status of science education at the lower secondary level in Trinidad and Tobago, which had recently been disseminated (see George, 2003; Herbert, Rampersad, & Akinmade, 2003; Rampersad & Herbert, 2003), with key stakeholders including officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and science teachers. The findings from the lower secondary project indicated that many schools had implemented the new national lower secondary school curriculum in science (Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002), which had been developed in 2002 by the Curriculum

Susan Herbert et al.

Development Division of the MOE as part of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) reform thrust. Part of the discussions at the symposium focused on teachers' responses to this new curriculum in terms of its usefulness in addressing students' learning needs, in fostering inquiry and higher-order thinking skills in students, and in guiding teachers with respect to strategies for instruction and assessment. In particular, the teachers were encouraged to speak about any challenges they faced with respect to the implementation of the curriculum, and were asked to identify areas in which they needed help.

While the curriculum itself was commended by most teachers with respect to its objectives, general organization, good articulation among the levels, range of activities and assessment strategies, user-friendliness, and so forth, many of the teachers present expressed the view that they either had to "*re-design the syllabus to suit the needs of [special] students,*" or "*students with special needs seem to be left out,*" or that the "*syllabus did not cater for the mixed-ability groups,*" or that they experienced difficulty in "*getting weaker students to remain motivated.*" A few also commented that while the curriculum document suggested activities that had the potential to promote higher-order thinking skills in students, they themselves needed to "develop skills in thinking in order to pass it [sic] on or teach students." They also felt that while the newer "SEMP" schools were well-equipped, many of the existing schools had limited resources to adequately support science teaching, or to give students the opportunity to engage in practical activities.

The teachers were facilitated in the development of individual action plans to address issues raised, and a formal offer was subsequently made by the science educators at the SOE to the teachers and their principals, indicating willingness to collaborate on the implementation of these plans. There was no response to the offer of collaboration, either by the teachers themselves or their principals. The comments of the teachers and their action plans (copies of which were requested at the symposium), however, provided sufficient stimulus for follow-up action by the science unit at the SOE.

We, as science educators at the SOE, believed that we could not sit idly by and do nothing when there were perceptions that education was "in crisis," and when reports indicate that a large percentage of students fail examinations each year or leave school with deficiencies in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There was a need for some kind of intervention. We were wary of moving forward with a predetermined research agenda since this approach has not found favour with teachers. The literature shows that classroom practitioners perceive that university-generated educational research is of no relevance to them or the

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

practicalities of everyday teaching, and do not look to such research to inform and improve their practice (see Sweeney, 2003). Another view expressed in the literature (see Greenwood & Levin, 2000) points to a role for the university that moves it from ivory tower status to full and complete participation with practitioner-stakeholders in society. The latter approach pointed to a way forward, and was in keeping with one of the seven strategic objectives of the St. Augustine Campus of UWI which speaks to developing relationships with stakeholders. Accordingly, the ReSEC project was designed.

The ReSEC project was formally conceptualized at a meeting of science educators of the SOE in June 2005. The meeting was held primarily to discuss the issues raised at the mini-symposium, prioritize them in terms of their importance, and formulate a plan of action for collaborating with science teachers in the new SEMP schools to make the new curriculum more responsive to students' needs. Specifically, the formalized objectives were:

- To gain insights into the challenges faced “on the ground” in the implementation of the national science curriculum
- To work with teachers in dealing with these challenges
- To work with teachers to generate science teaching/learning resource materials that would be useful in the context of these schools and similar schools
- To assist in the development of a cadre of “master science teachers” for the lower secondary level

Criteria for choice of schools, and strategies for initiating contact and inviting teachers to be part of the collaborative initiative were explored. It was envisioned that the first phase of such a collaborative project would take three years, working with teachers from Form 1 (the first year of secondary school for students between the ages of 11–13 years) and following through to Form 3.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the issues involved in initiating and implementing the preliminary phase of the ReSEC collaborative action research project. There are very few reports on the processes involved in this preliminary phase, but what exists characterizes the phase as “messy” (Bello, 2006, p. 16). However, very little detail on what constitutes the “messiness” has been reported. This report is intended to address this deficiency.

The issues reported on in this paper emerged from the data as interpreted through the conceptual lenses/frameworks of the university

Susan Herbert et al.

participants. What emerged as issues were influenced by contextual factors such as the history of school/university relationships, the specific interactions that occurred as the project evolved, and our own personal and professional experiences.

Some Theoretical Perspectives

The literature on collaborative action research may be explored from a number of perspectives. The theoretical underpinnings that informed the study are: conceptions of collaborative action research, establishing communities of practice, social constructionism, and models of collaborative action research.

Piliouras, Kokkotas, Plakitsi, and Vlaxos (2003, p. 1) suggest that “the adjective ‘collaborative’ in collaborative action research stresses a research methodology that involves researching with teachers rather than conducting research on them or about them.” Further, they state that underpinning their own action research study is the assumption that “teachers can acquire the expertise necessary for effective curriculum development, by refining and extending the practical professional knowledge they already possess through critical collaborative activity supported by a team of researchers” (p. 1).

Greenwood and Levin (2000) refer to the process of collaborative action research as *co-generative inquiry* because it is built on professional researcher-stakeholder collaboration. They make a strong case for a role for action research in connecting university social research to some of its primary social constituencies, thereby contributing to a positive restructuring of university-society relationships. In essence, they are advocating a reconceptualization of the university’s agenda. Clarken (1999) identifies elements that can serve as a guide to determine university/school readiness for collaboration and identify potential barriers to success. These are:

- trust/responsibility
- time/commitment
- accountability
- choice/ownership/meaningfulness
- shared vision/beliefs
- mutuality/reciprocity
- flexibility/adaptability

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

- challenge/openness to growth
- respect and communication/sensitivity

However, this reconceptualization can only be realized if participation in action research is seen as both a means of supporting research in teaching and an essential element of the research itself (Bruce & Easley, 2000).

The literature also speaks to collaboration and community building as critical elements in action research and school reform. Communities of practice have been defined as groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 5). They further suggest that such communities share information, insights, and advice; ponder common issues; explore ideas; and act as sounding boards. Wenger et al. also posit that good community architecture invites three main levels of community participation. These are a “core” group, who move the community along its learning goals; the “active” group, who participate regularly but without the intensity of the core group; and the peripheral group, who remain on the sidelines observing but not actively contributing. They further suggest that community members move through these levels as their interests are stirred.

The social constructionist perspective also underpins the action research paradigm. The underlying assumptions of social constructionism are that reality is constructed socially, and that meanings and knowledge are co-constructed in interaction (Shotter, 1993). Shotter posits that the social constructionist approach does not allow communication to be seen as simply a matter of information transfer and exchange, but rather as a process by which people can, in communication with one another, literally inform one another’s being. Research from this perspective focuses on communicative transaction as complex, dynamic, and context-dependent (Souza, n.d.). Beck and Kosnik (2006) see social constructionism as an approach that encourages all members of a learning community to present their ideas strongly, while remaining open to the ideas of others. Therefore, in forging a successful community, issues such as agency, knowledge, and power must be addressed.

The literature suggests that there are three types of knowledge that are each associated with different dimensions of power. These are representational knowledge, which is linked to power of competence (*power-over*, i.e., power to control); relational knowledge, linked to power of connection (*power-with*, i.e., in solidarity with others); and

Susan Herbert et al.

reflective knowledge, linked to power of confidence (*power-from-within*, i.e., power to act on moral values) (Park, 2001). Starkhawk (1987), cited in Park (2001), sees these three dimensions of power as being operative and necessary in community-based actions. However, reports in the literature are somewhat silent on these issues as experienced in practice.

Attempts at collaboration reported in the literature reveal various models for initiating collaboration. In one model, the initiative for collaboration is taken by “researchers” (see Bello, 2006; Grove & Fisher, 2006). In another, schools as organizations invite researchers to collaborate on a project (see Cooper & White, 2006). But it is evident that there are some limitations in the reporting of action research studies in education. In a critique of these studies, Grove and Fisher state that they provide an incomplete picture, with some being more descriptive than analytical, and others providing few details on the process of implementation. They also refer to the lack of clarity in research reports about the factors that lead to collaborative relationships. Bello, citing Gomez (1990), speaks to the under-reporting of the process aspect of action research. She posits that at the process stage hardly any “results” are perceived and, in research, efficiency and tangible results have been given priority over the educational value of processes (p. 4).

The ReSEC project is an example of the first model (Bello, 2006; Grove & Fisher, 2006). It attempts to change the relationship between the SOE and the secondary school, and to respond to the call by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) for the inclusion of the voice of teachers in developing a knowledge base of teaching.

Method

The process of establishing the collaborative project began with the purposive selection of one SEMP school, based on ease of access to the teachers, the attendance of one of the teachers at the science symposium on February 10, 2005, and proximity of the school to the university campus. Negotiating entry was relatively easy because of a personal relationship between one member of the science unit and the principal, who herself had participated in programmes at the SOE. She was contacted, and an initial meeting was arranged. Three members of the university team explained the project—its genesis and rationale—and obtained permission to proceed. A meeting was then held with three members of the teaching staff—two females and one male—of the science department. Two of them were at the time teaching Form 1 science and one had taught Form 1 science in the past. The project idea

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

was presented and the two Form 1 teachers—one male and one female—agreed to participate.

The female teacher (identified in the report by the pseudonym DC) was assigned to the One Special class, referred to as 1S, comprising students who had scored between 0% and 30% on the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). SEA is a national examination that is written by primary school students at 11+ and used to assign them to secondary schools. The male teacher (identified in the report by the pseudonym NB) taught the regular Form 1 class referred to as 1R, comprising students who had scored above 30% on the SEA examination.

The female teacher (DC) had 10 years teaching experience. Before assuming the position at the school at which the research was conducted, she had taught at two other schools. She had obtained a B.Sc. in Agricultural Science and was a trained teacher. DC had obtained the Agriculture Teachers' Education Centre (ATEC) diploma for teaching Agricultural Science and had recently been awarded a diploma in technology education. She was also the Head of the Department at the time of the research. The male teacher (NB) had been teaching for 3 years, was untrained, and had obtained a degree in natural sciences with a major in chemistry. Before embarking on teaching as a career, NB had worked in a science laboratory in industry. Neither teacher had been exposed to the methodology of action research. Both are married and are parents.

Three members of the science unit of the SOE participated in the research. The most senior member of the team (JG) had been employed at UWI since 1983, and at the time was a Senior Research Fellow. Prior to employment at UWI, this participant had taught chemistry at the secondary level for 10 years. The other two participants joined the staff at UWI in 1996. One (SH) had 15 years of experience of teaching general science and chemistry at the secondary level. The other (JR) was a biology teacher with over 25 years experience at the secondary level. In addition, this participant had served in an administrative position at the secondary level.

The Research Procedure

The research group comprised three university participants and two classroom teachers. The first step for the university participants was becoming familiar with the school context. This involved observations of science lessons and engaging teachers in after-class conversations. At the beginning of the process, each teacher was observed by all of the

Susan Herbert et al.

participants from the university and after-class conversations were held. As the project evolved, each teacher participant worked with a member of the university team, who observed classes and engaged in the after-class conversations with the teacher. In addition, the university participant who worked consistently with the 1S teacher also taught the class on a few occasions. Materials were produced to support classroom teaching, either by the teacher, teacher in collaboration with laboratory technician, or teacher in collaboration with university participants. At intervals, the entire group met for purposes of reviewing, planning, and reflection. These meetings also served as opportunities for building interpersonal relationships. On one occasion, all participants met at the university for an informal get-together, which included lunch.

Data were therefore gathered from classroom observations, reflective conversations, and planning sessions. Classroom sessions and meetings were audiotaped and transcribed. University participants also prepared field notes and were therefore the instruments for data collection. The data were analysed by university participants using a theoretical framework, for example, Clarken's (1999) elements of collaboration, and a grounded theory approach to determine other emerging issues

Emerging Issues

Two main issues were addressed as the collaborative process evolved. These were related to "perceptions of power differentials" and "clarification of the research process." Attention to these issues was required as we sought to "get it right."

Reducing the Perceptions of Power Differentials

A number of issues related to collaboration emerged. In the context in which we worked, we were aware that perceptions of power were inevitable. JG stated explicitly: "*I know I was aware of the power thing as perception.*" Perceptions of power differentials was an underlying concern because we were aware that attempts at collaboration within organizations and among stakeholders require the development of trusting relationships, which can facilitate freedom of expression. In a context in which we had entered uninvited, but in which we were nevertheless accommodated, and aware of the perceived differences in status of university lecturers and secondary school teachers, we took steps to smoothen the path to meaningful collaboration. The following illustrates our efforts at deliberately addressing perceptions of power differentials.

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

When we began the project during the first term of the 2005 academic year, most of the meetings were held on the school compound at the teachers' convenience. For example, we arranged meetings during their non-teaching periods or after school had been dismissed. We sought to have the process work in a way that would establish that we were partners in the process, as we attempted to build a trusting relationship.

Partners in the process. During the first meeting (20 September, 2005), we provided a background of the work leading to the conceptualization of the project and expressed our desire to collaborate with the teachers. The following illustrates:

JG: Before we could do anything we need to get you on board... We would work with you. We could plan together, share ideas, sit in on classes...really a collaborative effort over this 3 year period.

We tried to emphasize that we would be equal partners in the process.

SH: I just want to stress that we would be working together. We would really require a lot of your input.

At one point during the meeting a teacher asked: “*Exactly what are you all going to do?*” The following shows how one university participant communicated our orientation towards partnership with teachers:

JG: We don't know. When I say we don't know, it's the kind of project that evolves. I can tell you what our big goal is. Our big goal is to work with you.

At the beginning of the second term (January 2006), we invited the teachers to UWI for lunch, at a time that was mutually convenient for all parties. At this meeting, we engaged in a discussion that would allow us to establish a joint purpose for the project. After lunch, we reflected on the progress made on the project during the first term, and made plans for the second term. Based on the first term's experience, we thought that we could have suggested some project objectives to kick-start the discussion, for example, to gain insights into the challenges faced “on the ground” in the implementation of the national science curriculum: “to work with teachers in dealing with these challenges,” and to work together to establish a joint purpose—one in which all parties had an input. At this stage, while we were focusing on the process of reform, the teachers were focused on a product such as a “new” curriculum, as the dialogue below illustrates:

JG: That's how we see it. We don't know if that's how it will play out. So those were our objectives.” ...Is there anything that you don't agree

Susan Herbert et al.

with? Anything that should be added? We are open. These things are not carved in stone. We can change as we see fit.

DC: What would be the outcome of this? Would it be a new curriculum?

As the meeting continued, one university staff member raised the issue of ways of addressing one another. She suggested a change in the level of formality that we had used at the start of the project:

JG: So maybe in the context of this then, you, Mrs. C and you Mr. B...And before I go to that, I'm wondering whether we should not shift to a first name basis...It's something for us to think about...So in the context of this, maybe D. and N. could give us some feedback on the Term 1 teaching experience and working with us.

We were always cognizant of the entry process—that we had proposed the idea of collaboration. Hence, when the project began, our focus in these early stages was to consistently communicate the message that the teachers would have direct control over the manner in which the project evolved. From the first session (September 2005), during which the project idea was introduced, and at follow-up meetings in October 2005, we as university researchers tried to facilitate the process of collaboration as much as possible with explicit signals for teachers' ideas and input:

JG: We thought that it was necessary to chat with you to see where you are coming from, what your goals and aspirations are for the class. And most importantly what contribution you think we can make ... because that has to come from you.

During the meeting in January 2006, we as university participants again tried to facilitate the process of collaboration as much as possible by being flexible with the time for meetings and the venue selected:

JG: So work it out and let us know, but I would really welcome that- to be in the school and get more into it.

DC: Is Tuesday good for you?

NB: For me too.

JG: So let's work for Tuesday, yeah.

All: Yeah.

DC: Tuesday 31st January?

JR: And we're looking at what time to start? 2.00 p.m.?

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

The teachers' role in action research was also highlighted and shown to be an integral part of the process of collaboration:

SH: Actually we are working with you, but we are not the only ones researching.

NB: Yes, I understand. If I try an approach, I can think about how it was done. Can it be done better?

SH: A lot of reflection on your part.

Building trust. Honesty is an integral part of developing trust in a relationship. The SEMP science curriculum is designed to incorporate topic areas in the separate sciences which are supposed to be integrated during the teaching/learning process (MOE, 2002). There is a bit of a paradox here. On the one hand, the curriculum document is titled "Integrated Science" and places emphasis on integration during the teaching/learning process. This is in keeping with current research which speaks to the removal of the traditional disciplinary demarcations (see, for example, Sweeney & Seal, 2008). On the other hand, topic areas are in the separate sciences, and teachers have little or no exposure to integrated science during their academic preparation. University graduates from the UWI, the pool from which the majority of science teachers in Trinidad and Tobago is selected, read for higher degrees in one or perhaps two of the traditional science disciplines. This means that both teachers and teacher-educators could be challenged by some aspects of the syllabus. One university participant was forthright about these limitations:

JG: I know I was aware of the power thing as perception. One of the things I tried... was to tell the truth. I don't know the biology so in that sense he (NB) had it all, 'cause I'm not a biologist.... But I realized it's the system we live in, you know, especially when you preface the names by Dr. this and Dr. that. It sets up a kind of dynamic, which is really not what we want.

During the meeting JG also stated explicitly, "We know we haven't got it right yet, but we would really like some very frank feedback." This statement provided the space for open, honest communication. Subsequently, one teacher (DC) felt safe enough to share information about feelings of tension she experienced when SH observed the classroom sessions. "When I have someone in my classroom, it is obviously a tense moment, even though I did Dip.Ed. That's always a little struggle there."

Susan Herbert et al.

Being open about the perceived power issue, honest about our deficiencies, and facilitating teachers' openness served to set us on the path to establishing a climate in which perceptions of power differences were diffused over time, though they were not entirely eliminated. Therefore, to deepen the levels of trust, we revisited our communication strategies, especially those that would facilitate our movement from university participant as expert to university participant as learner and collaborator in this particular context.

We had entered the context with the intention to be equal partners in the collaborative process, and thus to learn from and with the teachers as a strategy for reforming science education. The manner in which we attempted to build trust and create opportunities for learning to occur and for shared decision making about science curriculum was determined by the specific interactions in which we were engaged. For example, SH, who was working with a trained and experienced teacher, adopted strategies that respected the teacher's practical and professional knowledge base. Examples of how this was done are presented below.

During the after-class discussion of the science lesson held on 25 September, 2005, SH suggested that worksheets/activity sheets could be developed for use in the class. The following excerpt illustrates her use of questioning as a means of suggesting new ways of operating in the classroom. Significantly, the excerpt also reveals that the idea of collaboration was cemented. The teacher used the pronoun "we" in the sentence "We could try that."

SH: But do you think that they would be able to work with each other in groups... if they were given some information? Information related to the factors or the conditions required for photosynthesis? If they were given a little worksheet or activity sheet with some pictures? Do you think that they would be able to work in groups to come up with what is required for photosynthesis? And what is photosynthesis?

DC: They would be able to work in groups.... Yes, they could but that would have to be over a series of classes. I don't think that they could come up with a conclusion in one class...We could try that. Do up a worksheet.

Towards the end of the conversation, SH also sought clarification on how they should proceed in developing the worksheet and offered assistance in the production of the worksheet:

SH: So is there anything... Do you think that you would make the worksheet? I don't know if you would want any input. I mean, if you

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

would want any input from me or from us...Or do you think that you would have to conceptualize what you're doing?

DC: Initially before you suggested it I had planned to do a little experiment...to make sure they understand.

SH: ...What I'm saying is if you produced the worksheet and you wanted to have it copied, we would try to help with the resources...

DC: The school has money. No. We have lots of paper.

Power Differentials Surface

Yet despite attempts to reduce the impact of perceptions of power differences, we were not always successful. For example, there were occasions when we felt that we were intruding. During the conversation of 25 September, 2005, Mrs. C mentioned that she had changed her plans to accommodate SH's scheduled visit. She did not consider cancellation as an option, giving the impression that she did not consider herself as an equal partner. The following illustrates:

SH: So when did they get the results of the test?

DC: They still have to.... I don't know...I didn't have time to do that yet (sighs). It's just dragging on. I couldn't give them today because that would have been a whole lesson. I don't want to waste your time. So I put it off. We'll see what happens.

Feelings of intrusion also surfaced when we met with teacher participants for the after-class conversations. In the absence of an official meeting/conference room at the school, we met in the library on most occasions. However, with the required rearrangement of furniture or student dislocation to facilitate such meetings, we sensed some unease on the part of the librarian. Although permission was always given, it appeared that we were really inconveniencing the library staff.

Incidents such as these led to reflections on the process of establishing collaborative relationships within a school setting. For example, we pondered upon questions such as: Who should be involved in the process of establishing a collaborative project in a school? Did the approach adopted inadvertently reinforce perceptions of power? Furthermore, when we noted that we were the ones initiating contact, we recognized that the one-sided communication was an indication that the issue of power differentials had not been resolved.

One-sided communication. One of the main factors impacting upon any collaborative project is communication (When do we meet? How

Susan Herbert et al.

often? Where do we meet? How do we maintain contact? What do we discuss?). Our different locations within the education system and the competing pressures of workplace responsibilities were challenges that emerged. DC said: “*It will have to take a high priority because there are lots of other things going.*” During the early stages of the project (October 2005), SH and DC had planned to work together to produce a worksheet. SH suggested to DC that that they should communicate via the telephone. DC suggested communication via e-mail.

However, the priorities of workplace responsibilities, such as accommodating changing school schedules, reduced the time available for preparation and feedback, and DC did not initiate contact either by telephone or by e-mail as she had suggested. Consequently, the worksheet referred to above was prepared without the collaboration intended. During the second term, SH became involved in teaching one class. Accordingly, two-way communication was even more crucial to ensure that her plans were congruent with the teacher’s plans, and that the students had the necessary prior knowledge or skills required for the lesson. The following reflective entry, written in February 2006, also illustrates the pattern of the one-sided nature of the communication process that was a recurring theme:

I called DC on Friday morning to express my concern that the students would not be ready for a lesson on chromatography as we had planned. After reflecting some more I felt that it would be more logical to do a session on evaporation as I had initially planned after the lesson on crystallization on Thursday. She said that there was no science class on Thursday and mentioned her disappointment that again when she is responsible for an aspect of the plan that there is no follow-up. (Last week Thursday, D was supposed to introduce the students to the use of the spatula in preparation for my class on 14/2/06 and this was not done). I therefore expressed my desire to do the session on evaporation on 21/2/06 instead and that I would go ahead and prepare the worksheet with this in mind.

We interpreted the lack of initiative in making contact as evidence of teacher participants’ continuing discomfort with the process of collaboration or as a means of redistributing power. It was only by the beginning of the first term of the second year of the project that one of the teachers began to initiate contact. JR reports on such contact in September 2006 via e-mail to one of the university participants:

I heard from N yesterday. He has been assigned two Form 1 classes, and has requested (as part of the collaborative process) that I meet with him to engage in planning for these classes. He is free for one period

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

tomorrow morning, so I promised to meet with him at 9.40 a.m. I know that you operate on a tight schedule now, but I was hoping that you could join us and share your ideas.

The above illustrates some of the challenges that were associated with perceptions of power. But two other issues emerged during the early phase of the project. One was “impatience with the collaborative process;” the other was “clarification of the research process.” A discussion of these two issues follows.

Impatience With the Process of Collaboration

During the second month of the project, we, the university participants, began to construct a deeper understanding of the collaborative process. The attempt to collaborate led to personal insights about human frailties impacting on researcher as instrument. For example, the following comment, during the early phase of the project (October 2005) when DC indicated that she would prepare a worksheet, illustrates that SH was willing to circumvent the processes involved in developing a collaborative relationships, in order to expedite results.

SH: But if it's [help is] not required. Well, great. It means that we won't have to make an arrangement about when we would meet to drop off the worksheet and so on.

The teacher's independent actions removed the obstacles associated with (a) arranging convenient times for face-to-face meetings, or (b) using technology for communication. While this results-oriented approach may have served to move things along, independent action reduced the level of collaboration.

The project therefore served as a medium for university participants' learning at many levels. As teacher educators, we had not hitherto collaborated with other stakeholders in the manner dictated by the project. As such, we had to learn how to surrender control and to develop trust in the process. Further, the teacher participants had not been engaged in research in this way before, so we also needed to “clarify the research process” at intervals, as we collaborated on the project.

Clarifying the Research Process

During the preliminary phase of the project, it was necessary to discuss the research process on numerous occasions. This was particularly important because we did not plan separate sessions that dealt exclusively with research. During the first meeting (20 September, 2005), the action research process was described as follows:

Susan Herbert et al.

JG: The kind of research we're really talking about is called action research where you research as you work and you analyse your research data as you work and you use the results of your analysis to put back in your planning and you work it during the cycle.

However, there was evidence that teacher participants did not fully understand the research dimension of the project. During the meeting of 4 October, 2005, one of the teachers sought further clarification on the research focus.

NB: The action research, what would it entail? Like what is involved in the research? ...Is it looking at the classes, looking at inputs? Is it that you get information and experimentation ... is it like that? I'm trying to picture what it is like. I can't really...

JG: I think I need to start from the beginning again. Because it is not like you described.... Maybe what we should do next time is to bring a little bit of literature on action research so you can read about it.... If it were the other kind of research we would tell you these are our objectives and stuff like that.

We did follow-up with the literature and, in addition, we presented a framework to assist teacher participants as they reflected on lessons taught. The forms were intended to induct teachers into the data collection process. By reflecting and writing about specific teaching issues, the teacher participants would have data to share with us and together we could work towards addressing the issues of concern. But up to the point of preparing this report, the time available and the school context did not allow us to help them to understand fully their roles in the data collection and analysis procedures.

Even though there were challenges associated with establishing and engaging in the process of collaborative research, there were benefits derived from the said process. Some of the benefits are discussed below.

Benefits

From our perspective, there were benefits accruing to the teacher participants and to us—the university participants. The teachers had the opportunity and support to reflect on their practice and we—the university participants—learnt valuable lessons that would enhance our future interactions with teachers in their own school environment and in the university classroom. Each benefit is discussed in turn.

Teachers reflect on their practice. After-class conversations provided opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice, and, hence, to

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

identify issues for concern, propose solutions, act on them, and reflect on their actions. From our perspective, teachers' involvement in reflection on their teaching was a benefit, and the following illustrates how teachers' reflections led to modification of the science curriculum.

After seven months of collaboration, a discussion between teacher participants and university participants in May 2006 revealed that both teachers had modified their practice to facilitate student learning. The 1S teacher reflected on her actions in the classroom, and her comments show that she had refocused her science teaching by placing more emphasis on students' development of science concepts and less emphasis on developing basic literacy skills, such as writing and spelling:

DC: In delivery, using a new approach I am using more worksheets to provide more structure. This gives more time for teaching and student activity. The downside is that students may lose the worksheets, but I try to ensure that they place the worksheets in their books for review.... May compromise on literacy skills (since students have less opportunity to write out everything), but there is more time for science. Literacy can be left for the remedial group. The focus is on having students enjoy and understand the science.

The 1R teacher had expressed interest in using students' prior knowledge as the vehicle to increase the level of student-centredness in the classroom. In other words, he intuitively felt the need to put constructivist theory into practice:

NB: Trying to use students' prior knowledge. This is a new area for me. I used to tell them everything. With the clarification on the use of notes as a teaching strategy, I bring on more activity. [I try to] develop notes with the students. Moving from too much explanation to using more visuals...not too T-centered, using the visuals to help students make sense...I am still challenged about what might be the ideal activity, and making links is the hardest challenge for me. I am trying to formulate ideas, but am still not sure. I like the idea of moving from concrete to abstract.

University participants learn from experiences. For example, DC's modifications of the curriculum were based on (a) her desire to meet the perceived needs of the students by providing concrete concepts, (b) her recognition of the importance of having students establish links (relationships) among concepts, and (c) her intention to have students discern the relevance of the material studied to their everyday life experiences. Her concerns about the abstract nature of the concepts to be

Susan Herbert et al.

introduced were expressed in the after-class conversation in October 2005, as follows:

DC: Well I decided to continue with plants and look at more concrete things. All right. So I say I branched off from the cells. I basically finished with that because I'm not going into too much detail... We looked at the organism as it pertained to well man...so I thought I'd try to connect the two looking at a living thing and then move on into parts of plants that they could see and touch—concrete.... I wanted them to know that not only animals and man but [also that] plants are made up of organs... make sure that they make the connection.

However, the influence of the written curriculum document surfaced as the conversation progressed. She expressed the view that she should introduce ideas that would have prepared students for what was to come. The following dialogue illustrates:

DC: I want to touch everything before the end of the year.

SH: When you say everything...?

DC: The major topics. They have to do matter and energy... microorganisms. I don't know if I really want to go into that.

SH: But why do you want to touch everything?

DC: Well so at least they'll be a little more prepared when they get into Form 1. You know?

Based on the interactions with the teacher participants, we began to understand the nature of the tension that emerged when the teachers attempted to be faithful to the curriculum document [fidelity approach to curriculum implementation] and, at the same time, attempted to modify the curriculum in response to students' needs. For example, even though DC taught a 1S group with special needs, for which there was no written curriculum, she felt that she should introduce all the topics that were intended for the regular Form 1 classes. In addition, teacher participants did not feel empowered to make changes to the national curriculum. For example, DC needed clarification on whether the outcome of the collaborative process would be a new curriculum, given that teacher participants worked in a context in which the MOE usually sanctions changes to curricula. We therefore learnt the following:

- The stronghold (even stranglehold) of the national curriculum and officialdom

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

- The difficulties teachers face in adopting new roles—even an experienced teacher like DC
- The hidden (or not so hidden) agenda that all students must cover the same material (as exemplified by DC in particular)
- Power of contextual variables

The above shows that the issue of modifying a national curriculum to meet diverse student needs is not as straightforward as it might seem. This knowledge is very important, as there are implications for teacher development programmes.

Discussion

The findings from this study bear some similarities to, and show some differences from, those reported in the literature. Some of the similarities are related to the patterns of participation that emerged. For example, in spite of our attempts to reduce perceptions of power differentials, such as time for socialization, we (the university participants) perceived that initially the power dimension between the teachers and the university participants was one of power-over (control) (Park, 2001). Similar views have been reported by Fetters and Vellom (2001). They stated that teachers “were leery of working with the university. They did not want university personnel to come in and take over” (p. 74). In addition, our attempts to establish mutuality and trust are similar to the retreats mentioned by Grove and Fisher (2006). Other significant similarities were those related to the constraints of time available for collaboration within the current structures of the public school system and the university, and the uncertainties associated with the initial phase of the collaboration process. Bello (2006) describes the initial phase of establishing collaboration as “messy.” It can be posited that this messiness is the period required to resolve and to reconstruct perceptions about others before true collaboration can begin.

Most of our interactions (social and/or professional) are predated by historical antecedents. These in turn give rise to perceptions about the interacting parties and shape the manner in which the interactions occur. In the particular interactions reported on in this study, which aimed at collaboration, the antecedents include the history of development of the school and the university as institutions within the Trinidad and Tobago context. Since none of the participants entered the collaborative relationship in a vacuum, it is natural that the perceptions of the

Susan Herbert et al.

participants involved would have mediated the interactions and contributed to some of the messiness that occurred.

As we strove to adopt the principles of collaboration (Clarcken, 1999), it was evident that we proceeded differently from some researchers in the international setting. For example, Grove and Fisher (2006) reported an approach that seemed to retain a top-down dimension. They stated that “goals for participants were further developed at a weekend retreat” (p. 57). In this study, we attempted to establish egalitarianism by facilitating “a joint purpose.” As was reported earlier, we were “aware of the power thing as perception,” and this perception provided the conceptual framework that guided many of the processes and procedures that were enacted. Another difference that must be taken into account is the context in which this study was conducted. As is commonly reported in the literature, (see, for example, Bello, 2006; Grove & Fisher 2006), participants involved in similar action research projects had prior relationships with the researchers or had been exposed to action research programmes, which might have facilitated the process.

Alongside the challenges involved in establishing a true collaborative relationship, some benefits were evident. With respect to the development of the reflective habit, the literature suggests that teacher reflection can contribute significantly to transforming practice. The process of reflecting provides teachers with knowledge that informs future actions and improves the quality of science teaching (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliot, 1991; Lincoln, 2001). As teacher educators, we perceived that some transformations had occurred based on teacher participants’ explicit comments and observed actions.

Further, the experiences gained from teacher participants’ attempts to transform the science curriculum, along with the ensuing tensions/conflicts, provided some insights for our own practice. In-service teachers with whom we interact often comment that the curriculum as written does not meet the needs of many of their students. We have often recommended that they adapt the curriculum, but we did not have first-hand experience of the issues involved with following such prescriptions. The results of this study show that curriculum modifications are not as straightforward as they may appear. With the insights gained, we are now better placed to develop strategies to help teachers in our professional development programmes to deal with the philosophical, technical, and context-specific dimensions involved. For example, one approach might be to be more deliberate in helping teachers to make the curriculum more adaptable to diverse student abilities; to pay more attention to contextual issues such as urban/rural differences, cultural variations, and so forth. We may also strengthen the

Collaborating to Reform Science Education

aspect of the programme that draws upon teachers' personal theories as we help them in their personal, social, and professional development, and focus more consciously on the technical skills required to implement a range of classroom instructional strategies. In retrospect, this preliminary phase of the project has allowed us to gain insights into the challenges faced "on the ground" in the implementation of the national science curriculum (our first project objective), and to begin the collaborative process to facilitate our second objective, that is, working with teachers to deal with these challenges.

Participation in the project also led to a new level of collaboration among stakeholders, and also saw an increase in the membership of the community of practice. For example, the laboratory technician moved from the position of an outsider, to a peripheral member, to an active member of the group (see Wenger et. al., 2002). This is an example of the dynamic nature of the community that emerged and the level of comfort that had eventually developed among the members of the group. The level of interaction among university participants themselves was a reflection of a changing culture—from one of cooperation in which an individual accepts and works along with another's ideas to a sense of community and shared mission in which there is input from all parties to set the agenda for action (see Bruce & Easley, 2000).

In conclusion, our interpretations of our interactions with teacher participants were influenced by our perceptions, experiences, and so forth. At the beginning of the process, our interpretation of teacher participants' perceptions of power was the concept of power as control, that is, by technical means that derive from representational knowledge. However, as we interacted with teacher participants and as the project evolved we began to develop a different understanding of the conception of power—one that did not involve control only. This new understanding incorporated a more liberating concept of power, which embraces solidarity and self-confidence as well as control, as advocated by Park (2001). By engaging in this process, we were able to reconstruct our understanding of the collaborative process and become more conscious of cultivating reflective knowledge as we work towards co-constructing the concept of power as confidence (power-from-within) (Park, 2001).

The learnings from this research project are instructive for the future of university/school collaborations in the area of curriculum reform within the Trinidad and Tobago context. Power differentials, along with associated issues of trust-building and communication modes, are inevitable when there is the perception that the knowledge brought by any one party has greater value or currency. The process of developing meaningful collaborative relationships in such groups therefore requires

Susan Herbert et al.

time and the requisite dispositions of openness, honesty, and commitment from all concerned, since there is no easy solution to attaining optimum collaboration. We recommend that further action research projects of this nature be conducted if we are to increase our knowledge and understanding about reforming science curricula within the Trinidad and Tobago context.

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**RECONCEPTUALIZING THE AGENDA FOR
LANGUAGE EDUCATION:
Languages for All**

Beverly-Anne Carter

In 1997, the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI) embarked on a programme of languages for all via the establishment of the Centre for Language Learning (CLL). The mission of the unit was clear. The CLL was to be the institutional means for organizing and expanding the teaching of foreign languages at the UWI, St. Augustine. Its mission meant that students could now aspire to foreign language competence as a core skill of their “graduateness.” At the end of the first decade, it is useful to examine how successfully the Centre has accomplished its mission. Moreover, as the Centre embarks on its second decade, a refocusing of its mission—with reference to current research on non-specialist learning, new societal imperatives such as the Spanish as a First Foreign Language (SAFFL) Initiative, and institutional objectives such as the Campus’s adoption of internationalization as a strategic objective—is called for. These are the issues addressed in this paper, which seeks to set out how the CLL, as a UWI centre of excellence for languages, proposes to meet the challenge of teaching, research, innovation, advisory and community services, and intellectual leadership in non-specialist language learning in the next decade.

Introduction

Background to the CLL/Language Centres

By order of the St. Augustine Campus Finance and General Purposes Committee, a campus centre for languages was established in August 1997. This new teaching unit, the Centre for Language Learning (CLL), was to become the institutional means for organizing and expanding the teaching of foreign languages at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine. The CLL’s immediate focus was on Spanish and French, two international languages spoken in the region. But its mission to organize and expand meant that it was mandated not only to bring a

Beverly-Anne Carter

different group of learners to the language-learning table, but also to introduce new languages to the menu.

A review of the CLL's work reveals that it has been very successful—both in quantitative and qualitative terms—in meeting its original mandate. From a core of two languages, the Centre has expanded to offer some 10 languages: Arabic, (Mandarin) Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Yoruba. Additionally, in January 2006, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), formerly attached to the Department of Liberal Arts, was included in the curriculum at the CLL. From approximately 200 students, the CLL now regularly enrolls 800 persons in its campus programmes and approximately 100 learners off-campus. Qualitatively, the Centre receives high praise from its students, who value the dynamism of their teachers and the fact that many of them are native speakers of the languages they teach. External assessments have been equally complimentary. The CLL underwent its first full-scale programme review, via a Quality Assurance Review, in December 2005 and emerged with flying colours.

The CLL has grown. But, not surprisingly, this dynamic growth has not been without certain drawbacks. As the CLL prepares to enter a new decade, it is an opportune moment to pause and reflect on its work thus far. If we are to chart a path forward for this campus language centre, the clichéd looking back to look forward is a necessary step in the process. A good starting point for this review is to revisit the notion of the CLL as a university language centre.

Challenges and Opportunities

One criticism levelled against the CLL in the Quality Assurance Review was that it had succumbed to mission creep. The reviewers felt that as it had expanded, there had been some degree of dissolution of its primary focus and, as a result, the CLL's mission as a university language centre had become obscured, both for internal and external stakeholders. The fundamental question then was: What is a university language centre and what is or should be its mission?

Identity/identity formation is a truly contemporary challenge, which equally besets the individual juggling roles and responsibilities and institutions. In the case of UWI, the question can be posed: How does the premier tertiary education provider in the region reconcile its role and responsibilities as (a) a research intensive institution that values research and publication, and uses this as *the* metric for promotions; (b) an institution in the mould of a liberal arts college with a focus on high-

quality undergraduate teaching; and (c) an enabler in the society, cognizant that, within a perspective of widening participation in tertiary education, it must assume a responsibility to increase access by providing pathways to a university education for traditionally under-represented groups?

I am not suggesting that these roles and responsibilities are mutually exclusive. But like many of UWI's internal stakeholders, I am fully aware of the dissonance that sometimes seems to arise from attempts to engage equally on all these fronts at the same time. The CLL's identity crisis was no less profound. Is it a revenue-earning profit-seeking enterprise? Is it a provider of extra-curricular (not accredited, therefore less prestigious) learning for the student population? Is it an enabler of the university's public service mission, providing a public good—subsidized language training—for adult learners? All of these issues about what the CLL is and what it does are further complicated by its web of relationships with department, faculty, and campus.

Defining a University Language Centre

A useful definition of a university language centre and its role in providing non-specialist language learning comes out of Fay and Ferney (2000):

Institution-Wide Language Programmes and Language Centres aim to maximise opportunities for language learning by providing a comprehensive and viable language programme which takes into account the needs of a wide spectrum of non-specialist language learners. These learners who specialise in disciplines other than modern languages, now outnumber those specialising in languages in Higher Education. To identify and meet their needs, provision must emphasise how language learners' competencies can transfer from generic contexts to a range of disciplines; it must promote greater awareness of learning strategies and devise curricula which facilitate subsequent professional mobility across linguistic and cultural frontiers in an increasingly global economy. Mapping non-specialist provision has prompted much debate about the process and product of learning and teaching during a period of unprecedented change within the language learning community. (Book jacket blurb)

This definition of the *what* and *how* of a language centre coincides well with the original mandate of the CLL to organize and expand the teaching of foreign languages at the St. Augustine Campus of UWI. The

Beverly-Anne Carter

Fay and Ferney (2000) definition also points to some of the characteristics of a university language centre. A university language centre's scope is campus/institution wide and its curriculum represents a departure from the traditional offering for specialist learners. The reach and nature of non-specialist provision are intended to have a broad appeal to students from all disciplines, and in many institutions in the UK, Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs)/non-specialist programmes are dubbed "languages for all" programmes.

Reconceptualization of the Centre's Mission

The challenge to our identity forced us on to the path of realigning our work with our original mandate. As part of the process of redefining who we are and what we do at the CLL, we embraced the suggestion of the Review Team to define a core mission, a commercial mission, and what was dubbed a *pro bono publico* mission. Our core mission then is the provision of "languages for all"/institution-wide non-specialist programmes, grounded in relevant research. Our commercial mission is the revenue-earning role referred to earlier, and our *pro bono publico* mission, a public/outreach mission that allows us to see added value not only in financial terms. As the title of this paper suggests, the major thrust of this paper will be on our core mission—the languages for all programme. The paper will therefore explore what a languages for all approach means to the institution and the wider society. To do this, I shall examine some curricular issues, then some sociocultural challenges that influence a languages for all agenda. Finally, I shall discuss what I see as an appropriate institutional response to the challenges that I have outlined.

Curricular Issues in Non-Specialist Learning

I shall confine my attention to three curricular issues that tend to feature prominently in discussions on non-specialist language learning, and which also engage our attention as we try to craft the best curriculum for our learners: content, entry levels, and levels of achievement. As noted earlier, most non-specialist learning tends to be generic language provision catering to students from a variety of disciplines. This pedagogical decision is supported by research from applied linguistics, which demonstrates that specialist lexis and registers are independent of the actual structure of the language (see O'Leary, 2000). Moreover, the lexical items that are peculiar to each discipline occupy such a reduced field that it seems more efficient to give priority to the common core of

generic technical terms in whole-group teaching, and respond to the disciplinary focus in some other way, for example, via strategy instruction or an autonomous approach.

A second curricular issue that often appears in discussions on non-specialist teaching and learning centres around entry levels of non-specialist language courses, and the fact that the majority of this provision is sub-General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level. The concern here is that such courses introduce an academically less challenging element into a degree programme and compromise the degree status of the student's major. Ferney (2000) and Brierley (2006) both provide robust rebuttals to this argument. Ferney (p. 6) contends that "sub-A Level elements can be tolerated within a degree programme provided the degree programme *as a whole* is of A Level + 3/4 standard." Brierley makes a similar point, citing Quality Assurance benchmark statements that routinely allow for a range of generic and transferable skills, which can be accredited within a degree programme without compromising the core disciplinary competences that are taught and assessed at the degree level.

What is seen as a more critical curricular issue for linguists involved in non-specialist teaching is that the levels of competence achieved in the various stages of the IWLPs are clearly specified. Indeed, defining language proficiency in a way that makes clear both to students and other stakeholders what they (students) can do with the language is a pedagogical concern at the heart of *all* language teaching (e.g., Bissar, 2000). The adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF)—a non-language-specific tool—has been a tremendous boon in this regard. The CEF (2001) recognizes a basic, independent, and proficient user and provides illustrative descriptors of the competence of these users in the four broad skills areas. This has facilitated both curriculum/syllabus development and testing/assessment/certification in many language programmes in the UK, in Hong Kong, and throughout Europe. Sheils' (2001) view that adoption of the CEF can "facilitate coherence and transparency in the description of objectives, content and methods" is widely shared by many in languages. At the CLL, we too have adopted the CEF. We have found that not only does the CEF provide good descriptors for our programmes, but it also facilitates articulation with the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) Spanish and French, which, like the UK's General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS)/A Level language syllabi, are inspired by a communicative approach to language learning. Adopting the CEF will allow us to more easily reward previous

Beverly-Anne Carter

school-based learning certified by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

A third curricular issue alluded to earlier is the integration of a learner autonomy approach in non-specialist language provision. Broady and Kenning (1996) underscore the utility of learner autonomy in the higher education language curriculum:

Promoting learner autonomy has become an important aim for many university language teachers as they respond positively to the widening range of student needs and interests, the exciting possibilities for self-directed learning offered by new technology, and the increasing emphasis in higher education on providing students with skills for life-long learning. (Book jacket blurb)

The greater heterogeneity of the non-specialist language classroom—differences in students' disciplinary background, their previous experience of foreign/second language learning, their perceptions about language learning, their learning styles, their vocational/academic/social reason for learning a language—in comparison with a specialist programme, suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be suitable. In a curriculum that integrates learner autonomy, there are more opportunities for learners to personalize their learning according to their own learning profile. Learner autonomy promotes the sharing of responsibility for learning between teacher and students (Carter, 2006). Thus, while the classroom teacher takes charge of the core content, autonomous learners working in a self-access centre, with the support of classroom teacher or language adviser, *can* tailor their independent learning to enhance classroom learning, for example, as discussed earlier with reference to a specialist lexis. Learners can exercise considerable freedom by focusing on skills, topics, media, materials, and so on of their own choosing. Further, they may work in ways more compatible with their learning style than in the whole-group encounter.

Sociocultural Conditions Affecting Language Teaching/Learning

Moving from the curricular/classroom focus, this paper will now look at some of the wider issues affecting non-specialist learning and the implications of promoting a languages for all perspective in Trinidad and Tobago. While the classroom is undoubtedly one of the most important parameters in classroom-based acquisition (e.g., Freed, 1991), Stern (1983, p. 274) reveals the multiplicity of factors that affect language

teaching and learning. Dörnyei (2003, p. 4) notes that a foreign language is “socially and culturally bound, which makes language learning a deeply social event.” While Dörnyei’s focus is on the sociocultural dimensions of the target language (L2), Stern’s diagram shows that the sociocultural dimensions of the native language (L1) context are no less significant in classroom-based acquisition.

The role of English as the official language of Trinidad and Tobago immediately suggests one of the challenges involved in promoting language learning/teaching locally. The progressive spread of English and its status as *lingua franca* in the globalized world often means that English speakers are less willing to invest in foreign language learning. English speakers’ knowledge of the importance of English is further buttressed by a belief that the majority of the world’s population is monolingual and that multilinguals are the exception. This is a myth that proves difficult to dispel, even among educated L1 speakers.

Research conducted by Horwitz (1987), among others, has revealed some of the implications of learners’ beliefs on their attitudes and motivation. It is hypothesized that in contexts where language learning is not highly valued, the “group language learning self-image” (Horwitz) is lower. This hypothesis was also shown to be valid in the local context. In research conducted among specialist learners of French in 1997/98, reported in Carter (2006), there was almost universal agreement that everyone can learn a foreign language. Students were also confident about their individual potential for success. On the other hand, there was less enthusiasm about the language learning potential of the society as a whole. The majority of respondents were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that people in Trinidad and Tobago are good at learning foreign languages.

Another example that illustrates the significance of the group language learning self-image, also at the tertiary level, comes out of research by Byrne (2006). Byrne surveyed non-specialist linguists at 11 UK universities in 2005/06 and at 12 universities in 2006/07. These students attended both traditional research-intensive universities like Cambridge and Durham and newer universities like the University of Surrey and Leeds Metropolitan. He found that almost all the students (99% in 2005/06 and 97% in 2006/07) thought that the European Union (EU) goal that all students should have skills in their mother tongue plus two languages was desirable. However, when the results were disaggregated by nationality, international non-EU students were the most optimistic that this goal was achievable; followed by EU students; with UK students (the only group where English speakers were dominant) being the least optimistic. Byrne’s survey provides further

Beverly-Anne Carter

compelling evidence that the group language learning self-image can be strongly influenced by prevailing societal attitudes to languages and language learning.

The influence of sociocultural factors on language teaching/learning throws into sharp relief the importance of a language policy as a guiding document and the sign of a society's commitment to language learning. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Spanish as a First Foreign Language (SAFFL) Initiative seeks to realize the Government's goal to make Spanish the country's first foreign language by 2020. Although similar initiatives have been announced before, this time the creation of an implementation body—the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS)—responsible for raising public awareness and coordinating projects that promote the acquisition of Spanish language proficiency is a concrete step to realize the state's goal.

The Secretariat is headed by a full-time Director and employs persons with competency in areas such as foreign languages, communications, and project management. The Secretariat operates under the aegis of a Cabinet-appointed Steering Committee, chaired by the Trade Ministry's most senior public officer—the Permanent Secretary. The membership of the Steering Committee is drawn from Ministries that are closely linked with the SAFFL Initiative, for example, Education; Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; Foreign Affairs; and Tourism. Other institutions that are key to Spanish language teaching and learning, notably UWI; the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT), and, more recently, The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), as well as private sector organizations such as the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce, also belong to the Steering Committee. Two subcommittees—a Language Planning Subcommittee and a Communications Subcommittee—complete the organizational structure.

The composition of the Steering Committee and Subcommittees has ensured that people who are multipliers in the language field—language professionals and educators, senior civil servants, and other professionals who occupy positions of influence in the society—have a stake in the success of the SAFFL Initiative. What this helps to do is reinforce the credibility of the SAFFL Initiative in the eyes of key stakeholders, and, by extension, telegraph to the society at large the importance of SAFFL. The SAFFL Initiative is less than five years old, but the initial data seem to suggest that it is encouraging a change in public perceptions about the importance of Spanish language learning for Trinidad and Tobago citizens. We at the CLL *have* noted that the SAFFL Initiative has

stimulated demand for Spanish language proficiency both among students and members of the public who access our courses.

A University Language Policy

This brief description of the SAFFL Initiative shows the potential of a national language policy for providing strategic direction and putting language learning on the national agenda. It is argued that a university language policy can serve the same function in an institutional context. The implications of a university language policy, firstly in contexts where such policies are common and then in the UWI context where such a policy is being proposed, will conclude the reflections in this paper.

The Situation in the USA

The concept of a university language policy is fairly common in prestigious colleges and universities in the USA. Students are often required to complete a number of semesters of language study as part of the general curriculum requirements. Although this policy is often cast in terms of a mandatory foreign language requirement, the net effect is that students continue to develop their foreign language proficiency or begin to acquire such proficiency in the course of their undergraduate education. The foreign language requirement is a proven way to extend language learning in the US higher education sector. What is less certain is whether students who think of the foreign language requirement as an obligation emerge with a more positive attitude to language learning. In other words, while mandatory courses *extend* language learning, it is debatable whether they *promote* language learning and intercultural competence among the target population.

Indeed, in a paper entitled “Globalization and 21st Century Competencies: Challenges for North American Higher Education” (Fantini, Arias-Galicia, & Guay, 2001), the authors’ strong plea in favour of “competencies appropriate for the 21st century” and their singling out of second language proficiency and intercultural competence among these suggest that, despite the spread of mandatory foreign language requirements, the US higher education sector is not meeting its objectives in the take-up of foreign language learning. On the other hand, a statement by President Margaret Lee (2006) of Oakton Community College, Illinois, underscores the importance of foreign language and intercultural competence even for the community college sector, traditionally regarded as third tier in the highly stratified US tertiary

Beverly-Anne Carter

education sector. Lee said that “you can't live in the world today, and you can't do business in the world today, unless you are a global citizen,” and added that while community colleges are meant to serve the community, “we do live in a world that is so small now that the ‘community’ is the people on the planet.”

The growing realization of the paucity of foreign language skills in the USA and the consequences of this for trade and investment, and recently for national security and defence, led in 2006 to the launch of the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI). The NSLI will “dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critical need foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi, and others through new and expanded programs from kindergarten through university and into the workforce.” (United States. Department of State, 2006).

This new focus will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect in colleges and universities, with administrators and language educators revisiting their current language policies to determine how to extend and promote language learning among those in tertiary education.

The Situation in Europe

In Europe, “the aim of language learning is to develop individual plurilingualism and pluriculturalism,” this according to Joseph Sheils, the Head of the Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe, the body charged with responsibility for language use, and language learning and teaching in Europe. In Europe, the focus is on language learning for all, rather than as the “preserve of any social or intellectual elite” (Sheils, 2001). The three key planks of the European approach to language policy formation are: 1) that language learning is a right for all, 2) individuals must be helped to develop their plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, and finally 3) that Europe’s linguistic heritage is a source of enrichment. These understandings have led to a comprehensive approach to developing and promoting language learning in sectors ranging from primary to adult education, straddling majority language, minority and regional languages, and, more recently, community languages.

One recent initiative in the higher education sector is a proposal to form a Higher Education Language Policy (HELP) network. The decision to establish this network was one of the outcomes of the European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning Among All Undergraduates (ENLU) closing conference held in Nancy, France in April 2006. Conference deliberations on the importance of university language policies and the necessity of taking both top-down and bottom-

up strategic action to realize the goal of making language competence a core component of undergraduate curricula resulted in a call for a formal structure to coordinate European efforts in this area.

Although the concept of language learning as a right for all implies work on all educational fronts, there is nevertheless an expectation that universities have a *special* role to play in supporting language learning and teaching through the research in which they engage, as, for example, the research that is expected to support the HELP network. According to Berthoud (2001):

Universities must reflect on their specific contribution in their dual role as providers of education and research...they must respond to the new linguistic and cultural needs through their educational structures while at the same time anticipating future needs through their research structures.... However, in order to develop and make educational and academic choices relating to language, universities must develop a language policy, which will direct their choices.... Universities must become actors in language policy and be recognised as such in the political, economic and professional worlds.

What the European model underscores is the need for universities to drive the language agenda, not only by ensuring full coverage of language learning needs through languages for all programmes within their institutions, but also by adding value to foreign language education through the conduct of research.

This conceptualization of the way in which the language sector in higher education is expected to act—as a promoter of language learning and a driver of research—is indeed one of the acknowledged goals of higher education. A primary mission of higher education is “to contribute to the development and improvement of education at all levels” (UNESCO, 1998). There is widespread agreement that, “owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations” (UNESCO). This is a perspective that we share. At the CLL, we are committed to a vision of applied research into language teaching and learning, and language policy to inform our practice and our approach as a teaching unit. Our research on adult language learning also responds to the societal need of the SAFFL Initiative to engage more adults in language learning. Finally, through our individual and institutional research in areas such as technology applied to language learning, learner autonomy, the

Beverly-Anne Carter

integration of self-access resources, corpus linguistics, and motivation, we continue to help shape the research agenda in foreign language education.

A Language Policy for UWI, St. Augustine

In a document presenting a draft language policy for UWI, St. Augustine (Carter, 2007), I make the point that:

In the globalised higher education sector, a curriculum devoid of a focus on communicative and intercultural competence will be judged to be deficient, failing to provide opportunities for its beneficiaries to acquire a vital skills set. UWI graduates who do not have communication in foreign languages as a key skill will find their prospects for employment and for academic and professional mobility very constrained whether at the national, regional or international level. (p. 2)

The document continues:

To raise institutional awareness of the importance of foreign language skills what is required is a policy statement showing that the University acknowledges that foreign language competence adds value to undergraduate and graduate study and endorsing foreign language competence as a strategic institutional, national and regional goal. Moreover, the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus must project itself as the visionary and credible voice on languages in the national education sector, leading from the front in 2007 as in did in 1997.... What is needed is a broad framework that promotes the added value of foreign language competence; that underscores the verticality of language learning throughout the education system (rewarding previous language study at secondary school) and recognises language learning as a lifelong pursuit. That framework should also emphasise diversification in the provision and choice of languages. The last point needs to be stressed, for such a perspective will accommodate both specialist and non-specialist language learning and the latter at varying degrees of proficiency. Additionally, unlike the SAFFL initiative, which designates a first but to date is silent on the place and role of *other* languages, a focus on diversification in choice of languages will not result in the promotion of Spanish at the expense of other languages. Instead, diversification of choice of languages would mean a continuing role for French as an

important regional and world language; an enhanced role for strategically important languages like Arabic, (Mandarin) Chinese, Hindi, Japanese and Portuguese; and a place among non-specialist offerings for heritage languages such as French-lexicon creole (patois) and Yoruba. (p. 3)

Finally, I propose the following statement:

Draft Language Policy Statement:

Foreign language competence is one of the basic competences of the tertiary educated person. It is a key to national and international citizenship in today's multilingual and multicultural world. The University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus will promote and foster student engagement with foreign language learning as it pursues its strategic goal of embedding an international and intercultural dimension in the curriculum. (p. 3)

Conclusion

I have argued here that the Centre for Language Learning, established in 1997 as the medium to expand and organize the learning of foreign languages, must renew with its strategic role of putting languages on the agenda by aggressively ensuring that language learning becomes a feature of undergraduate programmes. I have further argued that the creation and implementation of a university language policy provides a rallying point around which all efforts to promote language learning can be focused. Not only will such a policy enhance language learning, but it will also make research into language education—pedagogic research as well as language policy research—a vital component of the work of this centre, like other language centres. There will certainly be implications, especially resource implications, in this reconceptualization of the mission of the language centre. But if this Centre for Language Learning is to fulfil its developmental role as an academic unit within higher education, it must engage equally as a provider of learning and a provider of research in higher education.

UWI sets out as its mission, “teaching, research, innovation, advisory and community services and intellectual leadership” (UWI website). The Centre for Language Learning aims to do no less in carrying out its core mission, its commercial mission, and its *pro bono publico* mission in the language learning/teaching field.

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THE PROBLEM OF GENERATING A ‘GENUINE’ SOCIAL STUDIES

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The goals of the social studies are about citizenship and developing persons. However, it has low status, tends to be marginalized, and is taught in much the same manner as the other disciplines even though “citizenship” suggests a seamless view of knowledge. This paper sets out the rationale for a research agenda to interrogate the problem of generating a genuine social studies. It does this by analysing the role played by learning theories—behaviourist, cognitivist, and humanist—in structuring the social studies learning environment in different countries and contexts. Theories of situated cognition provide a framework for investigating how teachers, educators, and students learn their environment, how they attempt to overcome it, and whether and how attempts at overcoming can be conceptualized more abstractly, leading to knowledge building in the social studies—more robust theories, concepts, propositions, and learning approaches. This study, then, is charting a way forward in reconceptualizing learning in the social studies so that citizenship and personhood can become more realizable goals.

Introduction

Much has been written about the ambiguous status of the social studies in the school curriculum—accountable for high ideals of good citizenship and becoming more human, and at the same time regarded as somehow inferior to the traditional disciplines of knowledge (Ross, 2001; Thornton, 2005). The fact that it cannot be pursued at institutions of higher learning and is essentially a “school” subject marginalizes its importance in the eyes of parents, teachers, and students alike, to a great extent. As a result, over time social studies advocates have tried to clarify the nature of the social studies (Armento, 1993; Lybarger, 1983; Saxe, 1992; Watras, 2004; Wronski, 1993), yet it cannot seem to overcome enduring critiques (Egan, 1983). The search is on for generating a *genuine* social studies; one more faithful to how it has been conceptualized by its founders and social studies writers and commentators, and one less influenced by the traditional attitudes and

Jeniffer Mohammed & Carol Keller

ideologies towards learning and knowledge in schools (Mohammed & Keller, 2004; Winch, 1958, 1997).

This article sets out a rationale for a research agenda that investigates the contexts of social studies teaching and learning in schools in different countries. An ecological approach promises to yield information on the environments in which social studies teaching and learning take place. This approach, which emphasizes contexts and environments, will focus on the skills, abilities, and dispositions of learners and teachers; the ideologies governing schooling (teaching, learning, and assessment); school organization; the prevailing conceptions about the social studies; the texts and other learning materials used; and the lived experiences of participants. Our main idea, which we want to pose for debate and discussion, is that people learn their environments and that the social studies suffers because of this (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991). It tends to be regarded as just another subject that can be transmitted as factual knowledge, and although there is more of a press today towards constructivism and humanist pedagogies, the social studies continues to be treated as “product” or a “given”—already fully worked out, as in a syllabus or a text. Even the notion of the good citizen is emphasized as output or a product rather than as an in-process, phenomenological issue.

Rationale

The social studies has long been entrusted with the goals of nurturing the good citizen and with becoming more human (Bohan, 2003; Carpenter, 2004; Mraz, 2004). This mission (Marsden, 2001), though, has been interpreted and re-interpreted in various ways (Crocco, 2004; Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005). For example, a fundamental divide in the arena of social studies education is whether it is highly disciplined—history being its main vehicle—or whether it is primarily interdisciplinary as suggested by its all-embracing purposes (Slater Stern 2006; Thornton, 2005; Whelan, 2001). At another level, there is the fundamental issue of whether it is about output as suggested by “producing the good citizen,” or whether it is about process—investigating the experiences of teachers and learners in exploring ideas about citizenship and cultural life (Trofanenko, 2005; Urrietta, 2005). These are major struggles that continue to obfuscate the nature of the social studies and how its original purposes (which continue in rhetoric) are to be achieved.

Despite valiant attempts to focus on the ineffable purposes of the social studies, it is still treated as a traditional discipline or, rather, as separate disciplines (Crocco & Thornton, 2002; Parramore, 1993). Attempts at overcoming this orientation tend to be neutralized by the

dominance of the disciplinary curriculum. In response to the wide array of habits, dispositions, and knowledge required of the “good citizen,” teachers have been harnessing an ever-increasing number of disciplines into social studies lessons, producing a multidisciplinary study that largely loses focus. However flawed, it represents an attempt to deal with these purposes, which are seen as unique and which represent a challenge to many social studies teachers. By contrast, a different premise about the learner and knowledge starts with human problems and issues (e.g., adolescent concerns in the secondary school) and attempts to build/interrogate ideas of citizenship and being better humans from such a foundation. In such a conception, the “disciplines of knowledge come into play as resources from which to draw within the context of the theme and related issues and activities” (Beane, 1995, p. 619). Starting from a “problem” invokes real-life situations and, thus, *the student as a source of knowledge* is emphasized over the discrete disciplines. Constructivist ideas about relationships between teachers, learners, and knowledge, though, have had mixed success to date, one reason being the “gatekeeping” actions of teachers, influenced largely by their beliefs and experiences of teacher education (Baker & Moroz, 1997; Pennell & Firestone, 1996; Smith, 2001; Thornton, 2005).

An ecological study that investigates the environments of social studies teaching and learning in different contexts is being proposed in order to examine the understandings and/or ideologies related to knowledge and learning that underpin the curriculum in those places. Specifically, we are interested in the extent to which a *genuine* social studies is being generated. *A genuine social studies* is understood as one where the social studies is rooted in the experiences and cultural life of the people in different contexts, and this knowledge is used to contribute to the developing body of concepts, propositions, theories, and ideas in the social studies.

Methodology

Situated Cognition

Various researchers interpret situated cognition differently, but it is usually applied to how concepts or the processes involved in learning practical tasks are learned more meaningfully in context (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger 1991; Núñez, Edwards, & Matos, 1999). The main idea in the situated cognition view of learning is that people learn best in practical, everyday situations where they are called upon to complete a task within a natural setting, among others

whom they can learn from in a sort of apprenticeship role. Actually engaging in the learning tasks helps them to make connections, some of which they devise themselves, so that they learn much more than the steps in an activity, and achieve a holistic understanding of the processes, problems, and possible solutions which relate to that activity. What they learn is their environment, which makes the learning palpably different from learning the same things in a classroom where, traditionally, abstract knowledge is the logical place to start. In this paper, situated cognition is applied to how and what social studies students, teachers, educators, and other stakeholders learn about the social studies. Instead of applying it only to student learning of a concept, we are applying it to how persons generally learn the social studies learning environment. It refers to all the practices, assumptions, contradictions, and relationships between dominant and other paradigms that configure the environment of social studies learning in school. Remaining faithful to the metaphor, then, if we want to study environmental conditions we will need something of an ecological approach.

Bereiter (1997) proposes that understanding how people learn can be penetrated using a basic three-step model of cognition. Firstly, persons learn their environment in a behaviourist fashion. Whether in a classroom or in a tailor shop, people learn what are the fundamental dimensions of a problem in that context. For example, even if a mathematics problem starts off with “Jane and Louisa have to divide 10 apples,” students in classrooms know that the storyline is incidental and that the problem boils down to a case of manipulating numbers and computing. They therefore learn that problem solving is about arriving at the right answer—the “truth”—through a static series of rational steps—the algorithms—and reproducing the same steps to solve similar problems (Lave, 1988). In the case of real-world situations, learning takes place differently, but people still learn their environment. Lave’s work among apprentice tailors in West Africa shows how having them iron finished garments or attach buttons and cuffs—the last stages in garment construction—contributes to a broad understanding of the whole process; later on they learn how to sew, and the very last thing they learn is how to cut (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For them, the environment is organized to stimulate learning that will eventually give a cumulative understanding of what a master tailor should know. In a similar sense, students, their teachers, and others learn what disciplines are like, what knowledge is, and who is a learner through experiencing the dominant learning approaches in our schools. Knowledge about the social studies, therefore, is learned within the parameters set by such learning environments.

Secondly, Bereiter (1997) says that people not only learn their environment but can overcome that environment. With the knowledge they have gained, they are able to create strategies, develop relationships, and modify practices to deal with problems and issues in their context. Overcoming their environment could mean, in the case of the social studies, the intention to organize multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to learning, as well as experiments with constructivist pedagogies and authentic learning. It can also mean the opposite, a determined push by the “social studies as history movement” to assert itself in new ways to overcome the ambiguities currently plaguing the field (Ravitch, 1989, 1991). Attempts to overcome the environment may or may not be successful depending on the extent to which one could really overcome. It is instructive to note, for example, that even today in the social studies, “American history textbooks, in general, present a white, middleclass, Eurocentric view of the world” (Zhao & Hoge, 2006, p. 428).

A third level or phase suggests that human beings are capable of thinking of their environment, relationships, practices, and how they have overcome them or are adapting to them, in order to develop ideas in the abstract that represent knowledge and understanding generally about such problems or issues, which can be further refined in overcoming the environment. They can develop symbols to generate models to go beyond the environment. Bereiter (1997) likens this third level to Popper’s World 3, and in this dimension we see possibilities of generating a more *genuine* social studies.

Knowledge Production

Popper (1979) portrayed the worlds we inhabit metaphorically as World 1 (the material world or the physical and human environment); World 2 (the mental and subjective world of individuals); and World 3 (that of knowledge objects—theories, concepts, propositions, abstract knowledge created by the human intellect). Traditionally, much of our learning involves bringing Worlds 1 and 2 together to learn our environment and to attempt to overcome it. World 3, consisting of immaterial knowledge objects produced by humans, has the capability to go beyond our local subjective knowing. Treating our ideas and experiences as objects for further argument and scrutiny, Popper believes, brings us nearer to a more “truthful” understanding of phenomena—“to a fuller, a more complete, a more interesting, logically stronger and more relevant truth—to truth relevant to our problems” (p. 148). Bereiter (1997) takes

Jeniffer Mohammed & Carol Keller

this position as providing a basis for escaping the situatedness of our learning by building knowledge.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) posit that knowledge building differs from learning. The knowledge we produce and learn is situated because of the physical and social situation in which it takes place, but this knowledge has the potential to go beyond what normally constitutes the practices of a community. In education, there is a dominant notion of knowledge as content, and when the learner holds it in mind this is regarded as understanding. This, however, is merely transmission and does not help us escape the situatedness of our environment. Bereiter (2002) later portrayed knowledge as a *resource* or *product* that can help us to extend and improve that knowledge, and in so doing bring a view of understanding as the establishment of a meaningful relationship between the learner and some knowledge object. The learner does not just hold it in mind. For example, in the social studies classroom (or any other) *problems* become the starting point for any study—problems of explanation. Theories, interpretations, evidence, ideas, experiences, and explanations become the “content” or “knowledge” that is studied.

Specifically, a study of citizenship should begin with problematizing the ideas and accepted narratives of who is regarded as a citizen and what citizenship is about. What explanations and ideas are emphasized in the text? What understanding of citizenship is being advocated—the process of becoming a citizen, being a citizen in terms of rights and obligations—or what misgivings, fears, and/or commitments are there in the notion of citizenship? How is being a citizen of the European Union different to that of being a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago? Taking apart the arguments, explanations, and theories of citizenship, using personal and collective experience as well as the knowledge in texts and other resources, focuses the learner on extending and deepening social studies knowledge—the so-called knowledge objects of theories, explanations, ideas, and so on. This is what Bereiter (1997) believes is *knowledge building*, and this is what we believe is important in generating a more *genuine* social studies. Such practices help to focus the learner on citizenship formation and human affairs as a shared or cultural study, valuing the importance of expression of experience and dialogue about experience. This is what a *social* study is about according to the fundamental purposes of becoming more social or more human—expressing, sharing, learning to accommodate other’s opinions, developing a stance towards knowledge that is open-ended. Even if in social studies classes the experiences of the learner are encouraged, to a large extent this is done to enhance participation and interaction. World 3, however, asks that this knowledge that the student brings and is

expressing has the potential to be debated, discussed, extended, refined, and transformed, without reverting to the textbook in the end as the authoritative source.

Learning Our Environment: Learning Theories

The major approaches to pedagogy—behaviourism, cognitivism, and humanism—reflect different perspectives on curriculum, teaching, learning, learners, and knowledge. These learning theories developed chronologically—the behaviourist school has had a long history from the latter half of the 19th century to the present. Cognitivism developed largely as a response to the narrow interpretation of learning (as overt acts) on the part of behaviourists. Humanism, gaining currency in the 1960s, continued this movement away from outside stimuli and construction of knowledge (cognitivism) to an emphasis on the intentions and feelings of the learner. While all are represented in schools, behaviourist and cognitive approaches dominate, and it would seem that despite many efforts at reform, behaviourism continues to be the more pervasive (Bredo, 1997). Interrogating the ecological settings of social studies learning environments is likely to yield contextual clues about the influences of learning theories on how we learn our environment, our attempts to overcome it, and whether and how we are engaged in knowledge building.

Behaviourist Theories

The major tenet of this approach to pedagogy is that learning proceeds from manipulation of the environment. Known popularly as SR (stimulus-response) approaches, this view of learning sees knowledge as being organized by the teacher in suitable formats (graphics, rote exercises, learning objectives, motivational inputs, segments and sequences of activities/stimuli) for easy assimilation by students. There tends to be a generic understanding of learners and learning. While it is admitted that learners have minds to think with (a neo-behaviourist view), how the environment is organized is believed to be critical. Learning, then, is a process dependent on bombardment of the individual by stimuli from the environment—a process that could also be described as socialization through a transmission model. Knowledge on the whole is regarded as fixed; largely facts that have to be transmitted to the learner. Where the social studies is concerned, the location of the learner and the teacher in relation to the subject matter is treated as quite unproblematic and akin to what obtains in the traditional disciplines, even though the learner is preparing to become a good citizen or more

Jeniffer Mohammed & Carol Keller

human. In developing countries, a growing body of research bears out the fact that the social studies continues to be delivered by expert authority and textbooks, and by teacher-directed learning experiences, which are then summatively assessed. This is especially true where the majority of teachers cannot access teacher education (Merryfield, 1988); where there are undemocratic political regimes or a strong religious orientation (White, 1997); where inherited authoritarian paradigms from the West are still privileged (Tabulawa, 1997); and where there is a press to maintain peace or the status quo by unifying nationalist narratives (Roberts & Locke, 2003). Interestingly, in Western countries, traditional paradigms also tend to persist even in the midst of a resource-rich environment, enlightened teacher education programmes, and democratic political systems (Levitsky, 2006; Werner, 1998). Mintrop (2003) in describing civic education says that:

Despite demands of earlier reform periods, civic instruction at the turn of the century, according to the experts, is still traditional knowledge transmission and very teacher centred. Controversial issues that could foster critical thinking are avoided. The reports speak of a norm of ‘conflict avoidance’ (Hungary) or ‘fear of politicization’ (Italy). In the US report, this avoidance of controversy is described as fearing to be ‘perceived as insensitive to any person.’ (p. 448)

The dominance of the behaviourist paradigm (or transmission model) poses as problematic, it seems, the extent to which people can escape their environment; for despite numerous attempts at reform, traditional values and world views continue. An ecological study of the social studies learning environment in different settings (including texts and other educational media) should contribute detailed knowledge about how people learn their environment, what they are doing when they try to overcome it, and what knowledge products are obtained.

Cognitive Theories

Largely reacting to the outward focus of behaviourism, cognitive theory moved the emphasis in understanding learning from the environment to the mind. A premium was put on identifying the various internal mental processes involved in an act of learning—memory, retention, retrieval, schema building as in formulating categories and concepts. While behaviourists relied on learning by trial and error in manipulating the environment, cognitive theorists emphasized mental constructs to be tested by the learner. In other words, once a way of negotiating learning had been devised, it was “tested” in relation to being able to demonstrate

learning. The field of instructional design, important in teacher education, developed around organizing teaching/learning acts to mirror what was learnt about how the brain processed information. However, strong behaviourist ideas such as the presentation and measurement of stimuli and response also became incorporated into learning approaches.

Bruner, like other cognitivists, viewed learning “as a product of thinking” (as cited in Bredo, 1997, p. 25), but went further to posit a close relationship between the learner and knowledge (the discipline). According to him, disciplines were bodies of knowledge with a logical structure represented by the sequencing of content, concepts, and propositions, but they also had a psychological structure making the learning of the discipline congruent with the mental processes of the student engaged in an act of learning (Bigge & Shermis, 2004). In positing a relationship between the learner and the thing to be learned, Bruner was trying to overcome the behavioural influence affecting other cognitivists; that knowledge existed apart from the learner. Bruner also went on to challenge prevailing ideas about the social studies. In the 1960s, he was instrumental in helping to develop a federally funded new social studies curriculum in the USA, which became known as “Man: A Course of Study” (MACOS). It deviated from traditional values and content based on history as a discipline emphasizing the Western experience, and tried to stimulate thinking about human beings in all their cultural diversity through an inquiry approach to learning. It focused on the common characteristics of tool making in human evolution, the role of language in culture, and that of social organization. It asked the important question in the social studies, “What is human about being human beings?” (Bruner, 1966, p. 74). We see a determined effort to overcome the social studies environment that was anchored in behaviourism, but to a large extent the acceptance of the curriculum was thwarted by an appeal to restore what was traditional. The course was discontinued in 1976 because of widespread opposition citing that it did not cover much of the content expected in a social studies course, and it opened to inquiry many cherished values in the American way of life (Evans, 2004).

Growing out of cognitive thinking is the conception of learning known as constructivism, based on how learners make meanings rather than how the brain organizes information. In this approach, the focus becomes more trained on the learner’s interpretations of the world built up through experience and interactions. Today, this approach to teaching and learning enjoys widespread approval; yet, to a large extent, it remains problematic to implement, reflecting again perhaps the difficulty

Jeniffer Mohammed & Carol Keller

of overcoming our environment (Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Konopak, & Moore, 2002).

Humanist Theories

This approach places emphasis on the central place of meaning and feeling in learning. It underscores the notion that knowledge never comes without feeling, and this can be independent of the environment or the environment can be mediated by feelings. It is assumed that the learner always has feelings about what is to be taught, hence the premium placed on the needs, interests, experiences, dispositions, and feelings of the learner as the source of knowledge or starting place for instruction. Both Maslow and Rogers stressed the idea of agency or the ability of the learner to make significant personal decisions, the role of education in helping the learner to develop as an autonomous or self-actualized individual, and the major role that self concepts play in this picture (as cited in Nemiroff, 1992). To be able to engage the learner, educators must be aware of how he or she is thinking about or reacting to some problem or issue in social life. Hence, educators must learn more about their students. Going beyond Bruner's (1966) idea that there is a psychological relationship between the discipline and the learner, in this view the knower and the known are inseparable—the learner is constantly engaged in learning, working out what it means to be human, or developing as a person. However, the learner is not engaged with disciplinary knowledge per se but with his or her own needs and interests. Humanists see the disciplines as reflecting the different ways in which people express their orientation to some fundamental values—for example, geography demonstrates the relationships between human beings and the land; history and economics, too, reveal what others think are deep-seated values in social life. Humanists believe that these values and relationships are important for children to learn about as they are all dimensions of being human—how human beings have thought about life and society—but not as packaged disciplinary knowledge. The social studies would grow out of the problems and issues that children or adolescents face as they grow up, which help to reinforce, generate, or establish their values and attitudes. Humanists believe that these learning processes are going on all the time and the school has to intervene and enable that process.

Learning theories provide knowledge and assumptions about how children learn and become translated into methodologies of teaching, learning, and assessment. An ecological approach to the study of social studies education in a wide variety of classrooms will provide insights

about how such scenarios impact on different categories of students (gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and ability levels).

Overcoming the Environment

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary efforts, as well as innovations in curricula and changes in learning approaches, have been variously employed in trying to overcome the environment of social studies learning. Essentially, this involved a re-thinking of the relationships between knowledge, learners, and teaching/learning approaches. That these efforts are not as successful as they were meant to be suggests that social studies learning environments continue to be sites where situated learning characterizes student learning. Efforts to overcome continue struggling with dominant traditions, ideologies, and standard ways of operating. Our proposed research project focuses on trying to understand, at various sites in different countries:

- the dominant and alternative approaches to learning generally and in the social studies specifically;
- how students learn their environment and how they overcome it;
- the conceptions of the good citizen or the human taught in social studies learning environments;
- how social studies teaching materials reinforce and/or question an output-related notion of social studies education;
- how social studies classrooms contribute to knowledge production in the field.

We contend that social studies knowledge is not something to be given or transmitted but, rather, it is built and developed through the experiences students bring to the learning encounter. Adherence to ideologies that regard social studies as education for historical understanding, or inquiry or critical thinking, or even citizenship, fail to take on board that in a very real sense students are educated *through* the social studies and not *in* social studies for historical understanding, and so on. These *purposes* can be kept in mind but they cannot mandate that this is what a social study is like, that students will be educated in social studies for good citizenship. Imposing a dominant view of the social studies has brought us to this place of contention, where having learnt our environment and the situated knowledge at hand, all the ambiguities and conflicting ideas about social studies continue to compete in an ever-

constant search to unmask its *true* nature. To put our ideas to the test, we will embark on developing a body of empirical evidence on the nature of social studies learning in different parts of the world—the Caribbean first and then moving out to other developing countries. This should provide a sound basis for understanding what is regarded as social studies education and to what extent it is genuine, that is, emanating from the experiences and concerns of those learning to be the good citizen or being human. If it is that people seem to be only learning their environment, then a second stage of the inquiry will employ Popper's and Bereiter's way of thinking about World 3 and seek to undertake, with teachers and students, how their knowledge can be interrogated and extended into arguments, explanations, and theories constituting social studies learning.

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A 'Genuine' Social Studies

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Jeniffer Mohammed & Carol Keller

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**USING BLOGGING AS A TEACHING/LEARNING TOOL IN
A POSTGRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI):
An Activity Systems Analysis**

Cynthia James

This paper analyses the impact of blogging on teaching/learning in the English Curriculum unit of a postgraduate teacher education programme that had traditionally been taught face-to-face. Since the 22 teachers of this unit met as a whole group only once a fortnight for most of the semester, blogging was used to introduce course content, to promote reflection and research, and to facilitate teacher interaction. Activity systems criteria such as use of tools, distribution of community learning, interplay of contradictions, and achievement of objectives were used to analyse comments posted to topics on the English Curriculum blog. Two post-blog questionnaires were also administered to gain feedback on interactivity and blog outcomes. Findings suggest that while blogging did promote course content dissemination, it promoted little self-generated research. Teacher interaction was highest on topics of current local concern, while reflection, critical thinking, and risk taking varied with length of teaching experience and individual teacher aptitude. Implications are that in transitioning to online learning in the Caribbean, teacher educators should pay attention to cultural issues and traditions of learning in Caribbean educational systems. With the rapid evolution of e-learning resources and ongoing research in mixing traditional and online technologies, a blended learning approach that accommodates a “flexible learning” philosophy might be best suited for the Caribbean as educators acclimatize to and indigenize technologies.

Introduction

An Overview of e-Learning Initiatives in Higher Education in the Caribbean with Specific Reference to UWI

Marshall (2004) suggests that if the Caribbean is to remain competitive in higher education, it needs to move toward the “radical,” self-directed, and autonomous model of e-learning, even while it implements

Cynthia James

“standard” and “evolutionary” models. Consequently, with the trend towards education “becoming increasing [sic] borderless with universities competing for students in the same market, the global market” (Nagy & McDonald, 2007), the adoption of information and communications technology (ICT) is a challenge that has not been ignored. The post-secondary school sector is moving toward asynchronous e-learning (Caribbean Association for Open and Distance Learning [CARADOL], 2005; Kuboni & Martin, 2004; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2006) and, currently, The University of the West Indies (UWI) is focusing as much on training as on ensuring quality assurance standards (Kuboni 2006a, 2006b; Lee, Thurab-Nkhosi, & Giannini-Gachago, 2005; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2006). However, the need for training outstrips sheer capacity to train. Therefore, some level of initiative must be taken by staff of UWI. Thus, after completing an online postgraduate course in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) from a United States (US) university, in which blogging was used as a teaching/learning and communications tool, this researcher decided to use blogging for the same purposes with 22 in-service teachers in the English Curriculum group of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.) programme at the School of Education, (SoE), St. Augustine.

Blogging in Higher Education

A blog or web-log is commonly described as a “diary-like website that presents entries in reverse chronological order” (Safran, 2008). Two other features of its journal-type structure are that it allows for archiving and searching previous entries; and for reading, responding, and discussion (Ebner & Maurer, 2007). With the widespread availability of mobile devices such as cellular phones, i-phones, and other portable, travel-friendly devices, the mobile blog or “moblog” offers increased flexibility, the facility of multitasking, more opportunities for staying connected, and on-the-move *m-learning* (Cobcroft, Towers, Smith, & Bruns, 2006; Cochrane, 2007). Additionally, with more research being done into the effectiveness of blogging as a learning strategy, its use as an e-learning option in higher education has increased (Coghlan, et al.; Betts & Glogoff, 2006; Brescia & Miller, 2006; Dickey, 2004; Downes, 2004; Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Oravec, 2002, 2003; Stiler & Philleo, 2003; Ward, 2004).

Martindale and Wiley, for instance, used public blogging in their graduate courses in preference to e-learning discussion management systems such as WebCT. Martindale explained: “For my students, the

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

blogs offered a clear advantage over [WebCT-type] discussion forums because the blogs had greater sense of permanence” (p. 59), whereas Wiley found “blogs to be significantly easier to use” (p. 60). Learning benefits cited in their paper included: the improved quality of course assignments due to the generation of website research and discussion, students’ access to their professors’ wider intellectual forum and to “big names in the field,” much longer and more thoughtful responses, and the development of autonomous interaction within the course community. All the same, Martindale noted that “once [his] course ended, the student blogging also ceased” (p. 59), raising questions for him about the sustainability of blogging as a learning tool.

Stiler and Philleo (2003), early users who used blogging in undergraduate pre-service teacher education as a web-based journaling tool to stimulate reflection, also gave blogging a positive report. Feedback from their post-blogging survey indicated benefits such as the potential for archiving and the availability of quick day-to-day review. Their reservations included: some students’ non-response to sensitive issues such as race and gender bias; problems with set-up and technological issues (which they recommend should be sorted out before initiating blogging); issues surrounding anonymity, privacy, discretion, and giving options to students who have concerns about blogging; and preparing students for and through the process of journaling, giving them time “to think about, prepare, write, and respond to questions and queries” (pp. 795–797).

Even Brescia and Miller (2006), who are cautious about the effectiveness of blogging in enhancing college level instruction, cite positive outcomes such as “reflection, application, and engagement” (p. 50) as well as interactivity and greater student application due to flexibility of study time. Their major reservation surrounds demand blogging—“when instructors take away the voluntary nature of participation and begin requiring postings and responses to their postings.” Nevertheless, they find that although “the temptation for students is to respond simply for the sake of responding and to finish the requirement rather than processing information and learning,” demand blogging “can still promote intellectual development” (p. 50). Continued use of blogging in higher education tends to be less tentative and indicates that the flexibility of the medium in facilitating “conversation as learning” (Instone 2005, p. 306) allows for a variety of beneficial learning outcomes (Cochrane 2007; Ebner & Taraghi 2008; Robbins-Bell 2008).

Cynthia James

Rationale for Using Blogging in the English Curriculum of the Dip.Ed.

Because of its flexibility and this researcher's experience with it, blogging was adapted for the Dip.Ed., which is a one-year, in-service teacher education programme for secondary school teachers that has traditionally been taught face-to-face. It has a basic structure of (a) in-house classes at SoE and (b) school visits. Most of the in-house classes take place during school vacations and on alternate Fridays during the semester; they are either plenary or curriculum-group sessions. On the other hand, school visits take place during the semester on an individual basis and on alternate Fridays in small peer-teaching groups, supervised by subject teacher-educators. This means that during the semester, face-to-face contact among teachers and between teacher-educators and teachers is minimal. The infrequent opportunities for meeting during the academic year create challenges for establishing communities of practice, for generating peer support to address common teaching issues, and for maintaining general group cohesiveness.

Therefore, the English Curriculum blog was set up to: (a) promote an interactive, research-and-reflection archive through online discussion; (b) introduce course content through readily available website resources; and (c) engage teachers in communities of practice, while exposing them simultaneously to the wider world of pedagogy in the teaching of English. As in the Martindale and Wiley (2005) experiment, *Blogger* was used as the meeting place for the English Curriculum blog because of its user-friendliness and its accessibility.

Purpose of the Study

English is only one of eight subject areas in the Dip.Ed. taught under the same face-to-face constraints. Therefore, it was felt that the initiative would be a learning opportunity for all. In particular, information was being sought on two aspects:

1. The operational dynamics of the English Curriculum blog as a teaching/learning system; and
2. Teachers' views about the usefulness of the blog.

Description of the Participants

During the period of the blogging operations, the English Curriculum unit comprised 3 teacher-educators and 22 secondary school teachers (3

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

male and 19 female) from various regions of Trinidad and Tobago. Seven of the teachers (one of them male) were under the direct supervision of the researcher. Nevertheless, the blog was made open to the whole group. Blogging was voluntary and ran alongside the normal face-to-face procedures of the Dip.Ed. The other two teacher-educators did not take up the invitation to participate. However, they supported the call for the 22 teachers to do so.

The teachers were all Trinbagonians who taught 12- to 18-year-olds spanning a range of abilities—from struggling readers in public schools, who had scored between 0–30% on primary school exit examinations, to high achievers in government-assisted “prestige” schools. One teacher taught at a private Canadian international school. They taught English-based subjects such as English language and literature, Communication Studies, and Caribbean Studies. Nine were graduate teachers of English for less than 5 years, and nine between 5 and 10 years. This means that only four could be considered experienced teachers, and although some of them had various types of exposure to teacher education, none of them had training to teach at secondary schools. In their own schooling background, the teachers were past students of language and literature in traditional face-to-face Caribbean settings; their predominant assessment traditions being the essay format.

Because of diffuseness and infrequency of meeting times, over the years e-mail has been established as the predominant mode of contact in the English Curriculum unit. Prior to setting up the blog, all the teachers had e-mail accounts and functional computer literacy. To supplement this, a hands-on tutorial on *Blogger* was conducted and teachers were given a take-home guide. The few teachers who were not fully conversant with computers or did not have computers at home could access help and facilities at the SoE, at their schools, or at Internet cafés.

Methodology: Using Activity Theory as an Analytical Paradigm

Since the main goals were getting teachers to interact in communities of practice and generating a shared teaching/learning environment, activity theory seemed a logical investigative paradigm. The use of activity theory in collaborative learning, especially human-computer interaction (HCI), is well established (Collis & Margaryan, 2004; Frederickson, Reed, & Clifford, 2005; Jonassen, 2006; Nardi, 1998; Russell, 2002; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005). An activity system is composed of “interacting components (subject, tools, object, division of labor, community, and rules...)” working in subsystems of “production, distribution, exchange,

Cynthia James

and consumption” to achieve some outcome (Jonassen, 2000, pp. 4–5). A blog, for example, is an activity system composed of interlocking components, since blogging brings together people who are engaged in a system with in-built expectations, norms, and agreed rules or conventions of operation.

The subject or subjects are the persons interacting in the system; tools are the artifacts used as the materials for knowledge formation, such as websites, e-journals, videos, and books; objects/objectives are motives or purposes of the learning system set by the users; and the community is the gestalt formed by the people involved in the system, since learning takes place in “communities of practice” and contexts of use (Bødker, 1995, para. 3). Division of labour or distributed learning is generated by the participants as their exchanges expand or illumine a topic; and the outcome is some measurable evidence of learning. As for outcomes, Nardi (1995) enumerates at least four criteria by which they can be judged:

1. *A research time frame long enough to understand users' objects, including, where appropriate, changes in objects over time and their relation to the objects of others in the setting studied.*
2. *Attention to broad patterns of activity rather than narrow episodic fragments that fail to reveal the overall direction and import of an activity.*
3. *The use of a varied set of data collection techniques including interviews, observations, video, and historical materials, without undue reliance on any one method...*
4. *A commitment to understanding things from users' points of view, as ... in the practical need for getting the ‘natives’ point of view in [the] study of technology in the classroom.*

(“Methodological implications,” para. 1, p. 47)

Organization and Management of the English Curriculum Blog

Nine topics were posted on the blog at intervals of approximately one week apart over the period September to November 2006. Each topic formed its own activity subsystem and unit of analysis within the bigger interlocking English curriculum blog. Topics from the secondary school literature, language, and communication studies teaching syllabi were chosen on the following basis: (a) for their topical nature in the public domain (e.g., censorship of literature—*The Humming-Bird Tree*); (b) for their newness on the syllabus and teachers’ likely unfamiliarity with them (e.g., *Developing Oral Communication Skills*); (c) for teachers’

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

expressed difficulty in teaching them (e.g., *Teaching Grammar*); and (d) for the support they could yield to research practices (e.g., *The Literature Review*). The nine topics in order of appearance on the blog were:

1. Struggling Adolescent Readers
2. Project Gutenberg and Bibliomania — Electronic Literary Resources
3. 100 Top American Speeches: Rhetoric — Electronic Literary Resources
4. The Humming-Bird Tree: Teaching Theme
5. Developing Oral Communication Skills
6. Teaching Grammar
7. What is Critical Literacy?
8. The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning: Teaching Resource
9. Writing the Literature Review

Teachers had the option of posting anonymously. However, the researcher suggested to the teachers that using real names would inculcate ownership of learning and provide validation for comments, particularly if they wanted to use material from the blog in their teaching portfolios (an end-of-programme requirement). Only two unidentified comments were made. These were later claimed by the two teachers, one citing difficulties with posting, the other “self-consciousness” at her first posting. As blog administrator and tutor, the researcher posted under two alternative identities periodically to jumpstart topics or to act as provocateur. At other times the researcher posted under her own name.

Modelling Rules and Sourcing Tools

To indicate to the teachers that she was a member of their community of practice, the researcher-teacher-educator used “we” in composing topic prompts. For example, the prompt for the first blog topic read: “Although we were successful last year in many areas of our practice, we intend to experiment specifically with more strategies....” Rules of operation required teachers to: (a) bring research from resources (such as websites) that would broaden their teaching approaches, and (b) engage in reflective discussion pertaining to teaching with regard to these resources. Sourcing tools required finding relevant resources, including websites, to match topics. Thus, analysing and discussing tools, whatever they might be, to throw light on topics and clarify teaching practices went hand in hand with sourcing them. Given the low quantity of Caribbean educational material on the Internet, most websites linked to

Cynthia James

would, of course, be foreign. To provide understanding of topics and to encourage reflection and analysis of teaching content, teaching benefits that teachers could gain from responding were suggested, as can be seen in the prompt for Topic 1. To further cushion the teachers' initial attempts, the researcher initiated the first blog response under an alternative identity, modelling features such as reflection, participation in a community of practice, distributed learning, and analytical use of tools (See blog topic, *Struggling Adolescent Readers*).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The main data for this study consisted of the teachers' responses on the blog at <http://5240english.blogspot.com/>. Two post-blog questionnaires were also administered (see sample in the Appendix). The first was administered in the week after the last topic was posted to get teachers' self-evaluations on areas such as topic preferences, interactivity experiences, challenges, and opinions on blogging as a learning tool. The second questionnaire was administered two months later in keeping with Nardi's (1995) view of using "a research time frame long enough to understand users' objects" in the assessment of outcomes. Additionally, the blog administrator and researcher-teacher-educator kept a computerized diary of e-mails received and replies sent to teachers. This diary archive consisted of reminders to post, notice of new topics, and advice to teachers who e-mailed about difficulties with posting.

Data analysis was done using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, ANSWR. Coding was based on the standard interlocking elements of activity systems. Consequently, codes used were:

1. subjects or participants
2. tools and use according to rules
3. objectives
4. evidence of distributed learning
5. generation of communities of practice
6. observance of topic rules/requirements
7. level of interactivity

"Contradictions" or "breakdowns," a feature of activity systems, was also included as a criterion. Three types of breakdowns, based on Bødker's (1995) formulations, were factored into the analysis: (a) breakdowns due to computer problems (physicals); (b) breakdowns due to misunderstanding and misuse of information; and (c)

breakdowns/contradictions emanating from ideological tensions and opposition to information during blogging, which could signal the process of change and learning.

Findings and Analysis

The Operational Dynamics of the English Curriculum Blog as a Teaching/Learning System

Of the 22 teachers in the English Curriculum group, 2 did not participate (one male and one female). Both cited computer problems as the reason. For the 20 teachers who participated, response statistics for the 9 blog topics showed a topic mode of 3, a median of 3, a mean of 3.65, and a standard deviation of 2.00; thus indicating that most participants responded to just one third of the topics, and that the spread between highest and least responses to topics was large. In fact, only 7 of the 22 teachers responded to more than half of the topics, and most of them were the teachers assigned to the researcher-teacher-educator for supervision. *The Humming-Bird Tree*, which featured a current controversy surrounding censorship of the Caribbean literature text so named, generated most topic responses (13 teachers), while topics that involved manipulation of computer-based tools and foreign-based material, such as *Project Gutenberg*, *Bibliomania*, and *Top American Speeches*, generated the least responses (5 teachers each).

The low response to the electronic resource sites needs more follow-up. However, Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause (2008) suggest that technological factors may be attributable, not the least of which is perhaps “the lack of homogeneity...with regards [sic] to technology and a potential ‘digital divide’ between students within a cohort of a single year level” (Section: Discussion). These researchers continue:

While some students have embraced the technologies and tools of the ‘Net Generation’, this is by no means the universal student experience. When one moves beyond entrenched technologies and tools (e.g. computers, mobile phones, email), the patterns of access to, use of and preference for a range of other technologies show considerable variation.

This explanation seems plausible; for although teachers of the English Curriculum persisted if they wanted to post, using the computer as more than a glorified typewriter was new for some, and may have accounted for the low level of posting in some cases. As one teacher wrote, although she posted successfully:

Cynthia James

I definitely need more time to navigate around all the resources that are on offer to our curriculum group before I can make a more informed comment. I have to admit that I am a bit overwhelmed [sic] by the technology, though I use my computer everyday. There are some internet resources that I have shied away from for one reason or another. Right now I am not even sure that I am posting my comment in the right place!

This teacher's comment about not being sure about posting in the right place suggests that in a future implementation of blogging or any other e-learning strategy, "lecture capture" could be used in the initial stages of demonstrating the use of particular electronic tools intended to be incorporated in a course. Lecture capture is "an umbrella term describing any technology that allows instructors to record what happens in their classrooms and make it available digitally" (Educause Learning Initiative 2008: Section 1). Lecture capture would have allowed repeats not only for technical aspects of tools, but reflective aspects as well; for although there are intellectual property rights issues in its use, it "enhances and extends existing instructional activities, whether in face-to-face, fully online, or blended learning environments," and it facilitates instruction, particularly "in subject areas where students benefit from repeated viewing of content" (Section 4).

Scepticism and cultural defensiveness seemed also to have affected posting. For although many of the teachers who posted found the sites useful, they expressed concerns about the near absence of Caribbean material on the sites and about barriers to access such as the low socio-economic and literacy levels of their students, which could lead to student disengagement. The following posts of two teachers are examples:

(1) I felt that there are some drawbacks to the teacher that uses Project Gutenberg [sic]. The project excludes Caribbean texts. Thus the student may unavoidably receive the message that the classic Caribbean text and situation are not as important as the classic English, the American etc. those regions represented in Project Gutenberg [sic]. Another effect of using audiotexts that exclude the Caribbean text is that the very students that the teacher is trying to assist may in fact experience alienation from the literature used. Thus, instead of achieving reader ideals (such as reading engagement, lifelong reading, critical literacy) in the student, the teacher thus builds an alliterate or even a weak reader. The teacher must be very wise in her use of the audiotext in a Caribbean setting.

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

(2) Project Gutenberg is indeed an interesting and useful resource in the classroom. However at my school, 80% of students do not have access to the internet nor do they have an appreciation for reading.

These reservations are reactions that future implementers of e-learning in the Caribbean should anticipate. In parts of the world where e-learning is just getting off the ground and, as a consequence, local visibility on the Internet is low, teachers should be prepared beforehand for their near cultural invisibility in cyberspace, by perhaps being asked to reflect on what avenues could be used to deal with the issue, especially since their visibility in print educational material is often similarly miniscule.

Nevertheless, among the teachers of English Curriculum, where cultural adaptation was thought possible, relevant aspects of foreign websites were cited as positives, as the following post for *100 Top American Speeches* illustrates:

Thank you for the web site. It would be an excellent supplement to use in Communication Studies particularly the Internal assessment where part of the students' exams would involve a speech..... [I]n terms of analysing language elements, I would use the "I have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King. This would make an impact on my students since the present American culture has a growing impact on Trinidadian youths especially through Black music (R&B and rap).... While the content of the speech is inspiring to youths to overcome obstacles, the elements of persuasive orating are varied.

On the whole, (a) identification with topical local and cultural issues and (b) concerns about new topics on the Trinidad and Tobago syllabus seemed major factors in teachers' response to topics. The high response to the controversial topic of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean novel, *The Humming-Bird Tree*, supports this view. *Developing Oral Communication Skills* was another topic that generated high response. The latter was a new examination feature of the secondary school syllabus, with which teachers had indicated they needed help, because of their lack of competence with teaching Standard English in the Trinidadian Creole context. However, high involvement did not necessarily mean a high level of research or good use of tools. In their responses to both topics, teachers tended to focus more on personal experiences and their own views, rather than on observing the rules of the blog, which required them to: (a) bring research from resources (such as websites) that would broaden their teaching approaches, and (b) engage in reflective discussion pertaining to teaching with regard to these

Cynthia James

resources. The following post on *Developing Oral Communication Skills* is one example of such limitations:

The aspect of oral communication as regards the lower school is new information for me. We have recently taken in form ones and this is my first term of teaching them. My head of department has yet to bring this oracy aspect of the syllabus to my attention. However, now that I have heard about it I will start doing my research and interfacing with the members of my department to ascertain their knowledge and preparedness for this aspect of the English syllabus.

Thus, although teachers shared information among themselves, their communities of practice remained parochial and chat-based.

On observing that teachers were not using the web as a ready resource for the topics *Teaching Grammar* and *Critical Literacy* with which they were unfamiliar, the researcher-teacher-educator began to direct searches, providing examples of websites to stimulate discussion. However, many of the responses were merely regurgitations from these websites. The following example from the *Critical Literacy* blog gives little analysis, personal reference, or intimation of how the teacher would use the ideas in her own teaching:

• *Critical Literacy is an ongoing learning process that enables one to use reading, writing, thinking, listening, speaking, and evaluating in order to effectively interact, construct meaning, and communicate for real-life situations.... The goal is development of critical thinking to discern meaning from array of multimedia, visual imagery, and virtual environments, as well as written text.*

• http://www.bridgew.edu/Library/CAGS_Projects/LTHOMSON/web%20page/literacy%20definition.htm

• <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/contareas/reading/li300.htm>

With regard to the uneven responses alluded to above, Nagy and McDonald (2007) may shed light for further implementation of e-learning in the Caribbean. Reporting on research in higher education in Australia, they note that students' traditional cultural patterns of education impact their learning styles and responses to learning. Citing various scholars they note:

Entrants to higher education in any country bring with them embedded learning foundations and abilities based on various culturally defined paradigms. These learners may struggle to adapt to the student-centred focus common in many western centric higher education institutions (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002; Hinton, 2004). Kawachi (2000, p. 42) notes that "Western

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

conceptions and approaches are not transferable across cultures and that global distance education providers need to become more culturally sensitised to individual differences.” (p. 741)

Nagy and McDonald suggest greater flexibility within ICT use in e-learning. Their observations highlight, at the very least, that consideration and planning must be given to potential fallout arising from differences in cultural educational traditions in e-learning adaptation.

On the whole, though, a low level of critical thinking was not the norm on the blog. Nevertheless, on topics where teachers were making accommodation to new information and teaching strategies that they were unfamiliar with, there was a tendency to individualistic, exercise-driven responses. Few teachers posted more than once on any topic, again suggesting that they were not engaged in dialogue, but responding in the traditional paper-based assignment mode.

With regard to interactivity, *The Humming-Bird Tree* was the topic during which teachers made most sustained reference to each other. On most of the other topics they did not use the format of addressing each other directly; nor did they link or thread ideas. This tendency to individualistic response seemed to be associated with factors such as teacher personal linguistic style, textbook attitudes to learning, unfamiliarity with the topic being discussed, years of teaching experience, and type of school at which the teacher was teaching. The comments of the two males on the blog on *The Humming-Bird Tree* are representative examples. One male was in his early thirties, the other in his late thirties; one had been a graduate secondary school teacher for 10 years, the other for only 1 year; one taught at a prestige school, the other at a low-achieving public school. Both responded to few topics—one to four and the other to three—and in this last respect, they can be thought to represent the mean. However, while the longer-serving male, who taught at a prestige school, did not refer to any colleague by name, his style was very interactive. The following excerpt illustrates:

Upon preliminary reading i dont [sic] see what all the fuss is about...it is quite common for a speaker who is so emotionally engaged with his subject to become base especially if that person is not possessed with the gift of 'gab' there is nothing startling about this. i may go so far as to ask the class to 'look' into their own repertoire of verbally assaultive language. is there a realistic assault tone to these words or are these hyperbolic?.... The Buddah of Suburbia'...those of you who do not know dealt with themes as these though much more explicitly.... Chaucer expounded on these issues in the Nun's tale....

Cynthia James

The high level of engagement above contrasts with the following short response from the other male that comes almost at the end of topic:

I was asked to give my views on the Hummingbird Tree during an interview. I tried to say that text should be taught in context. However now I will say that text should be taught to suit the psychological level of the student.

The stilted tenor and the lateness of this posting suggest “lurking” (visiting the blog without necessarily becoming involved in posting). However, these very two factors indicate that the blog was serving as a site for reflection, gestation, and ideological change. Also, as is evident from the shorter response, a low level of interactivity did not mean that there was diminished division of labour or limited distributed learning. Teachers rarely repeated each other’s ideas, suggesting that they were reading each other’s posts, although their interactive behaviour did not signal that they were doing so. Of note, too, is the fact that the teachers who posted most often did not necessarily have the most reflective statements, share most information, or show strongest evidence of enhancing communities of practice. As with the two males above, personality, attitude, intellectual acumen, and literary awareness of individual teachers were larger factors in the level of thoughtful exchange on the blog.

Teachers’ Views About the Usefulness of the Blog

Outcomes of activity systems are not customarily assessed in limited time frames (Engestrom, 1999). Therefore, two post-blog questionnaires were administered—the first questionnaire, one week after the last topic was posted and the second, two months later—to gain more comprehensive feedback about the blog. A major objective of the second questionnaire was to gauge whether the blog was still having an effect on teachers’ practices after a delayed interval. Seventeen of the 22 English Curriculum teachers responded to post-blog Questionnaire 1 and 16 to Questionnaire 2.

Teachers’ responses revealed that by far the most frequent reason for the low levels of posting was time constraints. Extrinsic factors such as “tutor reminder” and the desire “not to seem delinquent” propelled them most often to post; while intrinsic factors such as topic interest and curriculum relevance took second place. An interest in interaction was cited twice as prompting posting, while self-motivation was cited only once. Nevertheless, all the teachers who responded found the topics and the exchange on the blog helpful. Some indicated that they had become aware of website resources that they had not known of before and this

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

had stimulated spin-off initiatives they were considering for the future. For example, arising out of using *Project Gutenberg*, one teacher wrote:

I have used the idea of the audio book in a few of my classes (Macbeth) but due to time [I was] unable to continue. A good idea though and one that I am sure to continue using. I am also thinking of recording excerpts from various books on the curriculum to use in class next term.

One teacher with Internet access in her classroom introduced her class to blogging: “It [the blog] has made me rethink talk in the classroom. I now include techno talk, and blend it differently now with the oral, visual and other literacies.... The blog is teen-friendly....” Another teacher, who had no Internet facilities at her school, had started a paper blog:

My Form 3 students...wanted to have a blog of their own but since our school does not have lab facilities with internet access, I decided that we would create a blog using flipchart paper on the back of the classroom. Every week I provide a topic and provide them with paper to write and ‘post’ their contribution.

Additionally, Questionnaire 2 revealed that teachers were using information from the blog two months after it had closed in the preparation of their action research project, which required each teacher to create and implement an intervention of lessons to address a curriculum problem with a class. All the same, only one teacher had set up a blog, although the majority of them said that their teaching had been influenced by the blog. Two cited lack of technological know-how and one lack of Internet access as reasons. However, eight said they had visited other blogs. More follow-up is needed to be able to assess whether the use of material from the blog two months after was merely opportunistic, that is, for their action research projects mentioned above. Further, considering the negative impact of time constraints on the initiative, and that many of the teachers felt they would have more time to implement blogging “after Dip.Ed.,” it would be useful to find out the extent and purpose of teachers’ use of blogging or any other e-learning medium after the Dip.Ed.

Researcher-Teacher-Educator Insights and Implications for Future Use

Major challenges for the researcher-teacher-educator were: (a) dealing with silence and reticence on the blog, and (b) the time-consuming nature of preparation of prompts for the topics. With regard to dealing with silence and isolation, Benfield (2001) suggests “face-to-face induction”

Cynthia James

to HCI and “get to know each other sessions” prior to the start of online classes (para. 5). He also considers defining expectations, developing a persona or voice, and devoting space to “social” communication, to be just as important in online as in face-to-face teaching. In retrospect, one realization is that more attention needed to be paid to social communication. For although there was much in the affective domain on the blog, the researcher’s preoccupation with academic objectives and fear of losing control to lightweight conversation suppressed the teachers’ wider communication needs. Creating a parallel social forum might have engendered more trust and less isolation as well as generated better and more sustained learning outcomes.

Also, the researcher’s decision to limit her voice on the blog and at times to disguise it, using alternate identities for fear of seeming to dominate, might not have been wise. A more prominent and sensitive voice might have led to better achievement of objectives. Additionally, the teachers could have been allowed to share administration of the blog. For although half of those who responded to Questionnaire 2 indicated that they were comfortable not initiating topics, either because of time constraints, or because they preferred to respond to the directives of the tutor, the other half wanted “to be allowed an opportunity to guide the discussion,” “to converse with others in class about stressful areas (like deadlines),” and to “have been given the opportunity to express [their] concerns regarding teaching and the Dip.Ed. Program.”

Preparing prompts was very time-consuming and just as challenging as dealing with blog silence. Much time was spent revising the wording of topics to achieve the “right” tone to entice the teachers to respond. In retrospect, doing seminars with the teachers, prior to and during blogging, specifically on how to do Internet searches and how to analyse, reflect on, exchange, discuss, and thread ideas in an online learning community would have made the experience more effective. For as a user of different kinds of web-based material herself, the researcher had adapted to various cultures and modes of online communication that she assumed the teachers were proficient in, since e-mail was a regular mode of communication in the group.

Implementing blogging within the traditional face-to-face structure of the Dip.Ed., as was done in this experiment, was not blended learning, but such an approach can be considered. It could be to the advantage of the Dip.Ed., given the time and contact constraints of its present format, to devote a portion of its teacher education and assessment to e-learning. For one, this would broaden teachers’ exposure to alternative ways of teaching and learning in teacher education, and, secondly, this would make the question of whether or not to make an e-learning component

Using Blogging as a Teaching/Learning Tool

compulsory null and void. In this regard, some consensus about how much and how best to incorporate blended learning could be worked out.

All the same, in light of the mere 30% response on the English Curriculum blog and the abstention from participation of the two other teacher-educators of the English department (although they encouraged their students to support the blog), this researcher feels, like Nagy and McDonald (2007), that a “‘one size fits all’ approach is inappropriate for both academics and students” (p. 744). The contexts that Nagy and McDonald cite are similar to those under which technology is being adopted in the Caribbean, and so relevant aspects are here stated:

Many higher education institutions have used ICT as a way of providing educational access to new kinds of students, such as mature aged, and/or external national and international students. However, the idea that advanced learning technology could provide both more effective pedagogy and lower costs has been largely dispelled through the last few years in which on-line learning has been conceptualised as the delivery of a product. It is now widely accepted that a sound pedagogical underpinning has been largely missing in these developments (McDonald & Mayes, 2005). In their study of the failed uptake of elearning in America, Zemsky and Massy (2004) suggest that “the hard fact is that e-learning took off before people really knew how to use it.” (p. 739)

Nevertheless, Nagy and McDonald do not exclude e-learning; rather they recommend “flexible learning” that takes into consideration both students and academic staff, noting the “disempowerment and loss of academic autonomy” (p. 740) that some staff feel, and the fact that “many academics have engaging oratory skills and when required to embrace on-line approaches to learning struggle to adapt” (p. 739). They posit that it would not be cost-prohibitive to offer a pedagogical model incorporating ICT that values diversity of teaching-learning styles, cultural backgrounds, learning traditions, and preferences. They recommend flexibility and choice such as the “three models of student on-line learning - the independent learner, the interactive learner and the collaborative model initiated at the University of Southern Queensland” (McDonald & Reushle, 2000, as cited in Nagy & McDonald, p. 740).

Overall, the aims of the English Curriculum blog were moderately achieved. As stated earlier, these were to: (a) promote an interactive, research-and-reflection archive through online discussion; (b) introduce course content through readily available website resources; and (c) engage teachers in communities of practice, while exposing them

Cynthia James

simultaneously to the wider world of pedagogy in the teaching of English. Undoubtedly, carrying their face-to-face operations alongside voluntary participation in the blog resulted in academic overload. As a result, for the future it is suggested that, since the experience showed that blogging can promote interactivity, research, and reflection on curriculum content, it can be integrated into the Postgraduate Diploma in Education at UWI, once educators are prepared to invest time and effort in designing flexible models of e-learning to suit the evolution of the institution.

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Cynthia James

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Appendix
Sample Post-Blog Questionnaire
About Blogging in General

- A. Was the English Curriculum blog your first time at blogging?
(Circle one) Yes No
- B. Did the tutorial help to make blogging easier when you were on your own?
Yes No
- C. What did you know about blogging before blogging for this course?

About the English Curriculum Blog 2006-2007

1. Did you post on the English Curriculum blog?
(Circle one) Yes No
2. If not, what factors caused you not to post?
3. If yes, to what topics did you post?
4. What prompted you to post?
5. Were you able to express yourself as you would have liked to on the blog? Explain.
6. Were the topics helpful? Explain.
7. Were the comments posted to the topics useful? Explain.
8. Were there topics that you would have liked to see on the blog that were not there? Examples?
9. Would you have liked to post your own topics? Explain.
10. What is your opinion of blogging as an educational tool?

**TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH:
Examining the Effect of Teacher Maturity on LOC Orientation**

Lorraine D. Cook and Tony Bastick

In this research, a modified version of Rose and Medway's Teachers' Locus of Control (TLOC) instrument was used to investigate the relationship between a selected group of high school teachers' age, length of service, and their teachers' locus of control orientation. Several studies have suggested a high correlation ($r = 0.845$) between age and length of service; one from the US showed increasing internality with length of service and the other from Israel showed increasing internality with age. In this study, a sample of 205 high school teachers in Kingston, Jamaica participated in the research. T-test and analysis of variance showed no significant difference between Jamaican high school teachers' length of service, age, and their teachers' locus of control orientation. These results imply that Jamaican teachers are not developing in their perception of personal control and responsibility for students' outcomes in the classroom. It is suggested that in-service development programmes should address these particular shortfalls in the professional growth of Jamaican teachers.

Introduction

Locus of control (LOC) is a personality construct identified by Rotter (Phares, 1976). This construct refers to the extent to which people perceive reinforcements as due to their own efforts (Internals) rather than to luck, fate, or powerful others (Externals). This conceptualization of two categories of LOC points to distinctions between social perception, with internals depending more heavily on inner sources as compared with externals who tend to hold social pressures accountable for their actions. Internals are perceived to be more active than externals in their efforts to shape their environment and in their willingness to correct personal shortcomings (Cheng, 1994; Phares, 1976).

Several research studies indicate that teachers' age and length of service affects teachers' locus of control (TLOC) and efficacy (Chester & Baudin, 1996 as cited in Main, 2008; Romi & Leyser, 2006; Sherman & Giles, 1981). Chester and Baudin found that novices who were over 30 years of age experienced increasing efficacy, whereas younger novices experienced decreasing efficacy; they also noted that the efficacy of

beginning teachers in their second year who were over the age of 30 dropped, while the efficacy of the beginning teachers under the age of 30 increased. Romi and Leyser cited several studies (Berryman, 1989; Cook et al., 2000; Forlin et al., 1996; Heflin & Bullock, 1999) which demonstrated that teachers' experiences (correlated with teachers' age) are related to attitudes—for instance, teachers with more years of experience hold more negative attitudes.

It is important to note that people, depending on their age and past experiences, can develop a stable LOC orientation. Lefcourt (1982) points out that one has to be careful in seeing LOC as a trait that is inherent in a person's personality. We need to recognize that personality instruments are approximations of the operations of a construct. We also need to be aware that people do change their minds and perceptions about things. Meaningful experiences encountered by individuals can change their actions and perceived outcomes (Lefcourt). Lefcourt cited several studies that support the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between age and internality (i.e., internal locus of control). For example, Penk (1969, as cited in Phares, 1976) found chronological age to be positively correlated with internality as assessed by Bialer's locus of control scale. Also included in Penk's research was a measure of mental age; Penk, using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, found that there was also a positive correlation between mental age and internality.

Several studies have indicated that on-the-job experience generates a greater sense of personal control. This disposition may be influenced by a greater understanding of how to affect the systems within the workplace (Kremer & Lifmann, 1981; Lefcourt, 1982; Sherman & Giles, 1981). Teachers with less than five years teaching experience are initially externally oriented in their LOC, but over time they become internal. Inexperienced teachers just embarking on their career tend to have more lofty expectations of students, and tend to expect students to more quickly own the learning process. Their expectations tend to be idealistic. They expect that the students will naturally want to learn, study, do homework, and navigate their own path in the academic discipline. The literature indicates that older teachers in their 30s and 40s are characterized by a greater deal of creativity. Writers such as Kremer and Lifmann (1981) explain that teachers at the abovementioned ages may have already overcome certain difficulties in their career path, and subsequently express more control of their environment and higher degrees of job satisfaction (Cheng, 1994).

Evans' (1997) findings about Jamaican teachers indicated that novice teachers wrestled with implementing the new knowledge and skills gained from training, when she noted that during their first year of

teaching, they grappled with closing the gap between what was taught in college and the practice that occurs in the classroom. She noted that first-year teachers, in attempting to replicate what was taught in college in actual classroom teaching, became frustrated and played it safe by adhering to more traditional teaching methods of lecturing and giving notes. This is reflected in the response of this first-year teacher:

I find that if I used note-taking with the class, it worked, even though the college advised against it. If they were too excited, I'd start giving notes and they would settle down. (p. 82)

Main (2008) discussed two groups of beginning teachers. The first group included those who perceived that they received high levels of support from the principal, deputy principal, and other teachers during induction. This group thought that their tutors were "useful problem solvers who assist with matters such as student assessment" (p. 129). Conversely, there was another group of teachers who reported lower levels of satisfaction with their induction programme. They reported increasing levels of stress and less networking. The latter group also reported the least staff support and thought that their tutor lacked skills and knowledge in pedagogical practices.

Kremer and Lifmann's (1982) results revealed that the two extreme age groups—20–30 and over 41—were more externally oriented than the 31–40 age group. Sherman and Giles (1981) found significantly higher internal scores by teachers with more than five years experience as compared to teachers with less than five years experience. However, the results did not concur with Cook's (2002) research findings; her results indicated that there was no relationship between participants' Teacher Locus of Control (TLOC) orientation and their age and length of service.

Due to the limited literature on teachers' locus of control, this paper serves to update the literature on teachers' locus of control in the Caribbean.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between a selected group of high school teachers' age, length of service, and their TLOC orientation, using a more sensitive LOC instrument targeted at Jamaican teachers in order to test for the "maturity effect" with Jamaican teachers. The researchers were motivated to conduct this research in order to improve the effectiveness of teachers by providing a framework for developing internality training for teachers. Additionally, the study was aimed at identifying those teachers who would most benefit from an

Lorraine D. Cook & Tony Bastick

internality training programme and in ensuring that eligibility criteria did not exclude important groups of teachers. Age and length of service were examined in this study using the following research question:

Do Jamaican teachers' age and length of service influence their degree of LOC internality?

The above discussion suggested that as teachers grow older and gain more years of teaching experience, they tend to become more internal. The discussion also provided support for a link between increased internality by training and improved teaching performance.

Methods

The research design of this study was guided by two studies: Kremer and Lifmann (1981), and Sherman and Giles (1981). Teachers' length of service was categorized as less than five years or greater than five years; teachers' age was categorized into three groups: 21–30 yrs; 31–40 yrs; and 41 and over.

Instrument

The data for this study were collected using the Rose and Medway Teachers' Locus of Control instrument (TLOC). The TLOC questionnaire was developed by Rose and Medway (1981) to measure the extent to which teachers held themselves responsible for students' success and failure in the classroom. This instrument was geared only for classroom teachers and so far has been utilized only in the classroom (Cook & Bastick, 2003; Northington, 1998; Rose & Medway, 1981; Stanton, 1982). This questionnaire, with modifications, was used in this research to measure teachers' belief in their control and to determine the extent of the relationship, if any, between teachers' LOC and teachers' age and length of service.

Included in the modified TLOC questionnaire were items on teachers' demographic variables, including their education, age, and length of service in the educational system. These variables were included because they were found to have significance with regard to differences between externally- and internally-oriented teachers (Kremer & Lifmann, 1982).

The scale was modified to make it more culture-friendly. An example of a culturally biased question from the original instrument is as follows:

Q3. Suppose students did not appear to be benefiting from a more individualized method of instruction. The reason would be.

The above stem from the question was modified to read:

Q11. If my students did not appear to be benefiting from the discovery method of instruction, the reason for this probably is.....

The question was changed since high school teachers in Jamaica rarely use individualized methods of instruction.

Scoring of Teachers' Locus of Control Instrument

The teachers were asked to choose between three options (a, b, or c). In addition, the modified TLOC instrument's instructions required that teachers rate their answers by giving a continuous score of 0–100 for a, b, or c, with 0 denoting no contribution and 100 denoting maximum contribution.

The modified TLOC questionnaire consisted of 21 forced choice items. Each question was scored by the researcher as follows: “-1” was given for each external answer and “1” was given for each internal answer.

Initially, dichotomous scores were calculated for each teacher using summations of minus 1 or positive 1. Continuous scores were calculated by multiplying the dichotomous scores with the associated percentages. Each teacher was given two final scores—an internal or external dichotomous score and an internal or external continuous score. The continuous scores facilitated a more sensitive scoring of responses to the TLOC instrument.

The discrete scoring fixes the degree of internality and externality of an individual by the equation $I+E = 40$, where I is internal and E is external. As an individual's internal scores increase, his external scores decrease in exactly the same proportion of his increased internality. Therefore, if an individual's internal score increases by one, his external score will decrease by one.

On the discrete scale, two persons with the same internal score implies the same proportion of internality; however, in reality this may not be so. Two individuals with the same internal scores on the discrete scale can be very different in their proportion of internality or their mixture of internality as measured on the continuous scale. This was reflected in the data collected. For example, using the NLC instrument, participants numbered 1 and 8 scored 29 as their internal score using the discrete scale; however, using the continuous scores their internal scores were 64.8% and 48.8% respectively. Another example is participants 11 and 13; they scored 33 each using the discrete scale; however, on the

Lorraine D. Cook & Tony Bastick

continuous scales their scores were 66.3% and 71% respectively. For example, on a continuous scale a teacher may indicate that she believes that she is responsible 70% of the time for the success of students, while with discrete scoring she would be forced to answer a or b—which suggests 100% internality or externality.

Sample

Copies of the TLOC scale were administered to 225 teachers: 210 copies of the questionnaire were collected, of which 5 were incomplete and 15 were not returned to the researcher at the end of the data collection. The 205 teachers represented 21% of the total population of the 12 high schools.

The sample consisted of 175 females and 50 males with a mean age of 32 years. This sample of teachers had an average of 9 years teaching experience. The teachers were all high school teachers, specializing in different subject areas such as mathematics, literature, history, Spanish, and technical drawing.

Hypotheses and Statistical Analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine the influence of teachers' length of service and age on their TLOC orientation. Bivariate correlation was used to ascertain the relationship between age and length of service.

Hypothesis 1 tested the relationship between age and length of service. Results hypotheses 2a and 2b responded to Research Question 2:

Research Question 1

Is there a relationship between teachers' age and length of service?

H₀: 1 There is no relationship between teachers' age and length of service.

Research Question 2

Do internals and externals have the same mean age and length of teaching experience?

H₀: 2 Teachers with internal scores are not different from teachers with external scores with respect to their mean age and length of service.

Cronbach Alpha was computed for responses to the TLOC instrument to determine the internal consistency—the degree to which the items that made up the instrument were all measuring the same construct (TLOC). The values ranged from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. Pallant (2003) noted that a Cronbach Alpha 0.70 and greater

is acceptable. Other quantitative analyses included statistical tests for normality and descriptive statistics.

Results

Test for Normality

The K-S test indicated the likelihood of the sample coming from a normal distribution. This indicated that parametric statistical techniques would be more appropriate. The result from the K-S test in Table 1 showed, at the $p < 0.05$ level, that the sample is unlikely to have come from a normal population. The result of 0.183 was non-significant.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		cTotal
N		205
Normal Parameters (a,b)	Mean	-559.30
	Std. Deviation	496.531
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.076
	Positive	.076
	Negative	-.032
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.093
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.183

a Test distribution is Normal.

b Calculated from data.

Internal Consistency of Instrument

The internal consistency of the TLOC instrument for both the dichotomous scores and the continuous scores was moderately high using Cronbach Alpha, 0.70 and 0.71 respectively (see Tables 2 and 3). This also suggested that the two types of scoring did not contradict each other.

Table 2. Reliability: Continuous Scores

N of Cases = 205.0
N of Items = 21
Alpha = .71

Table 3. Reliability: Dichotomous Scores

N of Cases = 205.0
N of Items = 21
Alpha = .70

Testing for Significant Relationship Between Teachers’ Age and Length of Service

To verify the relationship between age and length of service, Hypothesis 1 was tested using correlation: $H_0: 1$ There is no relationship between teachers’ age and length of service.

Hypothesis 1 was rejected. The results indicated that there was a strong relationship between teachers’ age and their length of service. As teachers increase in age their length of service also increased (see Table 4). We can observe that age was significantly correlated with length of service ($r = .852, p < .01$).

Table 4. Correlation Between Age and Length of Service

		Age	Length of Service
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.852**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	178	172
Length of Service	Pearson Correlation	.852**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	172	196

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Testing for Significant Differences Between Two TLOC Orientations

In order to ascertain the differences in TLOC based on teachers’ age and length of service, a two-way ANOVA was generated to test the following hypothesis:

$H_0: 2$ Teachers with internal scores are not different from teachers with external scores with respect to their mean age and length of service.

Null hypothesis 2 was not rejected. Teachers with internal scores did not differ significantly from teachers with external scores with respect to their length of teaching and their age. Results of ANOVA can be seen in

Teachers' Professional Growth

Tables 5, 6, and 7. Results showed that teachers' age and length of teaching experience did not have any significant impact on participants' TLOC orientation ($F= 1.083, p> 0.05$; $F = .070, p>.05$, respectively) (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 5. Descriptives: Age, Length of Service, and TLOC

Length of Service	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
less than 5 years	20–30 yrs	-9.1233	6.67488	73
	31–40 yrs	-6.5000	6.65475	8
	over 50	-9.0000	.	1
	Total	-8.8659	6.63653	82
more than 5 years	20–30 yrs	-8.6111	5.75110	18
	31–40 yrs	-6.7424	8.31738	66
	over 50	-5.1250	7.79079	8
	Total	-6.9674	7.81862	92
Total	20–30 yrs	-9.0220	6.47556	91
	31–40 yrs	-6.7162	8.11479	74
	over 50	-5.5556	7.40120	9
	Total	-7.8621	7.32668	174

Table 6. ANOVA: Age, Length of Service, and TLOC

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	271.166	3	90.389	1.704	.168	.029
Intercept	10755.310	1	10755.310	202.806	.000	.544
Age	114.903	2	57.451	1.083	.341	.013
Length of Service	3.695	1	3.695	.070	.792	.000
Error	9015.524	170	53.032			
Total	20042.000	174				
Corrected Total	9286.690	173				

Table 7. Post Hoc: Length of Service and TLOC

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
20-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	-2.3058	1.13993	.110	-5.0010	.3895
	over 50	-3.4664	2.54466	.363	-9.4831	2.5502
31-40 yrs	20-30 yrs	2.3058	1.13993	.110	-.3895	5.0010
	over 50	-1.1607	2.57083	.894	-7.2392	4.9179
over 50	20-30 yrs	3.4664	2.54466	.363	-2.5502	9.4831
	31-40 yrs	1.1607	2.57083	.894	-4.9179	7.2392

Discussion

Do internals and externals have the same mean age and length of teaching? The results did not establish any statistically significant relationship between age, length of service, and TLOC orientation. This is contrary to Kremer and Lifmann's (1982) results where they found that the two extreme age groups—21-30 and over 41—were found to be more externally oriented than the 31-40 age group. Sherman and Giles (1981), however, found significantly higher internal scores by teachers with more than five years experience as compared to teachers with less than five years experience. However, the results did concur with Cook (2002), whose results yielded no relationship between participants' TLOC orientation and their age and length of service. This implies that internality training should not be restricted to younger teachers. It also indicated that the scores of an LOC measure could be the most discriminating factor in deciding on teachers who would benefit most from internality training.

The results also suggest a need for continual professional development programmes within the schools for teachers, as the results from this study suggest that they were not experiencing career maturity. Evans (1997) noted that newly trained teachers, through observations of what older teachers do or by listening to what others such as the principal and other teachers say about teaching and students' learning, fail to use methods and apply concepts learned in teachers' college; instead these

newly trained teachers line up their teaching approaches with the norms of the workplace.

Teacher training institutions need to explore opportunities for professional development programmes in the school system for teachers from different age groups and with varying length of service. The development programmes should involve techniques such as action research. As Stringer (2008) noted, "action research applied systematically to the issue of poor academic performance, provides a high likelihood of improving student outcomes" (p. iii).

Action research connotes involvement, commitment, and growth as educators; teachers are taught that action research and action learning skills create understanding and insight into the classroom situations by bring together process and outcome, teaching and research, reflection and action, theory and practice (Baird, Mitchell, & Northfield, 1987; Stringer, 2008)

As guardians of education, training institutions are not only responsible for the training of new teachers but they should also be concerned with the continued empowerment of teachers in the classroom. These development programmes should result in the continued development of self-confidence and sense of responsibility towards their students.

The results from this study caution teacher education trainers not to limit training to younger teachers or to impose restrictions in terms of age and length of service. The results suggest that there are situations when the mature and younger teachers will have similar professional needs.

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Lorraine D. Cook & Tony Bastick

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EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AS A MICROPOLITICAL EXERCISE

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

The administration of a school is usually perceived of as occurring within the confines of the school facility itself. This research seeks to highlight the reality of administrative procedure within the context of promotion to senior management positions in some denominational secondary schools in Trinidad. The data were gathered through interviews with practitioners in the field and from other key players in the promotion scenario. Key players in this research are teachers, aspiring school administrators, past and present school administrators, Church Board members, and members of the Teaching Service Commission. The qualitative analysis of the data brings to the fore pertinent voices that spell out for us those practices which demonstrate how micropolitics is manifested in the promotion process. The findings point to some consequences of micropolitical activity in the promotion process, and suggest a way forward for this selection process.

Introduction

In societies where traditions are held fast and have the capacity to shape future development, it is always essential to pause and reflect.

In the context of promotion, there have been dominant patterns and behaviours that have been engendered by and perpetuated by sociocultural determinants. This research examines the status and nature of the promotion process and procedures, whilst exploring the human element which is the controlling agent. It takes a necessary bold look at human behaviour and social systems, specifically in an educational context. In the first instance, its major premise is that micropolitics is an underlying feature of promotion and leadership in the context of education. More specifically, its usefulness lies in its ability to cite and analyse instances of micropolitics and to trace its influence. The identification of these realities alerts us to the need to be more self-aware and self-critical if our professed professional and constitutional goals are to be realized. It compels us to confront the threat that micropolitics places on equality and social justice. An examination of micropolitics penetrates the façade of professionalism and rectitude, and uncovers the reality of human frailty. It highlights the irony that although social

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

systems are designed to facilitate fairness and objectivity, they are, in fact, the breeding ground for subsystems of bias, dishonesty, abuse, and unethical behaviour.

In Presbyterian secondary schools in Trinidad, there have been rumblings underground of dissatisfaction with the lack of Presbyterianism in the schools, and from teachers and even Church Officials, Board members, and past and present candidates that the promotion system in those schools is not fair.

The significance of this research lies in its dependence on the perspectives and the voices of its participants, many of whom have regarded this research effort as an opportunity to express opinions and share experiences that have profound personal and professional meaning for them. In an era where cross-cultural initiatives are being encouraged, and where developing countries are engaging in imported consultancy work, an insider's perspective can serve to counter the inappropriate adoption of "clinical" international theory, policy, or practice.

Additionally, this research provides the decision makers in the promotion context with some tools for self-appraisal and appraisal of the present system. The mere existence of this research is an opportunity to take stock, to recognize the researcher as partner in a collaborative effort, and to become agents of positive change.

The major aim of this research is to investigate the ways in which micropolitics is perceived to play a role in the promotion process in Presbyterian secondary schools in Trinidad. It seeks to afford key players the opportunity to voice their views and perceptions, and to share their experiences.

The research also aims to show that though formal procedures do exist, the power of the informal or the covert is not to be underestimated. It also seeks to demonstrate that in addition to practice, policy is also seen to be determined by micropolitics.

Most importantly, the hope is that participants' involvement in the research would stimulate their own critical reflection as a forerunner to true professional emancipation and empowerment. On one level, emancipation from a colonial mentality is essential to the attitudinal and social progress of the Trinidadian. On the other more universal level, as human beings, emancipation from the narrow and negative possibilities of self affords one the opportunity to be open to more constructive and worthwhile potentialities such as community and nation-building, achievement of ideals, assessment of and provision for human needs, and the creation and realization of systems that provide for these.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would aid understanding of the context, and would serve as a stimulus for initiating continuing

dialogue and transparency. The promotion context, hopefully, would be just one of the areas in which this approach to policy and practice would be evident.

Literature Review

In the following section, italicized sub-headings represent the categories used in the analysis of data.

Micropolitical Nature of Organizations

(Micropolitics is a reality)

The influence of the micropolitical must not blind us to the fact that organizations are in and of themselves “political” in nature. There exist political norms, that is, informal and disguised signals, which direct members’ behaviour. Especially in situations where uncertainty is rife, there is much reliance on political skill. Organizational political behaviour has been defined as social influence attempts that are discretionary (not formally prescribed or permitted), that are intended to promote or protect the self-interests of individuals and groups, and that threaten the self interests of others (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981).

While many influence attempts are consciously undertaken, and people often attribute political intent to others, such behaviour in itself is described as apolitical. The actor’s awareness is such that he approaches an encounter with an expectation of the outcome, of how he will act, and of the role the other will assume, including any resistance or encouragement. If incompatibility results, a process of negotiation follows. Participants’ ability to accommodate facilitates the continuation of the interaction. This behaviour is characterized by struggle and resolution, negotiation, process, and flux. Flux, because shared understandings are transient and must be reaffirmed or renegotiated (McLean, Simms, Mangham, & Tuffield, 1982). The bottom line is, as Porter et al. (1981) remind us, that situational ambiguity or lack of structure may provide an opportunity, but it is personal stake that may provide the incentive to engage in political behaviour.

Networks

(Lobbying and canvassing)

Organizational political behaviour has been defined as social influence attempts that are discretionary, that are intended to promote or protect the self-interests of individuals and groups, and that threaten the self-interests of others (Porter et al., 1981).

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

Perhaps it is in light of such social influence attempts that Raab (1992) pursues the necessity of taking networks seriously. Group membership and popular participation in decision making were surely elements of democracy, after all. Groups have come to play an important part in the process of administration and, as Raab has pointed out, “policy implementation is...itself a political process open to influence, games, bargaining, and representation” (p. 72). He continues: “the games of a policy network go on behind closed doors, through which only relatively few can enter...their relative covertness makes them less amenable to research. In time, however, games may become institutions, to which public legitimacy is accorded, and perhaps even some degree of transparency” (p. 74).

Manipulation

Implicit in this claim is that human beings are capable of behaviour that is consciously selected and planned, and of choosing objectives and procedures. We are conscious of our own acts and those of others so that we present ourselves in a manner intended to control the behaviour of others. As such, each individual is capable of consciously manipulating his own behaviour and that of others.

Why would we want to manipulate? Human needs have been elaborated and may range from physiological to spiritual or even ethereal (Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938). In organizational settings, the most outstanding needs have been said to be achievement and power (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; McClelland, 1965; McClelland & Burnham, 1976). Our need to attain these controls our behaviour, so that we ourselves “psyche-out” others in order to understand how to deal with them. In other words, we categorize others in order to adjust our behaviour to suit that role: “It follows that we have done unto us what we do unto others; we conduct ourselves in the knowledge that others will seek to typify us just as we seek to typify them” (Mangham, 1979, p. 109). We seek comfort in being able to predict the conduct of others, and by our personal “assessment” treat them with due approbation, emulation, circumspection, or as we see fit.

Fitting in (Grooming)

The concept of being able to predict the behaviour of others falls within the paradigm of the well-established theories of socialization and even indoctrination. Organizations engage in socialization consciously, unconsciously, and even surreptitiously. This is most blatant in the

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

recruitment process where candidates are screened not only for skills and aptitude, but for being able to “fit in.” Apart from having selected the particular organization themselves for what they perceive to be their own “fit,” the organization places high value on “falling in line.” Gradually, the recent recruit may come to adopt the “meanings” as his own (Kaufman, 1968; Perrow, 1972). Such is the impact of socialization, or even indoctrination, that not only are they *disturbed* by suggestions that change is required, but they are *astounded* because any other pattern is unimaginable (Kaufman). The “internalization” and taken-for-grantedness brought about by socialization consequently constrains the consideration of alternatives. It must be noted that the internalization discussed here refers to both formal and informal norms. The latter is the stuff of which much of the more colourful and intriguing micropolitics is made, and will be the subject of further discussion.

This notion of being a good fit is not quite as clinical and worthy as it may seem on the surface. If there is to be a good fit between the applicant and the needs of the post, then those needs must be scrutinized closely enough to include the overt and the covert. The issue of micropolitics comes back to haunt us. Wellington (1989) examined recruitment procedures in the information technology (IT) industry and the rise of networks. In two of his five case studies, recruitment policy was directed, to a large extent, by the use of personal networks or the “grapevine.” The metaphor of a “growing family” was used to describe the development of the management core of one of the cases. The use of personal networks is seen to be a cause for concern, since it may deny opportunity to those outside the network. The “fitting in” concept in selection serves to maintain the status quo and so may be found in conservative cultures and typically in small communities. “Certainly recruitment policies with such unwritten laws within them would seem to be doing little to affect existing working practices and career structures. Such policies must surely also disadvantage existing minority groups in society” (Wellington, 1989, p. 226).

The potential contribution of minorities to education has been researched by Su (1997). This study found that minority teacher candidates in the United States (US) aspired to move out of teaching into administration to be able to effect great changes in existing schools. “No chance for advancement” was cited more often by them than by “mainstream” (white Caucasian) candidates. Because of their keen awareness of inequalities suffered by the poor and minorities, they see the role of the good teacher as taking the responsibility for transforming schools and society. So that, in the first instance, the fitting in concept

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

would be an obstacle to recruiting the most committed, whether at entry level to teaching or for promotion.

Fitting in from the applicant's perspective is also worth considering. That an organization hopes to select a specific type of individual does not necessarily mean that that type is going to be attracted to the position. School districts in the US have adopted recruitment practices which involve sending an organizational representative who is demographically similar to an applicant in order to increase the applicant's attraction to the employing organization (Lin, Dobbins, & Farh, 1992, as cited in Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997). Research (Young et al, 1997) has shown that the content of recruitment messages (job advertisements) can influence the type of persons who apply. The personal warmth of the principal as organizational representative was found to influence applicants' perception of the attractiveness of the vacancy. The principal's age had no effect (Young & Heneman, 1986, cited in Young et al., 1997) and gender did not influence candidates' reactions (Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, & Thiessen, 1993). To avoid the cocooning effect that some societies encourage within organizations, diversity of personnel can only be achieved through effective "recruitment practices and informed recruitment policies" (Young et al., 1997, p. 104). Viewing diversity from a wider lens, there are broader cautionary notes to be drawn from Bartolome and Macedo (1997). They analysed issues and messages in the mass media and news events in the US and concluded that academia in the US has purposefully ignored issues of race in education. The presence of xenophobia in that society and others has major implications for recruitment practices and the perpetuation of ideology and the ideology of perpetuation.

The Promotion Interview

(Abuse of promotion interview)

Discussion leader and chairman

Whereas the members of a group contribute to its overall operation, the pertinence of the discussion leader and a chairman has been outlined by Klein (1963) who, in presenting conditions by which ideas can be changed, asserts that a good chairman is the greatest single asset that a committee can possess. The chairman's main function is that of facilitator. He/she discourages irrelevancies, allows time for thought and consideration, circulates memoranda beforehand, skilfully invites contributions without interrupting discussion, and keeps order. Maier (1952) suggests several useful instructions for an expert who must work with an unskilled group (Klein, pp. 123–124). Yet, as Klein further

indicates, committees do not necessarily have to be handicapped by a chairman who is weak or otherwise ineffective; nor should they use him/her as a scapegoat for their own weaknesses. It is possible for a committee member to perform this role informally instead of allowing the procedure to break down. In this way, valid and useful contributions from diffident or low-status members would be encouraged.

An important point Klein (1963) makes about group procedure has to do with the process of steering a proposal through a committee. The suggestion made is that the matter should be first introduced under “any other business” and then discussed with the chairman and secretary for placing it on the agenda for the next meeting. This discussion should be of a factual nature, bearing in mind that sound ethics and considerations of courtesy dictate that these are not occasions for canvassing support or for persuasion (Klein, pp. 128–129). It becomes obvious that following procedure, technically and ethically, leaves little room for the negative fallout of micropolitics that is not constructive.

The interviewer

The importance of the interviewer in the selection process cannot be overstated. Training may be the compromise in the effort to control the possible subjectivity of an interview situation. Apart from the interplay of information in an interview, there is also the “sword dance” of impression management (Baron, 1986; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Goffman, 1971; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wood & Mitchell, 1981). More recent research has found that impression management tactics, especially self-promotion and ingratiation behaviour, run the risk of creating undesirable impressions on interviewers (Crant, 1996). Applicants are better advised to use self-focused tactics (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999). Yet, it is possible that personal factors play a role in determining the effectiveness of the use of impression management tactics (Kacmar & Carlson), one example being the perceived similarity between interviewer and interviewee (Wayne & Liden, 1995). In a related study, it was confirmed that interviewer and, to a lesser extent, applicant characteristics may both have a role to play in the use of impression management tactics by applicants. For example, applicants used entitlements more with less apprehensive interviewers or, as the researchers point out, interviewers who were perhaps perceived as less apprehensive. Older, more experienced, and longer tenured interviewers seem to have discouraged the use of entitlements and encouraged the use of enhancements and self-promotion. Issues that arise out of such findings are interview validity and the value of structured interviews and, again, interviewer training (Delery & Kacmar, 1998).

Bureaucracy and Efficiency

(Formal mechanisms)

Within society, various interpretations of control and order exist. Weber's (1947) theory of bureaucracy has influenced much of the thinking in this field. Theorists writing in this tradition assume that organizations have a clear-cut division of labour with high degrees of specialization and expertness. When the authority structure is hierarchical and official, official decisions are governed by a system of rules and regulations to ensure uniformity, continuity, and stability. Eventually, bureaucracy is seen to be efficient and rational. Thus, personal considerations are disregarded; technical qualifications are emphasized; persons are appointed and not elected to positions; and advancements are determined by seniority or achievement, or both. Political, family, or other connections have no role in this "bureaucracy." The clinical elements of the organization's objectives and sub-goals are of primary importance.

Blau and Scott (1969) comment, however, that what is missing from this view are the inherent dysfunctions of the system, which manifest themselves in the form of conflict. They also indicate that Weber (1947) ignores the informal relations and unofficial patterns that are bound to develop in formal organizations.

As if in extreme polarity with an organizational structure that prioritizes control and order, a "loosely-coupled" educational organization is structured according to "ritual classifications" of curriculum, teachers and students (Meyer & Rowan, 1988). These classifications become social norms and, more often than not, are not subject to close inspection or are not required to be accountable. According to Meyer and Rowan, the work of the educational organization, that is, the instructional activities, are quite casually coordinated. One is left to surmise, then, that the crucial linkages with educational organizations are so loosely-coupled that there is room for displaced and/or incompatible goals and visions which may be coexisting in disharmony.

The issue here is whether "loose-coupling" facilitates disharmony and, consequentially, conflict, and whether conflict is actually an "unnecessary evil" which allows for flexibility. The flexibility inherent in schools as organizations gives rise to the assumption of good faith—the "logic of confidence," whereby "parties bring to each other the taken-for-granted, good-faith assumption that the other, is, in fact, carrying out his or her defined activity...the plausibility of their activity requires that they have confidence in each other" (Meyer & Rowan, 1988, p. 105).

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

According to these theorists, not only does the success of the organization depend on the accounts they give, but the “actors” within must also take into account the *appearance* of what they are doing.

Control of Information

(Lack of communication)

The malfunctioning of communication flows in organizations will have negative repercussions for efficiency and effectiveness. Such malfunctioning may be related to the transmitter, the timing, or the nature of the communication (oral or written) (Guetzkow, 1965). The “networks” involved in communication in organizations are prone to difficulties that hamper proper functioning. Legitimacy with respect to the issuance of directives and commands is an issue that creates conflict in organizations. Inaccuracy, misinterpretation, and inappropriate communication channels are some of the problems to be encountered. There is also the view that experts prefer to avoid authoritative channels in order to “get on with their work” (Dalton, 1950). Friendship and status are also components of the network of communication channels in organizations and impact upon the flow and the nature of messages.

The effective transmission of messages is linked to both the origination of communication and the reception of the message. If both points are widely varied, the variation of interpretations will be greater (March & Simon, 1958). The importance of non-verbal communication cannot be understated, and has been explored by a large number of researchers, including Knapp and Hall (1997) and Feldman and Rime (1991).

There are times when the contents of messages may be transformed, either through omission—due to various factors such as saturation or overload (Roby & Lanzetta, 1957; Shaw, 1955)—or intentionally. Distortion also occurs at various levels and for different reasons (Allport & Postman, 1947; 1954; Allyn & Festinger, 1961; Campbell, 1958; Cohen, 1958; Read, 1962).

It can be said that such “malfunctioning” may not always be dysfunctional, in that ambiguity facilitates interpretation that has more meaning or significance to participants in the organization. No doubt, ambiguity may also result in ignorance, but the value of ignorance as a component of communication has not been greatly explored in communication systems apart from initial work by Moore and Tumin (1949). To avoid omissions and inaccuracy in message contents (Baker, Ballantine, & True, 1949; Macy, Christie, & Luce, 1953; Willis & Hale, 1963), repetition via variation in form and channel, and verification

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

through feedback are used. But “not only do the very devices invented to alleviate communication difficulties tend to produce new sources of communication trouble, but even success in the surmounting of such difficulties itself produces new blockages in the already existing structures in organisations” (Guetzkow, 1965, p. 561).

Honesty/Dishonesty

(Dishonesty, negotiation, game-playing)

Where important decisions are made governing people’s careers, and where impressions, perceptions, attitudes, and personal preferences are expected contributory factors to such decision making, the notion of truthfulness or honesty must figure in the collage of behaviour. Backbier, Hoogstraten, and Terwogt-Kouwenhoven (1997) conducted a study of situational determinants of the acceptability of telling lies. Lying is introduced as a “functional communication strategy,” in that a lie is a message from a sender designed to influence a receiver in a certain way (Buller & Burgoon, 1994, as cited by Backbier et al.). A lie is being regarded not as an end, but as a means to achieve a certain goal (Miller & Stiff, 1993, as cited by Backbier et al.). Interviews were conducted with 180 women between the ages of 30 and 40 (age and gender differences were avoided as distracters). Motive, situation, and relation (the other person) were found to be influential to the judgement of lies. There was a strong relation with the role of the motive of the liar and the relative importance of the situation. Motives for lying were seen either as social—where the person who is lied to has the greatest interest in lying—or as individualistic and egoistic—where the person who is lying has the greatest interest in lying. Lying may be seen as more acceptable for social motives and lesser so for individualistic and egoistic motives. In the context of promotion, decision makers and candidates have at their disposal yet another weapon, or another instrument for realizing their goal.

Quite a number of researchers have focused on issues in assessment and recruitment, but not many have included the voices and input of the full cast of players in the promotion scene. Research done so far shows clearly a need for bold entry into research that can marry elements of selection, promotion, and micropolitics, and Church as an organization, all in the context of schools. As such, this research sought to identify the micropolitical elements present in the promotion exercise in a denominational secondary school. It is an opportunity to investigate the claim made by Ball (1987):

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

The promotion process appears closed, secretive and biased. The criteria for promotion are regarded as unfair or politically distorted; they are open to interpretation. Promotions are regarded, rightly or wrongly, as political acts. (p. 172)

Micropolitics...is multifaceted, indexical and obscure. It intervenes when least expected, it underpins the fleeting encounter, the innocent-sounding memo, the offhand comment.... The hint, the guarded reference, the euphemism are the lexicon of politics. It is the stuff of mutual understanding and misunderstanding, of later denial, of informed sources and second-hand accounts. (p. 245)

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research is guided by the need to understand how subjectivities are produced and the influence of historicity on social organization and behaviour. The qualitative approach to this research will enable the research itself to make “the comfortable strange and disconcerting” (Dippo, 1994, p. 203). It will also provide the opportunity for the researched, including researcher, to engage in self-criticism and self-reaction through introspection. It is the vehicle through which the researcher will attempt to “peel back the leaves of understanding” (L. Barton, personal communication, 1999) and to “unsettle questions, texts...to challenge what is, incite what could be, and imagine a world that is not yet imagined” (Fine, 1994, p. 30). It is also influenced by the postmodernist stance that multiple voices do coexist, thus suggesting varying interpretations of reality.

This researcher finds that the qualitative approach allows for the understanding of circumstances and conditions which are central elements of the particular research context (Rubin & Rubin 1995). Understanding, however, though it comes with the “baggage” of bias and subjectivity, can still be achieved through enquiry that is consistent, transparent, and reflexive. The reflexivity and transparency of the research also commit the researcher to the limitations inherent in the situational reality of the research. One example of this is the limited capacity of the emancipatory paradigm to have an encompassing role within this research context, which is limited.

To a large extent, data collection is largely dependent upon the telling of “stories” and, as such, the role of language in the construction of worlds (Usher, 1997) must be considered. The choice of data collection methods and data analysis methods is also influenced by the significance

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

of language as powerful and political. Reflexivity guides the essential peripherals of the research, such as journal entries, memos, and notes, which shape the “progressive focusing,” as delineated by Arksey and Knight (1999). The unfolding of this research can certainly be seen as progressive focusing, since fieldwork directs and redirects foci.

This researcher is both insider and outsider. This may have had some effect on data collection, but I have sensed that both could have been an advantage. “Insiderness” has certainly helped with access and a positive attitude by some to the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Pilot interviews informed the interviewing of 44 persons, including a key informant, Board/Church personnel, present principals, present vice-principals, past principals, past vice-principals, present candidates, past candidates, teachers, and Ministry of Education/Teaching Service Commission (TSC) officials. The interviews were semi-structured and varied slightly for each category of respondent, to suit their position and experiences. Questions focused on participants’ knowledge, experience, opinions, and interpretations of the promotion process and related elements within the context. All interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed. Respondents verified their transcripts.

One of the significant features of this research is the importance attached to comments made by individuals as opposed to a focus on the frequency of occurrences. This is due to the reality that each interviewee represents his or her distinct experience of the relevant context. Individuals are also highlighted because of the nature of micropolitics, where one voice potentially has much significance.

Data were coded and categorized under broad headings initially and eventually re-coded to create new subcategories. Care had to be taken not to lose the human element of the research. As such, much of the actual words of respondents have been used in the data presentation and analysis.

Findings are presented according to the subcategories of the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Micropolitics is a Reality

Comments of influential persons and candidates specifically state that there is a political element in promotion or promotion-related activity, including Church involvement. On varying occasions, individual Church Officials commented on “*the stress of Church politics*,” with one adding

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

that “*in the Presbyterian community you have a little more bacchanal than in a typical small society.*” With regard to one promotion scenario one principal admitted that a “*lot of politics were involved,*” while a past vice-principal “*wasn’t aware of the potential and actual tensions involved.*” A candidate for promotion “*was unaware [then] of the undercurrents...the corruption*” and concluded that “*reality...depends a lot on politics*” and recalls that “*the vice-principalship of [School Name] was a very sort of messy situation re the build up.*” A Church Official recalls “*confusion... for [School name]*” and “*sweated.*”

With regard to the actual selection process, one candidate explained that “*educated people don’t want to put themselves on the Board...don’t like the politics of the organization. The politics of the Presbyterian Church is the downfall in terms of the selection process,*” while a teacher declared that “*so much depends on the character of those engaged in the selection process. It matters little what system is in place if the system is accompanied by those more concerned with politics and not principles.*”

Actual Strategies Evident in the System

Lobbying/canvassing

All statements in this category contained variations of terms such as *lobbying, canvassing, campaigning, influence peddling, arranged, their own candidate, press for.*

A past principal revealed that “*all kinds of canvassing of a very devious nature take place*” and that in one scenario “*...they politicised the whole business of appointing people...just like how politicians want to ... indulge in patronage...they become the agents of either organized prejudice or good decisions....*” Even Church Officials seemed to be aware that “*people do lobby for candidates*” and that “*some principals have their own candidates*” so that “*they will sit down night and day and will use telephone, just to keep you out.*” Corroborating such views, an influential person comments that “*very often, when recommendations come to Synodical Council, a lot of politicking goes on, canvassing goes on behind the scenes....*” Two teachers from Presbyterian secondary schools respectively are of the view that “*the system is not fair (and) candidates’ friends and family lobby for them and generally the best person is not given the job but the one with the most connections,*” and that “*it is unfortunate that there seems to be too much lobbying for candidates rather than who really qualifies for promotion.*” While a Ministry Official guesses that “*there is a lot of campaigning and so on,*” a past vice-principal puts forward the view that “*the objectivity of the TSC perhaps balances the lobbying and biases of the Board.*”

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

Manipulation

Manipulation comes in many forms. Potential candidates become “active strategists” (Lyons, 1981) and become visible in Church or become involved in school management. One non-Presbyterian candidate, it is reported, was baptized in the Presbyterian Church three years prior to being appointed as principal. According to one candidate “...*people who never attended Church get themselves nominated to serve on Boards, preach and then finish with that,*” and another reports on one version of one such scenario by saying that “[regularity of Church attendance] was a blatant lie...*Because soon after he received the promotion he has discontinued his interest in the group.... His attendance to Church has fallen.*” Verifying this type of occurrence, a Minister is of the view that “...*the link with Church will always be a problem. They have people sometimes who know how to play the game, they come and they get involved with the Church and they make sure that people who have to make the recommendation see them...and as soon as they get their promotion they back off.*”

Grooming

Grooming by a principal is one of the more common forms of manipulation. If a principal grooms a candidate, the general expectation is that that individual would be recommended.

One candidate recalls that “...the Principal had the teacher sign documents for him as Principal designate.... I took these documents.... I said well, what is this? Is this an official post? Principal designate? It means that everything is being railroaded.” A past principal recounted seeing a specific teacher “with that kind of potential, and I started giving him extra responsibilities. Made him a Dean, Head of _____ Department.... My view was not just getting the work done, but training for successors.”

Teachers, too, have perceived the grooming practice to be the cause of potential conflict, but many have also described the conflict that can arise from appointing outsiders. In this case, the micropolitical strategy may be represented in the resistance of opposing staff. Words suggesting staff’s strategy are *tension, clash, friction, not be welcomed, resentment, unacceptance, hostility, reception is cold, alien, like a bull in a china shop, misfit*. So, the power to strategize is also held by the “minor” players—the teachers.

Many candidates also speak of other people in the system who encouraged them to apply for administrative positions. These efforts to manipulate a situation may stem from a fear of the unfamiliar and a need

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

to know that the status quo will be maintained. Principals who have spent years labouring at an institution seem to think it is their duty to “pass the baton” on to someone who has an appreciation of their own efforts. They therefore find difficulty considering “outsiderness” and the potential “undoing” of all that they have managed to build and maintain as one of their life’s major accomplishments. Notwithstanding that manipulation breeds inevitable lack of justice, the human need for perpetuation and stability is the pertinent factor here. From the perspective of an inside observer, the manipulation that is evident in the promotion process is akin to nepotism in organizations. Schools see themselves not just as individual communities, but as families.

Abuse of the promotion interview

Candidates report sensing unfair biases with reference to their Church attendance, with one reporting being “*badgered with questions about this log book*” ...and having “*the distinct feeling that this [person] already knew who was going to be recommended.*” Tone and approach were found to be inappropriate as a candidate wondered if he was “*at a scolding session...at a blaming session*” and described the interview as “*disappointment,*” “*agony,*” “*an inquisition,*” dealing with “*frivolous matters,*” “*niggling things that had nothing really to do with my Presbyterianism—if you want to call it that.*” The candidate was left with the impression that “*obviously they knew I did not go to Church so they harped on that fact,*” and that behaviour at a particular interview was inappropriate as “*half the people (interviewers) eating while half the people asking the questions.*” Even at the TSC level, there was the perception that the Commission had already decided “*...it was not going to overrule the recommended candidate. It was going through the motions of giving me the satisfaction that I was being heard.*” By conducting unsatisfactory interviews, the Board is not fulfilling its role and shows contempt by making its biases blatant. Abuse of the interviewing process serves to undermine the morale of potentially well-intentioned and capable candidates.

Formal mechanisms and ad hoc practices

Ad hoc practices serve to perpetuate not only the inefficiencies of the system, but also the negative perceptions held by participants and observers, in addition to the culture of micropolitics. Several accounts reveal incorrect and inconsistent procedures while some are indications as to how these are perpetuated. Misinformation was seen to be one of the causes of dissatisfaction in the area of promotion. In the past, much bitterness ensued due to a lack of direction about acting administrative

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

positions in denominational schools, because the correct procedure had not been constantly adhered to on some occasions.

One principal reports that “the Secondary Schools’ Boards... usually ask the Principal, off the record, for a recommendation as to who...would be the most suitable...” Principals are faced with a challenge involving ethics and strength of character when the Board asks them for their unofficial recommendation for administrative positions in their schools.

An influential person explained that there are times when some persons on the Synodical Council are not au courant with correct procedures for promotion. Arms of the Presbyterian organization are responsible for the perpetuation of this adhocery in procedure. To reiterate the words of the *Church Guide*, “democracy irresponsibly practised can lead to anarchy and confusion” (p. 48).

Formal mechanisms constitute the façade which facilitates further micropolitical tactics. *The Church Report* is one mechanism which generates much apparent dissatisfaction among candidates for promotion. There is the perception that “regularity of attendance” at Church is interpreted in varying ways and that, according to one Minister, even “*Official Boards have so blatantly lied about the person’s involvement and activities.*” Due to deliberately inaccurate Church Reports “*a committee has now been formed to look into ways of ensuring valid Church Reports,*” according to the then Chairman of the Presbyterian Secondary Schools’ Board of Education. It is also possible that the Board’s decisions can be overruled by the Synod, which votes without having interviewed the candidates.

Teachers may choose to *challenge the system* by exercising their rights. One candidate reports about another saying that “even though the person may not have been genuinely interested in this case, she became interested because she realized that this was something to be challenged.” Union activists also utilize this right to challenge according to one vice-principal.

Becoming members on Boards and Committees is another contentious issue. In this case, a Church Official refers to the Administrative Committee of a particular school as one influential person reportedly desirous of “interfering” “*made sure...got on that Board [meaning Administrative Committee]...wanted to become Chairman...didn’t make Chairman...and now...has been trying to interfere with the school.*”

The Church’s Constitution, according to a Church Official, also has a role to play in control as “the Constitution was drafted in order to

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

eliminate some people from the Church hierarchy...in terms of the whole administration...to restrict some people who are vocal.”

Non-action, in terms of implementing a formal mechanism, has resulted in frustrating candidates as “the Board is not doing anything. The Ministry is not doing anything and I am there hanging.”

A lack of clear procedures, the Staff Report, and the Synod’s ability to overrule the Board’s decisions are other formal mechanisms that enable the micropolitical activity on the promotion arena.

Lack of communication

Candidates claimed ignorance about the criteria used for selection by the Board. One candidate felt that “*if it is based on factors that are not known, then...it is not what we call a level playing field,*” and another pointed out that “*if some people on the inside track know these things because somebody on the Board knows them and they mention it to them, well then they have a definite advantage.*”

With regard to feedback from the Selection Interview, candidates complained that they “*heard...through the grapevine...there is no feedback mechanism.*” They had “*no way of knowing unless somebody came behind their back and told me.*” When feedback is not formal, silence breeds speculation. The Board’s justification may be that the TSC makes the final decision and that final feedback is their responsibility. The silence of the Board, however, places the candidate in a position of disadvantage. There is no formal channel for protest or query. The probing candidate is made to suffer the indignity of what is perceived by some to be soliciting information illegitimately.

Dishonesty/negotiation/game-playing

The conditioned or contrived social behaviour of man allows him to accommodate to suit his needs. One influential person devised tactics to “beat the system,” using someone else to voice his opinions. Even the interviewee is not without power, admitting to using his listening and interpretive skills to succeed in the interview: “*Depending on what you tell me, I can see way down the road where I feel you’re going and I manipulate it. So if I feel you want to hear certain things...But I did that in the Commission interview.*”

Another candidate claimed that although he had submitted an application for a position, “*the Principal and the Administrative Committee had not forwarded my application at all to the Secondary Schools’ Board...*” Eventually, a formal protest was lodged and this candidate was eventually appointed. So that according to this account, a deliberate attempt was made to sabotage this individual’s chances. An

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

ex-Board member and ex-principal recounted his own cheating at an interview, indicating that he changed marks on the score sheet to favour his preferred candidate.

Conclusions

This research has demonstrated how micropolitics is manifested in the given context. It demonstrates how inefficiencies may occur in the promotion setting, thus providing a cautionary knowledge base to enable a change in systems that may not be functioning in the best interest of a community.

The notion of change itself cannot be divorced from micropolitics. Change is a political process. It occurs when there is a conflict of values, and we bear in mind that conflicts which may have been submerged, surface with change (Ball, 1987). In order to institute change, the inevitable micropolitical elements must be utilized in order to improve the ideas and values inherent in the desired change. Power, influence, and control have a role to play. The major point of focus in this discussion is that the motives for change and the means must be based on informed judgement, with educational goals in mind. Purpose must be apolitical.

If there is the will, there seems to be room for growth with regard to the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education. Teachers are now in the era of performance management appraisals and have little tolerance for the informality and injustice perpetrated by micropolitical actors who shield their lack of knowledge and professionalism behind their armour of power and authority. Inappropriate influence and nefarious micropolitical activity can be curtailed when procedures ensure effective decision making in an effort to realize the chosen mission and vision of all stakeholders.

One of the main areas necessitating change is the method of assessment. Procedure must be linked to specified goals and must be precise. Although principals are at liberty to attach a letter of recommendation to the candidate's application, this is not a requirement. Since the Board's recommendation is considered to be significant, it would be useful if the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education were to design its own new assessment form, soliciting useful, specific information and evidence from all candidates' immediate superiors, including Heads of Departments, and even from principals who have recently retired or resigned. This form should also be signed by the candidate. Portfolios are also useful as documentation of

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

candidates' professional track record. Submission of these should be a requirement.

These suggestions also have relevance to the TSC and their form of assessment. Assessment must seem to be fair. At least candidates ought not to be subjected to the deliberate tone and air of power assumed by some members of the TSC, according to reports by some candidates. Teaching Service Commissioners must be conscientious in their efforts to execute the nation's ideals in education. Their Mark Sheet must also include descriptors for each category so that the sum of each individual's general impression would not be the determinant of who becomes an administrator of a school.

Accountability must be seen as a necessary ingredient of democracy. All agents of authorized influence in the promotion process must be accountable. Marks, statements, and decisions must be rationalized. If micropolitical strategies dominate decision making, as the data have shown, accountability is surely an appropriate goal at this point. In order for the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education to become more accountable, the culture of the Presbyterian Church must undergo metamorphosis. If it is to take its stewardship seriously, then it needs to overhaul its management attitudes and procedures.

Such an overhaul would underline the need for capability to be evident in the selection process. In this research context, interviewing as an assessment technique, and recruitment or selection procedures in this research context have not been regarded as areas that require specific technical or professional expertise. Instead, it is assumed that ex-principals, present principals, sometimes businessmen, and the average individual are equipped to conduct an interview for promotion. Perhaps there is need for an alternatively composed interviewing panel, which includes qualified interviewers who are removed from the promotion context—persons who have no close affiliation to the candidates or who has no affiliation to the Church or to the school in question. Persons experienced in education will advise interviewers as to discrete criteria, and will supply information to interviewers beforehand, will be present at the interview, but only as observers. The marking criteria and descriptors will be elaborated by the “qualified interviewers.” Though this may be in collaboration with past and present principals, the intention is that the qualified interviewers are familiar with desirable educational practice and policies, as well as with the needs of the particular context for which they are selecting. The Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education should also avail itself of the services of “experts” in additional assessment techniques, which may

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

include observation on the job or situational analysis, either orally or written.

A brave, bold, and visionary step for the Church would be to organize administrative training for teachers who may be interested in promotion in Presbyterian schools in the future. This can be executed with input from present and past principals, and trained personnel in educational administration. This suggestion is being made since so many interviewers and teachers consider a good fit and insidership to be important criteria. The Church and the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education can then structure its own "grooming" for anyone who is interested.

Church Reports also need to be valid. It is being suggested here that all members of the Official Board and the Minister of the candidate's region sign the report, instead of only the Secretary of the Official Board and the Minister, as occurs at the present time. Failure to sign must be accompanied by an explanation. This is in an effort to eradicate the likelihood of influence tactics and of the abuse of the system by candidates who become "practising Presbyterians" overnight. The capability of Ministers to administer their Official Boards also comes into question. All members of the Official Board of the individual churches would then be held accountable and not be in a position to "pass the buck." With capability and competence as major goals at every level of the Church's involvement in education, accountability will not be elusive. Instead, it would be understood. Accountability facilitates transparency. Both may even be seen to be synonymous.

Communication needs to be open and reciprocal so that teachers and selectors understand the concerns of each other. The first step in this transparency effort would be to make available to teachers the criteria for assessment, and, secondly, to create opportunities for teachers to express their views and for misconceptions to be clarified. The human tendency to speculate, to question, and to arrive at alternative conclusions makes the diminution of micropolitical activity somewhat of a challenge. Teachers' and candidates' views and attitudes are sometimes shaped by misinformation, misconception, and mystique. They need to be formally appraised of procedures both at the Board level and at the level of the TSC. It would be useful for both entities to institute mechanisms whereby they cease to be as nebulous as they have been up to this time.

For too long, the relationship between decision makers and teachers has either been distant or non-existent. It would be no exaggeration to say that decision makers, that is, the Board and the TSC, have had what appears to be insufficient respect for teachers as professionals when it comes to promotion. The lack of attention to detail, lack of feedback, and

Educational Administration as a Micropolitical Exercise

scant regard for professionalism in assessment are indications of the lack of esteem in which teachers are held by these authorities.

It is the social interaction of the parties involved that will determine the success or failure of innovation. What are required are attitudes that can accommodate all stages of the innovation. While there will be no escape from the politics of power, advocacy, and influence, we accept that all negotiation is political, but are comforted that the intentions would be healthy.

Education for democracy and empowerment cannot be achieved without attitudes that can accommodate it. Current attitudes to decision making, as at the level of promotion, are at the crossroads. Those accustomed to being in positions of authority may want to re-evaluate their original positions on many issues. They may seek compromise, and in the process may realize a system that is forward-thinking, enhanced, and user-friendly.

If the Church is to continue to have a say in the administration of its schools, it cannot afford to bask in the past accomplishments of standards set when there was not much competition, but must harness its many resources to set new standards other than academic.

The Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education has shown some signs of self-evaluation in that some major changes have been made along the way with regard to the Church Report, the Mark Sheet, and the handling of formal protests. The TSC has made attempts to promote transparency in its own procedures through face-to-face communication with school boards. This is certainly the beginning of the way forward.

The literature has shown how the needs of the individual are so much a reality that organizations need to consider those needs in their planning and management. Man's tendency to manoeuvre towards exploitation and success, towards individual actualization as opposed to organizational good, and towards power acquisition inevitably leads him to engage in micropolitical behaviour as he attempts to accommodate to new needs. In its aim to find out how micropolitics is manifested in the promotion context, the data have shown many instances of micropolitical strategies within the promotion context. Instances of micropolitical activity as described in this research support the theory that political behaviour is propelled more by personal stake than by situational activity (Porter et al., 1981), and that individuals' activity within organizations is inherently political (Mangham, 1979). But the theory being proposed as a consequence of this study is that micropolitical activity is also a cultural phenomenon. Micropolitics is endemic to small societies, not just to organizations. The administration of Presbyterian secondary schools falls

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

under the umbrella of a society—a social circle—which functions as the wider organization. Consequently, favours are usually sought, bargains are struck.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would, in the first instance, give others the courage to engage in research in areas that were before considered to be out-of-bounds. Secondly, this work could easily be complemented by related efforts by insiders who wish to initiate development by constructive critique.

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**WHEN CHOOSING MIGHT MEAN LOSING:
A Mixed Method Study of Secondary School Choice in the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

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This article argues that Trinidad and Tobago has historically operated a system of open enrolment. Open access to schools by families may be rooted in the conflict between Church and State over schooling. The system is founded on the principle of the right of parents to choose schools for their children, first argued in the 18th century by the Church, and now included as a provision in the Trinidad and Tobago Republican Constitution. Choice of secondary school is operationalized by a system of rules for placement at eleven-plus. Parents are required to list their choice of schools and depending upon the candidates' score in the eleven-plus examination, test takers receive one of these choices or are assigned to a school by the Ministry of Education. To study the system of secondary school choice in Trinidad and Tobago, information was gathered from the registration database of 11 eleven-plus examinations spanning the period 1995–2005. Student choices were analysed along with the demographic and geographic data. In the mixed method research design, data on the construction of choice were also collected from focus group and individual laddering interviews with both parents and children at four school sites. The integrated findings suggest that the choice-making process is complex, fluid, and dynamic, with multiple markets and different consumer types. Families made decisions in which children and even outsiders had considerable voice. Making choices involved a dual process of valorization and demonization of schools, but a tendency to reject some schools was predominant in many instances. The value placed on first choice “prestige” schools may be related to the consumer values of future academic success, safety of person, and assurance of stable personal development.

Introduction

Internationally, parental choice of schools has become one of the more important education reform strategies designed to improve quality and foster excellence and diversity in schooling (Weiss, 1998). The

worldwide move towards open enrolment systems is part of a larger series of economic, social, and political changes that have occurred over the past three decades (Whitty & Edwards, 1998). These so-called “market reforms in education” include innovations such as school autonomy, per capita funding, increased accountability, pupil selection and parental choice of school (Ladd, 2002; Sepänen, 2003). Although, in reality, choice mechanisms are complex and varied with sometimes contradictory outcomes, in theory, the introduction of choice into a public school system can provide greater opportunities for disadvantaged families to select and receive the best type of schooling (Bomotti, 1998). On the one hand, parents might choose to send their children to high-quality or specialized schools within a diversified market, thereby maximizing the child’s education experience (Archbald, 2004). On the other hand, schools operating within a free market environment can attract clients who truly value the particular school product.

Greater parental choice of school within an education system can force institutions to interact with stakeholders and adopt market-oriented practices in planning improvement. Of course, such a benefit-laden scenario might be simplistic and, in reality, there are often many weaknesses and imperfections associated with the operation of choice systems (Andersen, 2008). Such flaws and distortions often lead to unintended consequences, such as greater inequity and school stratification, ethnic segregation, and this might be coupled with limited choice-making capacity for some families (Burgess, McConnell, Propper, & Wilson, 2004; Burgess, Propper, & Wilson, 2007; Saporito, 2003; Walberg, 2007; Wells, 1991). Differences in outcomes, philosophy, and values have fuelled an intense debate on the morality and efficiency of this and other market reforms (Lazaridou & Fris, 2005). Indeed, at the outset, the issues have been strongly politicized, with different stakeholders positioning themselves on different sides of the fence (Jeynes, 2000). In the United States (US), some educationists consider the school choice campaign to be nothing more than a social movement led by activists, politicians, and public personalities (Powers & Cookson, 1999). However, there is also growing evidence that some choice systems do lead to higher achievement for school systems and students (Betts & Loveless, 2005). For others, the logic and rhetoric associated with choice is very compelling (Brighthouse, 2002).

School choice systems have been implemented or have developed in many different parts of the world, both in developed and developing countries (Forsey, Davies, & Walford, 2008; Salisbury & Tooley, 2005). Notable examples of open enrolment systems within the developed world are found in the US, Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, and the United

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

Kingdom (UK); and in the developing world, Chile, South Africa, and Argentina are notable (Maile, 2004). Each of these systems may be regarded as relatively unique with different sets of rules and structures governing the conduct of the choice mechanism, as seen in the case of school vouchers in the US, Chile, and Argentina (Carnoy, 1997; Narodowski & Nores, 2002). In reality, then, no one country has a monopoly on choice policy, and countries are striving to learn from each other by noting the weaknesses and challenges in implementing different sets of rules nationally or regionally.

In the US, there are a variety of choice programmes currently operating in different states, varying by target (demand or supply) and degree of choice (restricted to no restrictions). For example, some programmes may allow open enrolment within a district (intra-district choice) while other programmes allow choice across districts (inter-district choice options). Vouchers and tax credit are choice mechanisms that allow students to select either a public or private institution. Charter and magnet school programmes provide both school autonomy and flexibility, targeting specific students in the education market. Home schooling might also be considered another product in the choice scheme. As of 1997, 18 states had state-wide public school choice, 11 states had public school choice within districts, and 22 states had programmes that allowed students to access private schooling using state funds (McCabe & Vinzant, 1999). Since that time, the charter school movement has grown tremendously and now some 40 states include this particular choice programme (Center for Educational Reform, 2009).

In the UK, the national system of choice was developed as part of the education reform agenda of the 1988 Education Reform Act (Carl, 1994). This act created a system of open enrolment based on parental preference. The multiple innovations introduced in this reform package included (a) local management of schools, (b) pupil-led funding, (c) the abolition of school catchment areas, (d) parental choice, (e) specialist schools, and (f) more accessible “consumer” information (Giamouridis, 2003). In theory, parents could select any school available and schools could only reject applicants if they were physically full. The 1998 Education Act also created Grant-maintained schools, which were freed from bureaucratic control by Local Education Authorities and could therefore respond innovatively to parental demands (Bradley, 1996).

School choice systems have existed for some time in the developing world. For example, Chile has operated a national school choice based on vouchers since 1982. The voucher is a per capita subsidy, which promotes competition between the different types of schools in order to attract and retain students financed from the fiscal budget (Sapelli, 2005).

Jerome De Lisle et al.

Unlike the limited use of vouchers in the US system, where the system functions in just 12 states, Chile operates a nation-wide system that funds education in both public and private schools, the latter including both religious or non-religious institutions (Moe, 2008). Another Latin American choice system is found in Argentina, where the market for school places has developed because of the state's supply focused policies in the 1990s, and is aligned to partial or complete funding of teachers in some private schools (Narodowski, 2002). This system may be described as a quasi-monopoly rather than a quasi-market scheme (Narodowski & Andrada, 2001). Although the quality of public schools has improved, the private sector, which also offers valued bilingual education, continues to increase its market share (Potter & Hayden, 2004). Some developed countries have also recently introduced expanded school choice systems, notably South Africa after the apartheid era (Maile, 2004).

The Choice System in Trinidad and Tobago

Choice without Explicit Design

Moe (2002, 2008) has argued that whether or not there are negative or positive outcomes associated with open enrolment depends primarily upon the structure and “rules” of the choice system. He noted that:

The simple way to think of it is that school choice always operates within a structure—a framework of rules—which in turn has a lot to do with the kinds of outcomes choice will ultimately generate. In some structures, choice will lead to equity problems. In others, it will not. In still others, it will tilt the playing field in favor of the disadvantaged and aggressively promote the cause of social equity. (2002, p. 180)

Therefore, to evaluate the open enrolment system in Trinidad and Tobago, it is first necessary to explicate the system of rules and procedures that operates. In theory, a parent in Trinidad and Tobago can choose any public primary school regardless of its location and, indeed, many parents living in suburban areas have chosen primary schools located in the urban work centres. There is, however, a rarely enacted policy which gives priority of entry to students living within a three-mile radius of the school. In the case of the secondary school, families are limited to their listing of four choices provided at the sitting of the eleven-plus. For the secondary school, there is no formal restriction for choices based on location of the school. The ability of secondary schools to select students, however, is closely regulated, with only

denominational schools having some freedom to select up to 20% of their intake. Even in this instance, however, the student must have a benchmark score that is above that of the district mean (Jules, 1994; London, 1989).

For secondary school choice, the primary mechanism operates at the transition between primary and secondary school and is an integral part of eleven-plus selection and placement. This system was installed in 1961 and placement in a particular school is based on performance on the high-stakes examination, which is administered to all students on exiting primary school. Prior to taking the examination, students are required to list their choice of secondary school and placement decisions are made primarily based on students' scores in the examination. Students with the highest scores are virtually assured of receiving their top listed choice. This mechanism of choice, selection, and placement at this level was first established in an attempt to provide a more standardized system of access to secondary schools, which were a scarce resource (M. H. Alleyne, 1995). The choice dimension of the system remains the same up to the current period, although the design and number of choices may have changed over time. For the period 2001–2006, the number of choices was increased to six. Since the system is primarily examination based, students are competing to earn their choice of school. In reality, significant numbers of students are assigned to a school outside their choice because the more popular schools have limited capacity.

A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Evolution of Choice in Trinidad and Tobago

To gain additional insight into the current operation of the rules, a historical analysis of the evolution of the current system is useful. This reveals the past issues and tensions that led to the development of the system. In this regard, the development of an open enrolment system in Trinidad and Tobago may parallel that of the Netherlands, where the choice system was created early as a consequence of accommodations between state and denominational schools along with private fee-paying schools (Ritzen, Van Dommelen, & De Vijlder, 1997). In Trinidad and Tobago, the state has traditionally funded schooling in both government and denominational schools, with both considered essentially part of the public school sector according to the 1966 Education Act. While the intention might not have been to explicitly create a competitive education market, an open enrolment system has evolved, which now allows a significant degree of parental choice for individual families in both the primary and secondary school sectors.

Jerome De Lisle et al.

In the development of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago, London (1991) noted the emergence of several different models and variants of the secondary school created to fill specific needs of the populace at different times. These models and variants differ by governance system (church/state) by age (pre- and post-Independence), and by the curriculum and years of schooling offered. These different types now co-exist, resulting in a differentiated system in which choice sustains the differences. Campbell's (1997) seminal work on the historical development of the Trinidad and Tobago education system linked the operation of the education market to the differential value attached to schools:

What became clear is that the newer government schools established between 1958 and 1971 – not to mention the junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools of the 1970s – did not have the academic esteem of the pre-1958 denominational secondary schools. This was understandable and had less to do with the denominational or government character of the school and more with the age, tradition and experience of the schools and their staff. (p. 94)

Thus, over time, as new secondary school types were added, several different options became available to parents; however, most traditional schools have retained their high value (Hospedales, 1982).

From a sociological standpoint, it may be that the open enrolment system in Trinidad and Tobago was implicitly designed to ensure continued elite access to the traditional higher-quality, denominational schools, as Campbell (1997) has noted:

The system of recruiting students into secondary schools also worked in favour of those schools already better patronized by children of middle and upper class parents. The parents of the top 15 percent (or some other variable percentage) in the Common Entrance Examination (which replaced the College Exhibition Examination) were guaranteed entry for their children to the secondary school of the first choice. (p. 94)

More importantly, Campbell's analysis pointed to the importance of the entire selection system, inclusive of the examination and the system of rules for making choices. It is this selection/placement system that maintains the character of the education system and the differentiated school system. Indeed, if the eleven-plus were to be coupled with restrictions to choice, such as zoning, access to some traditional highly favoured schools could be substantially reduced. Historically, however,

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

as London (1994) noted, past moves towards restricting choice have met strong resistance and this continues to be the case today (Gillezeau, 2009).

The legitimate right of individual families to access education in the school type of their choice gives the placement system needed defensibility, as Campbell suggested:

From the late 1830s the development of education in Trinidad was characterized by fairly constant tension and sporadic struggles between government and the churches, and between one church and another. The right to have denominational schools became an article of religious faith. In particular the Roman Catholic social doctrine of the preeminence of the family in the provision of education, though more usually stated during the nineteenth century as the primacy of the church, provided a firm philosophical base from which to fight off the centralizing efforts of Protestants oriented or secular governments. (p. 271)

From very early on, then, the question of the role of the family in determining and controlling the nature and type of education proved to be a central societal issue in Trinidad and Tobago.

Admittedly, the early schools in Trinidad and Tobago were not truly designed to foster educational productivity, at least not in the narrow sense of the term. There was certainly little intent on fostering social mobility among the local groups. Instead, at the elementary level, the aim was primarily to promote standards of morality and to cement denominational loyalties, with secondary education initially for the white upper class and narrowly modelled on the English grammar school (Campbell, 1996). Williams (1969) concluded that there was no noble purpose to early secondary schooling in Trinidad and Tobago:

The purpose of the secondary school in Trinidad was to ensure the Anglicanisation of the colony. It consciously took the English public school as its model. The external examinations of Oxford and Cambridge, in which Trinidad was the first colony to participate, strengthened the prevailing English influence. (p. 712)

In time, the growing competition between Church and State to provide secondary schools exploded in an intense figurative war between St. Mary's College (CIC) and Queen's Royal College (QRC), the most famous colleges in the country, both situated in Port of Spain (Campbell, 1997). Later, this Church-State conflict would be further fuelled by the emergence of new schools, some built by other denominational bodies

Jerome De Lisle et al.

and by the Government in the 1950s to 1970s. The recent introduction of both denominational and government schools built under the SEMP loan in the 1990s further complicates the issue; especially since new denominational schools have been built with state funds for groups that had been marginalized in the past.

The conflict between Church and State over schooling was managed but not buried in the pre-Independence era with the establishment of a Concordat between Church and State (Alleyne, 1995). After the signing of the Concordat, however, tensions continued to simmer. For example, in his analysis of the development of the Presbyterian education sector, Teelucksingh (2008) suggested that the state (through its main protagonist, then Prime Minister, Eric Williams) believed that the choice system was contributing to religious and ethnic segregation, citing the statistic that of the 487 placed in Presbyterian secondary schools in that year, 184 were Hindus, 138 were Presbyterians, 55 were Roman Catholics, and 77 were Anglicans. Teelucksingh observed:

During his public lectures in 1965, Williams continued to highlight the insubordination fostered by the denominational schools with the solution being Government secondary schools as the main agent of integration. Based on the 1965 Common Entrance Examination results, Williams emphasized that the placement at secondary schools was indicative of denominational schools having a negative effect on integration in Trinidad and Tobago. (p. 103)

Campbell (1997), however, believed that the roots of conflict went far deeper than the nationalistic value of integration and extended to fundamental differences in beliefs, ideologies, and values. Critical among these, he argued, was the right of the family to choose the type of education:

This episode was not simply a struggle of QRC supporters against CIC supporters. . . . It was a struggle between the churches and the government at the highest level: at the level of the heads of the churches and the Cabinet of the country. It was a struggle in which each side declared conflicting ideologies fundamentally incompatible. . . . For example, the Roman Catholic Church's claim that the family and not the government had primary responsibility to provide education was quite novel, but was based on long-established Roman Catholic social principles. (pp. 85–86)

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

Campbell's analysis is perhaps also naïve because it ignored the critical influence of social class, and the underlying political and personal conflicts and contradictions that were publicly and privately held. What is important is that, in the context of school choice, these negotiations and agreements led to a system of rules for choosing secondary schools that currently operates. As in the past, the competition is broadly focused on two types of schools within the public school system—government and government-assisted denominational schools. Significantly, though, the government-assisted school sector remains dominant in terms of market value and resources. While the government-assisted schools have sometimes used arguments similar to private schools in situations of legal challenge, in reality, heavy reliance on government funding and the 1966 Education Act makes them essentially agents of the state (Mahabir, 2004). In reality, private secondary schooling that is independent of the funding of the state remains negligible in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The philosophy of parental choice and open enrolment that emerged out of this era is deeply enshrined in the 1976 Trinidad and Tobago Republican Constitution. While this Constitution does not explicitly support the right to education, it does acknowledge “the right of parents to provide a school of his own choice for the education of his child or ward” (Trinidad and Tobago. Government, 2000, section 4(f)). For example, Anthony (1993) noted Justice Lennox Deyalsingh's interpretation of this constitutional clause in a 1989 judgement in the case of *Mohammed et al. v. the Minister of Education and the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*. The Judge reasoned that the section ensured that the “Government's control of education is not absolute,” and concluded that the “Government cannot compel a parent to send his child to a public school.” He further reasoned that if parents were not satisfied with the education afforded by the Government, they have the right by law to “provide a school of his own choice for his child's education” (p. 28). Thus, paradoxically, the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution allows for private schools that are provided either by parents or by institutions. In reality, however, the provision of successful government-assisted schools in the education market limits the need for an extensive network of private secondary (Belfield & Levin, 2002).

Although the choice mechanism at eleven-plus created a powerful formalized education market in the secondary school sector, this has not always have been recognized by the schools themselves (Oplatka, 2004). Secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago are rarely market-oriented and do little to actively influence stakeholders' perceptions of the institution. Most schools do not have mechanisms that allow them to

Jerome De Lisle et al.

respond quickly to changing environmental demands or expectations. At the same time, successive governments have sought to provide new school types, adding to the existing variety of schools on the market without concern for the impact of market forces. For example, since 1996, a number of denominational schools have been rebuilt or remodelled. Even today, new government schools are being created, which are different to those in the past. Recent additions include 5-year government “high” schools and “magnet” schools; the latter designed to focus on four specific areas of schooling—science, performing arts, technology education, and information technology. The magnet school idea was included in the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) funded Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) and was seen as a way to “bring excitement and support by parents and others” (Inter-American Development Bank, 1999, p. 38). It is important to understand how these changing product lines influence the way families in Trinidad and Tobago choose schools.

Questions about Operation and Impact

Understanding how the secondary school choice system operates and impacts on the education system is a high priority for the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education (MOE). Indeed, a number of issues have arisen, which demand better quality information on exactly how the system operates. The hope is that better quality information will lead to more effective policy making. The consequences of unpopular or ineffective policies can be significant. For example, in December 2008, the MOE unsuccessfully attempted to regulate the type of schools chosen by parents on the assumption that parents often made inappropriate choices that impacted upon placement opportunities (Webb, 2008). This attempt at regulating choice met strong opposition by key stakeholders in the system (Consultation key on SEA, 2008). Even prior to this failed attempt, there was a 2005 decision to remove the two additional choices instituted in 2001. Although the claim was that families were not using these choices, it was not clear whether such a pattern existed in all educational districts.

Perhaps, though, the most critical issue is to gauge the impact and extent of choice among system participants. It may be that although there are several choices available to parents, in reality, the most desired is the first choice school and few students receive this outcome. Indeed, some schools, most of them the older traditional colleges, high schools, and convents, have come to be known as “first choice schools” because they are held in high value by most stakeholders and are consistently chosen

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

first on the parents' list of choices. Is the value attached to these schools relatively stable or are market values dynamic and fluid? Are these "first choice" schools valued primarily because of academic outcomes or are other factors important in a plural society such as Trinidad and Tobago?

Despite the important role of open enrolment in eleven-plus placement, there are few current studies on the operation or impact of the school choice system in Trinidad and Tobago. There is therefore little to go on as to why students currently choose specific schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Some speculation is possible, however, based on international studies. These studies group school attributes into two categories—academic and non-academic (Bosetti, 2004; Collins & Snell, 2000; Goldring & Hausman, 1999). Academic attributes relate to the performance of the school or the provision of some specialized academic programmes, as in the case of "magnet schools" in the US. Non-academic attributes may include school characteristics such as sporting prowess or specialized non-academic programmes. It might be that because formal information on either academic or non-academic school performance is not readily available to families in Trinidad and Tobago, that accuracy of perception becomes an important factor in choosing schools (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2002). If the situation is that some groups of families have more accurate information than others, those families with limited information might function as inert or marginalized consumers, not even seeking out or verifying information (Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Willms & Echols, 1992). With a possible information brownout or the existence of many inert consumers, some schools might be able to retain their status despite declining performance. It is important, then, to explore the situation locally in view of the context and development of the open enrolment system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another concern is what happens when families choose schools. If schools vary greatly in quality, parents might make decisions based on some loose imaginary ranking of schools. This ranking might be primarily based on perceived school attributes, with information gathered mostly through hearsay. The valence of each attribute will then relate to the decision maker's human values and will therefore vary across families (Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). However, even if accurate information is not widely available, some parents, as active consumers, might seek out data to ensure that their choices are accurate. Thus, the absence of information on schools will impact more strongly on marginalized or inert customers. In the system of rules used in Trinidad and Tobago, information about specific choice patterns might also be a critical factor. For example, some families might be able to attain placement in a high quality school, given a particular score on the

Jerome De Lisle et al.

eleven-plus, by selecting less frequently chosen schools as their first or second choice. This system might have been used by some in choosing schools like Belmont Secondary, Iere High School, and St. George's College in the past.

A system-wide lack of credible information about schools might lead to poor decision making among marginalized customers. For example, some marginalized consumers may list only frequently chosen schools among their four choices, thereby limiting the probability of the student receiving any school of choice. Some marginalized customers may also be inert, reluctant even to participate in the process. For example, they might be willing to leave the decision making to other more informed participants, such as teachers. Thus, choice-making patterns will not be homogenous, but vary spatially. Marginalized and inert consumer patterns may be related to socio-economic factors. Thus, the geography of choice might be an important factor because of the variation in the economic and social conditions across education districts (Taylor, 2001).

Although consumers will choose a school because of its attractiveness in terms of academic or non-academic attributes, it might be that the critical process is rejecting those schools considered worthless (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001). Therefore, consumers might have a tendency to attribute a host of negative or evil qualities to some schools—a process that involves vilification or demonization of the school agency (Reay & Lucey, 2000). Choosing a demonized school would be considered risky for families when the chance of obtaining a highly valued school is very low. Choosing a demonized school might also be considered risky for families with female candidates. Some international studies have suggested that the factor with the highest valence might be the school's academic achievements (Bast & Walberg, 2004). In this regard, an early study of secondary selection in Trinidad by Hospedales (1982) measured four attributes—performance of the school, perceived intelligence of children, quality of teaching staff, and religion—with performance proving to be the most important. Hospedales, however, used a restricted sample and asked parents to list their choices retrospectively, with the child already assigned to Tunapuna Government Secondary School. R. S. Alleyne (1991), in contrast, surveyed a national sample of adult non-educators and educators and found a broad range of indigenous conceptions of excellence in schools, including intellectual supremacy, character development, self-actualization, and social consciousness.

Therefore, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, non-academic factors like sporting prestige and all-round development might be critical when choosing schools. In any case, the value placed on different factors

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

will vary over area and time. For example, a factor such as location will be related to proximity and travelling convenience (Parsons, Chalkley, & Jones, 2000; Theobald, 2005). The importance of location will change over time and context, as road networks expand or the traffic situation gets worse. Additionally, some school characteristics might be more important for particular consumers. For example, middle-class consumers might be more willing to allow their children to access valued schools located at a great distance because of their ability to cope with transportation costs. Considering the plural nature of the society and the traditional role of denominational schools, religion could be a factor of high valence for Trinidad and Tobago. All of this means that the process of making choices in Trinidad and Tobago might be relatively complex and varied; not easily amenable to superficial or quantitative analyses.

The consumer is a central element in the school choice decision-making process. As indicated earlier, differences in consumers might influence the relative importance of each factor. An important consumer characteristic in this context might be the parents' socio-economic status, which provides a useful measure of social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital captures, in part, family and community variables such as information, trust, and norms of reciprocity in social networks. Social and cultural capital might be useful in explaining why some consumers are marginalized because they have little access to information or networks required for decision-making influence (Basu, 2006). Many of these marginalized customers may not be choosy as are customers who are integrated into the information networks of the education system. Therefore, they might be more willing to accept some of the newer products with less value than traditional offerings or products within their community settings.

Although most international studies suggest that parents are the primary decision makers, in reality, children, other family members, and teachers might be critical participants in Trinidad and Tobago. In this context, the role of the teacher or extended family member might be especially significant with marginalized and inert consumers. It is well known, for example, that teachers often advise students on what schools they should choose. The extended family might have a significant voice if they live in the same house or at a nearby location. Children might have a significant say in their choice of school in many instances, because of the central nature of the eleven-plus examinations in the lives of early adolescents. Reay and Lucey (2000) studied the choice-making process among children in the UK and found that their decision-making framework was relatively well developed. In Trinidad and Tobago, however, it might be possible for students' choices to impact even more

Jerome De Lisle et al.

strongly on family decisions, especially in some family circumstances. This paper will examine four themes related to the current operation and impact of the school choice system in Trinidad and Tobago. These include (1) schools and school types that are most highly valued; (2) possible variations in choice patterns; (3) the relationship between choice patterns, geography, and markets, and school and consumer characteristics; and (4) the relationship between choices and outcomes.

Methods and Materials

Rationale for Research Design

A mixed method research design was chosen combining quantitative and qualitative approaches (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The use of a mixed method approach was rationalized as follows. Firstly, there were several dimensions to the school choice issue, which suggest that choosing a secondary school is a relatively complex phenomenon not easily captured by one approach alone (Shapiro, Setterlund, & Cragg, 2004). Secondly, it was only possible to address some issues using a qualitative approach, with face-to face-interviews, for example, required to provide insight into the thinking of the parents and students. The need for supplementary qualitative data is also critical in light of the limitations in the official eleven-plus database, which does not allow measurement of important consumer characteristics, such as socio-economic status. However, since individual decision-making frameworks are often idiosyncratic; a large-scale quantitative study would also be necessary to provide information on general patterns in the population. Thirdly, each data set provides valuable but independent insight. On the one hand, only the quantitative data can reveal information about changes in placement patterns over time. On the other hand, only the qualitative study can fully capture the thought processes of different consumer types. To benefit fully, inferences from the different datasets must be integrated.

A triangulated multilevel mixed method research design was selected with the intention of obtaining different but complementary evidence. Cresswell and Plano-Clark (2007) argued that triangulated designs provide a way of understanding a research question by bringing together the strengths and weaknesses of various data collection methods. In the multilevel variant of this category of mixed method design, different methods are used to investigate different parts of the system, but the results are then merged for an overall interpretation. This design, then, will allow comparison of evidence from statistical data with evidence from the qualitative findings, as well as validation of data collected using

one method. The purpose of the mixed method design in this study was triangulation, defined as convergence and corroboration of results, and complementarity, defined as elaboration, enhancement, and illustration of results from one method to the next (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

A feature of this research design was the access to different levels of the system using the contrasting data collection methods. The different levels of the system targeted were (a) system, (b) parents, and (c) children. The overall system was studied using a quantitative approach, whereas family and individual level data were obtained using the qualitative approaches. The mixed method approach persisted through the processes of conceptualization, data collection, and data analysis. Applying a mixed method approach in the data analysis phase required greater attention to the process of integrating the data (Bryman, 2006, 2007). So rather than reporting the findings separately, inferences are integrated to be mutually illuminating. Following Cresswell and Plano-Clark (2007), to facilitate the use of multiple methods and approaches in the study, the large research team was organized into different qualitative and quantitative teams

The qualitative study was designed to be multi-method. Four distinct qualitative methods were chosen: (1) focus group interviews with parents; (2) focus group interviews with students; (3) soft laddering (one-on-one interview with parents); and (4) hard laddering (questionnaires). A laddering interview is an in-depth, one-on-one structured dialogue that draws out the connections people make between product attributes, the consequences, and core human values (Olson & Reynolds, 2001). Laddering is an important technique used in consumer psychology to investigate perceptions and choices, and is especially useful for eliciting hierarchical constructs and personal values (Veludo-de-Oliveira, Ikeda, & Campomar, 2006). A laddering interview can best capture the complex relationship between factors used in school choice. It must be noted that although both hard (a structured questionnaire that yields quantitative and “quantitized” data) and soft laddering (interview only) methods were used, the constructivist philosophy remained dominant during this data collection phase. These different qualitative methods were intended to bring together different strengths and overlapping weaknesses in data collection approaches (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007).

Sampling Procedure

Following Teddlie and Yu (2007), a multilevel mixed method sampling plan was employed. The plan included different sampling strategies for

Jerome De Lisle et al.

each unit of analysis. The use of appropriate sampling techniques in the different strands was critical to the study's legitimation (validity and trustworthiness). A census approach was employed for data from the 11 cohorts across the period 1995–2005. This dataset included six years of the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) and five years of the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). Additionally, from 2001, six rather than four choices were offered to parents on the registration form. The original database required substantial verification, validation, and expansion. Additional data added included residential codes, schools, and choices.

For the qualitative study, schools were first sampled from each of the eight districts using the criteria of SEA performance, socio-economic status of the pupil roll, and location in the district. A list of 40 schools was then obtained, from which 18 schools were selected. For this paper, data were analysed from 4 of 18 schools distributed in four education districts. At each school, parents and students were selected by the interviewers, school principals, and Standard 5 teachers. Focus group and individual interviews were conducted with the participants. Generally, the students and parents were from different families, since participation by parents was purely voluntary. The total number of participants in the qualitative phase was 26 students and 24 parents distributed in 4 primary schools (8 focus groups). The schools included a middle-income government primary school from the suburban area of west Trinidad; a denominational school in central semi-rural/semi-urban Trinidad; a middle-income, high-achieving school in the capital city; and one rural government primary school in Tobago. The sites captured families in different economic situations from different geographic locations.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interview schedules were constructed and piloted for both the focus group and laddering interviews. For the focus group interviews with (a) parents and (b) children, the initial issues were identified from the literature. These issues were school popularity, demonized schools, alert and inert clients, marginal customers, product attributes, family dynamics of choice, education markets, parent wishes or choices, matching schools with children, academic reputation of schools, single-sex schooling, and rational choice theory—logic, values and concerns that drive choice. A final list of questions and probes was obtained after discussion with team members and a formal pilot of the instruments.

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

A number of additional techniques were used to enhance participants' responses in the children focus group sessions (Bystedt, Lynn, & Potts, 2003). These included verbalization techniques for enhancing participant responses to the request: "Please explain your thinking when you made your choices?" The verbalization techniques included (a) concept mapping, used for questions on school attributes and choice; and (b) story telling in the children's interview, used to identify features of "demonized" and "highly valued" schools. The protocol for the laddering interview was adapted following Reynolds and Gutman (2001). The soft laddering and hard laddering (structured questionnaire) were used at the same time. In the procedure, respondents were asked to write down the choices they originally made and to describe the qualities (attributes) of the school. They were then asked to further describe attributes that distinguished between the different schools. After listing the qualities in order, they were asked iteratively why each quality was important, focusing first on consequences and then values.

Data Analysis Methods

The database for student registration at eleven-plus over the period 1995–2001 was obtained. The total number of students in the 11-year database was 175,945 (1995–2000) and 103,804 (2001–2005). For the period 1995–2000, there were four choices for each student and six choices for the period 2001–2005. The database was recoded for area of residence, and each school choice was identified as first, second, third, and so on. The database was then verified and validated. Descriptive data were collected for the schools chosen in the fourth to sixth registered choices. The correlation coefficients describing the relationship between the parent's religion and school choices were also obtained. Each analysis was done separately for males and females because gender is a factor influencing choice patterns and because a number of highly valued schools are single-sex. Schools were categorized by (1) the management authority, (2) the period built, and (3) the number of years of schooling as described by London (1991). The main indicator of value was the number of students choosing the school as the targeted choice. In the case of first choice schools, this is a very important indicator because it indicates the families' ranking of the school in the list of choices. In the pilot interview study, it became apparent that parents paid considerable attention to selecting the first choice school and that different factors led to the lower choices.

For the qualitative data, the data from both interview sets were first transcribed and then subjected to a coding process. The coding process

was done by five independent readers. Themes and sub-themes were then identified collaboratively, and tables and narratives generated based on inter-rater agreement. Illustrative statements were agreed to by the entire group. Only data from the soft laddering were included in this analysis.

Results

Which Schools Were Most Highly Valued?

To answer this question, data were analysed separately for the CEE (1995–2000) and the SEA (2001–2005). Tables 1 and 2 show the ranking of the 10 most highly valued schools as measured by the number of times the school was chosen as first choice. For both periods, the list contained only traditional schools (built prior to the 1960s). As shown in Table 1, the most frequently chosen school for males was Queen’s Royal College, a government institution. However, the other seven single-sex schools were all denominational—five Catholic, one Presbyterian, and one Anglican. There were two co-educational schools in the top 10 (St. Stephen’s and North Eastern Colleges) for the period 1995–2000, but only the former appears for the period 2001–2005.

As shown in Table 2, traditional schools also dominated the rankings for females across both periods. However, Lakshmi Girls Hindu College was ranked as No. 9 in both time periods. The change of rankings for the two time periods suggests a relative decline in the perceived value of some traditional schools, like Bishop Antsey High School (BAHS). However, St. Augustine Girls and Naparima Girls improved their rankings over time. Significantly, for the period 2001–2005, BAHS East, a new school to the market, was able to enter the top 10 rankings. There is only one mixed school in the top 10 most highly valued schools for girls. This was North Eastern College for the period 1995–2000; however, the school did not maintain its position in 2001–2005.

What were the Common Choice Patterns?

Table 3 provides the pattern of choices for the two designated periods based on (a) the school’s management authority, (b) the period when built, and (c) the number of years of schooling offered. The data were collected only for the first choice decision, considered the most desired outcome. As shown, in terms of the entire population, government schools were most commonly chosen in both time periods followed by Catholic schools. The relative number choosing denominational schools increased in the 2001–2005 time period. For females, only 31.3% of the population chose a government school, implying that close to 70% of the families chose a denominational school for their female child.

Table 1. Percentage of Parents With Male Students Naming School as First Choice

CEE (1995–2000)						
Schools Chosen by Males in the CEE (Ranked by Total No. Choosing)	Total % of Students Choosing School Annually					
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1) Queen's Royal College	5.8	6.2	6.8	7.5	6.2	5.9
2) Hillview College, Tunapuna	4.4	5.1	4.9	4.8	4.4	4.2
3) Presentation College, Chaguanas	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.2	3.9	3.4
4) St. Mary's College	4.6	5.2	4.3	3.7	3.5	3.8
5) Naparima College	4.2	4.3	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.4
6) Fatima College	4.5	4.2	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.2
7) North Eastern College, Sangre Grande	3.8	3.4	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.6
8) Presentation College, San Fernando	4.7	4.0	4.0	3.4	2.9	2.8
9) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town	4.1	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.2	2.7
10) Holy Cross College, Arima	3.2	2.6	3.0	3.8	3.3	2.8
SEA (2001–2005)						
Schools Chosen by Males in the SEA (Ranked by Total No. Choosing)	% of Students Choosing School Annually					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
1) Queen's Royal College	6.6	6.2	7.1	7.4	7.2	
2) Presentation College, Chaguanas	5.4	6.0	6.4	7.0	6.6	
3) Hillview College, Tunapuna	5.2	5.3	6.2	6.7	6.1	
4) Presentation College, San Fernando	4.9	5.6	5.4	5.2	4.9	
5) Naparima College	4.4	4.3	5.1	5.5	6.0	
6) St. Mary's College	5.1	5.4	4.8	4.5	4.6	
7) Fatima College	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.3	4.7	
8) Holy Cross College, Arima	3.8	3.2	2.9	2.9	3.1	
9) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.1	2.9	

Table 2. Percentage of Parents With Female Students Naming School as First Choice

----- CEE (1995–2000) -----						
Schools Chosen by Females (Ranked by Total)	% of Students Choosing School Annually					
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1) Bishop Anstey High School	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.6	5.3	4.9
2) Naparima Girls High School	6.1	5.9	5.3	5.5	4.5	4.1
3) St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph	5.0	4.9	5.7	5.0	4.6	4.4
4) St. Augustine Girls High School	5.2	5.4	5.0	5.0	4.4	4.5
5) Holy Faith Convent, Couva	5.3	5.6	5.0	4.3	4.1	3.8
6) North Eastern College, Sangre Grande	4.3	3.6	3.6	4.1	4.4	4.2
7) St. Joseph's Convent, POS	4.2	4.0	4.2	3.9	3.5	3.3
8) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town	4.5	4.3	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.1
9) Lakshmi Girls Hindu College	2.6	3.6	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.2
10) Holy Name Convent, POS	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.0	2.9
----- SEA (2001–2005) -----						
Schools Chosen by Females (Ranked by Total)	% of Students Choosing School Annually					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
1) St. Augustine Girls High School	7.1	7.5	8.4	9.6	8.7	
2) Naparima Girls High School	6.4	7.4	7.6	8.2	7.8	
3) Bishop Anstey High School	5.6	6.2	5.4	5.5	5.8	
4) St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph	5.3	5.4	5.0	5.9	6.1	
5) Holy Faith Convent, Couva	5.2	5.9	5.8	5.1	5.4	
6) St. Joseph's Convent, POS	4.4	4.7	4.5	5.3	4.9	
7) Holy Name Convent, POS	3.3	3.9	3.9	3.6	3.6	
8) St. Joseph's Convent, San Fernando	3.7	3.4	3.8	3.5	3.6	
9) Lakshmi Girls Hindu College	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.8	3.4	
10) Bishop Anstey High School East	1.0	4.1	4.1	4.1	3.9	

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

The small numbers choosing Hindu and Muslim schools may have reflected the low numbers of schools for these denominations. However, with the building of new Muslim and Hindu secondary schools during this period, the numbers choosing these schools increased somewhat in the 2001–2005 period.

The data suggest that some new SEMP high schools might have been perceived as a better-quality, more highly valued product, offering 5- to 7-year schooling instead of the 2–4 years offered in the junior secondary/senior comprehensive system (built 1971–1990). Although most families rejected the new sector schools built in 1971–1990 during the period 2001–2005 (9.3% to 9.4%), slightly more were willing to accept some of the schools built after 1991 (1.04% to 12.6%). However, the great majority of families continued to prefer the traditional schools, and the relative numbers choosing this type of school increased notably from between 39% in the period 1995–2000 and 47% in the period 2001–2005. “Years of schooling” provided by the institution remained an important characteristic, with the traditional school usually offering secondary education up to 18+. The data show that in the period 2001–2005, more than 60% of the families chose a 7-year school for males and females.

Table 4 provides the 10 top-ranked schools for choices 5 and 6 during the period 2001 and 2006 along with the number of families choosing. As shown for males, the most frequent option was no choice. This suggests that many families did not find these additional options necessary. For families that did make a choice, they most often selected a new sector or traditional school providing a 5- or 7-year education. A number of government schools built in the 1960s were included in this ranking, such as Tunapuna Government, San Fernando Government, Woodbrook Government, and St. James Government Secondary. Families also selected some of the more highly valued new sector 3-year schools such as Curepe, Chaguanas, Couva, San Fernando East, and Five Rivers Junior Secondary Schools. The pattern of choices for the females was very similar to that of males. Again, for choice number six, the most common option was no choice. Both El Dorado schools were highly ranked in the fifth and sixth choice list.

The Complexity of Choice: Markets, Consumer Attributes, and Products

In reality, the choice process may be much more complex than captured in the first two themes. It is likely that choice patterns would vary across education district and markets. Data addressing this issue were gathered using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Table 3. Schools Within Three Categories Chosen as First Choice

<i>----- Government vs Denominational Schools -----</i>				
(1) Management Authority of School	% Choosing Schools for First Choice			
	1995–2000		2001–2005	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Government	53.2	44.0	42.4	31.3
Catholic	24.6	23.7	29.2	27.5
Presbyterian	10.4	11.7	12.6	17.0
Anglican	6.7	11.9	7.3	12.6
Hindu	-	3.2	1.4	4.3
Muslim	2.5	2.8	3.6	4.1
<i>----- Traditional vs Newer Schools -----</i>				
(2) Period When Built	% Choosing Schools for First Choice			
	1995–2000		2001–2005	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Before 1950	39.2	37.4	47.0	47.4
1950–1970	33.6	36.7	27.7	29.3
1971–1990	18.8	18.2	9.3	9.4
After 1991	5.4	4.5	12.3	10.6
<i>----- Length of Schooling Provided -----</i>				
(3) Years of Schooling	% Choosing Schools for First Choice			
	1995–2000		2001–2005	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Less than 5 years	10.7	8.0	2.9	4.6
5-year schools	17.5	20.4	13.4	15.4
7-year schools	55.9	57.3	67.8	61.8

The quantitative study. Tables 5 and 6 provide the ranked listing of schools chosen for males and females over the period 1995–2005. The percentages choosing the school first across the seven education districts in Trinidad are also provided. The main pattern suggests that there were separate markets (circuits of schooling) in the North, South, South-East, and East of the country (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995). For example, St. Stephen’s was attractive for many families in the South Eastern District whilst Naparima College in the city of San Fernando was relatively less attractive. Therefore, all traditional schools do not necessarily compete against others nationally, but the competition between schools may be focused in circuits or markets. These circuits or markets are often bounded by accessible education districts, but in some cases a school’s

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

market might extend across multiple districts. The data also show that the market boundaries were quite different for males and females. For example, although some families in the South Eastern district were reluctant to choose St. Stephen's College for their daughters, they were willing to select the same school for their sons.

Table 4. Top Ten Schools Chosen for Choices 5 & 6 for Males & Females (1995–2005)

----- Males -----			
Fifth Place Choice	No.	Sixth Place Choice	No.
NONE	1,763	NONE	3,058
El Dorado Sec. (M)	1,588	Curepe Jr. Sec. (M)	2,140
Tunapuna Govt. Sec. (M)	1,504	El Dorado Sec. (M)	1,541
San Fernando Sec. (M)	1,491	Woodbrook Govt. Sec. (M)	1,297
Woodbrook Govt. Sec. (M)	1,403	Chaguanas Jr. Sec. (M)	1,264
St. James Sec. (M)	1,370	Couva Jr. Sec. (M)	1,191
El Dorado Sec. Compre. (M)	1,322	St. James Sec. (M)	1,169
Curepe Jr. Sec. (M)	1,200	San Fernando East Jr. Sec. (M)	1,168
Tranquility Govt. Sec. (M)	1,106	Five Rivers Jr. Sec. (M)	1,100
San Fernando Sec. Compre. (M)	957	Carapichaima Jr. Sec. (M)	1,085
----- Females -----			
El Dorado Sec. (M)	1,698	NONE	3,008
NONE	1,691	Curepe Jr. Sec. (M)	2,062
Tunapuna Govt. Sec. (M)	1,672	El Dorado Sec. (M)	1,678
Woodbrook Govt. Sec. (M)	1,575	Woodbrook Govt. Sec. (M)	1,463
San Fernando Sec. School (M)	1,429	St. James Sec. (M)	1,363
El Dorado Sec. Compre. (M)	1,421	Chaguanas Jr. Sec. (M)	1,230
St. James Sec. (M)	1,370	Tunapuna Govt. Sec. (M)	1,223
Tranquility Govt. Sec. (M)	1,023	Couva Jr. Sec. (M)	1,196
Arima Sec. (M)	1,021	San Fernando East Jr. Sec. (M)	1,176

As shown in Table 5, some schools attracted significant numbers of children from families located across different education districts. Examples are St. Mary's College and Queen's Royal College, which were the older traditional major boys' secondary schools. Although more

than 60% of students choosing these schools as first choice were from Port of Spain and Environs, significant numbers in three other education districts (Caroni, North Eastern, and St. George East) also chose these schools. No school, however, attracted children from more than four education districts. Some highly valued schools had a more restricted market, exacting a “pull” on fewer than three districts and primarily for students from one major district. Examples include Presentation College, Chaguanas, and Holy Cross College, Arima. However, a degree of dynamism was also apparent in the market, with some schools attracting clientele from a broader range of markets in 2001–2005 compared with 1995–2000. For example, in the case of Fatima College, there was a slight increase in the number of students in Caroni and North Eastern District putting this school as first choice.

As shown in Table 6, the situation with the traditional Port of Spain girls’ schools was quite different. For example, more than 80% of the students indicating Holy Name Convent as their first choice came from Port of Spain and Environs, whereas, for BAHS, which is metres away, this figure was only 62%–75%, with close to 20% of these first choices coming from families living in St. George East. This suggests that although these two schools are located in the same general vicinity, they may compete only partially. Some girls’ schools like Naparima and St. Augustine, however, attracted significant numbers of students from as many as four educational districts, spanning quite a broad geographical area.

Table 7 provides the collated data for the entire 10-year period based on the stated religion of the family and the school of choice. The table addresses the issue of the “attractiveness” of denominational schools for the different religious groups. As shown, families that tended to choose the government schools as first choice were from the relatively small, non-mainstreamed denominations such as the Baptists (55.7 % males, 47.2% females); Orisha (60.0% males, 47.6% females); Jehovah’s Witnesses (52.8% males, 38.7% females); and Seventh-day Adventists (46.45% males, 38.55% females). In all cases, these groups were more willing to take greater risks with their males. This might be due to the existence of several high-achieving government single-sex schools for males, but this alone would not explain these numbers. In terms of the percentages among the groups, Pentecostals (Evangelical Christians) were an increasingly large denominational group, but families professing this faith seemed more reluctant to choose Presbyterian (12.0% males, 17.9% females) and Catholic schools (27.1% males, 24.3% females) for first choice.

Table 5. Top Ten Schools Chosen as First Choice by Males Across Educational Districts

----- Common Entrance Examination (1995–2000) -----							
Schools Chosen by Males (1995–2000)	% Choosing as First Choice by District						
	Caroni	North Eastern	POS & Environs	St. George East	St. Patrick	South Eastern	Victoria
1) Queen's Royal College	7.4	2.5	61.7	28.0			
2) Hillview College, Tunapuna	11.9	7.5	2.1	78.4			
3) Presentation College, Chaguanas	90.7			4.6			2.9
4) St. Mary's College	8.1	2.6	57.7	31.0			
5) Naparima College	5.1				20.6	10.1	64.1
6) Fatima College	3.5		75.8	19.6			
7) North Eastern College		76.0		16.4		7.1	
8) Presentation College, San Fernando	6.1				21.5	8.7	63.4
9) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town						77.7	21.6
10) Holy Cross College, Arima	1.4	16.2		80.6			
----- Secondary Entrance Assessment (2001–2005) -----							
Schools Chosen by Males (2001–2005)	% Choosing as First Choice by District						
	Caroni	North Eastern	POS & Environs	St. George East	St. Patrick	South Eastern	Victoria
1) Queen's Royal College	6.0	3.8	61.3	28.2			
2) Presentation College, Chaguanas	88.9		1.0	7.4			2.6
3) Hillview College, Tunapuna	10.4	12.1	2.2	74.9			
4) Presentation College, San Fernando	5.0				20.1	9.6	64.8
5) Naparima College					23.4	12.0	59.6
6) St. Mary's College	5.4	4.0	60.6	29.4			
7) Fatima College	4.0	1.5	73.0	20.7			
8) Holy Cross College, Arima	1.9	26.5	1.4	69.5			
9) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town						78.8	19.8
10) North Eastern College		76.0		13.4		10.1	

Table 6. Top Ten Schools Chosen as First Choice by Females Across Educational Districts

----- Common Entrance Examination (1995–2000) -----							
Schools Chosen by Females (1995–2000)	% Choosing as First Choice by District						
	Caroni	North Eastern	POS & Environs	St. George East	St. Patrick	South Eastern	Victoria
1) Bishop Anstey High School	4.4	1.2	72.9	21.0			
2) Naparima Girls High School	5.7				18.7	11.9	63.3
3) St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph	8.5	5.7	3.3	82.0			
4) St. Augustine Girls High School	28.0	11.6	4.0	55.7			
5) Holy Faith Convent, Couva	85.6						13.1
6) North Eastern College		75.2		17.1		7.4	
7) St. Joseph's Convent, POS	6.5	3.4	74.8	14.9			
8) St. Stephen's College, Princes Town							
9) Lakshmi Girls Hindu College	33.0	5.6		60.7			
10) Holy Name Convent, POS	3.3		80.9	13.7			
----- Secondary Entrance Assessment (2001–2005) -----							
Schools Chosen by Females (2001–2005)	% Choosing as First Choice by District						
	Caroni	North Eastern	POS & Environs	St. George East	St. Patrick	South Eastern	Victoria
1) St. Augustine Girls High School	27.3	11.4	4.0	56.5			
2) Naparima Girls High School	4.9				22.5	13.9	58.2
3) Bishop Anstey High School	3.3	2.2	75.8	18.2			
4) St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph	8.3	8.5	3.9	48.9			
5) Holy Faith Convent, Couva	3.2	2.1	81.1	13.2			
6) St. Joseph's Convent, POS	3.9	3.0	80.0	12.9			
7) Holy Name Convent, POS	3.2	2.1	81.1	13.2			
8) St. Joseph's Convent, San Fernando	2.2				25.6	10.4	61.3
9) Lakshmi Girls Hindu College	29.4	12.3	0.6	57.5			
10) Bishop Anstey High School East	3.1	8.0	6.2	82.3			

Table 7. Management Authority of Schools Chosen by Candidates' Denominations

----- <i>Males</i> -----										
Religion of Candidates (1995–2005)										
Religion of School	Anglican	Baptist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Seventh-day Adventist	Jehovah's Witnesses	Pentecostal	Orisha
Anglican	11.0	10.3	6.4	5.3	4.9	5.8	11.3	7.9	7.3	7.5
Baptist	0.4	7.3	1.2	1.1	0.6	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.3
Catholic	27.1	18.9	24.7	26.7	41.6	19.9	17.5	22.5	27.1	27.5
Government	51.8	55.7	33.3	27.4	43.0	18.4	46.4	52.8	46.5	60.0
Hindu	0.0	0.2	5.6	0.7	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.3	0.6	1.3
Islam	1.6	1.4	6.9	19.7	0.9	4.5	0.9	1.5	2.8	0.0
Pentecostal	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.1	1.0	0.0
Presbyterian	6.7	4.2	21.3	18.9	7.4	48.8	7.1	12.1	12.0	2.5
Private	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.6	0.1	9.9	0.7	0.5	0.0
----- <i>Females</i> -----										
Religion of Candidates (1995–2005)										
Religion of School	Anglican	Baptist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Seventh-day Adventist	Jehovah's Witnesses	Pentecostal	Orisha
Anglican	26.3	16.1	6.5	7.3	9.8	4.8	18.6	15.7	14.8	14.3
Baptist	0.7	7.5	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.7	1.6	1.7	1.1	2.4
Catholic	21.8	16.7	21.4	19.7	44.5	13.3	14.5	23.0	24.3	25.0
Government	37.7	47.2	22.7	17.3	31.4	11.6	38.5	38.7	34.7	47.6
Hindu	0.7	0.6	17.2	3.7	1.2	2.8	0.6	0.9	1.3	0.0
Islam	1.6	2.4	6.4	21.3	1.6	5.5	1.5	1.9	3.8	1.2
Pentecostal	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.7	0.0
Presbyterian	9.9	7.9	24.6	29.2	9.7	61.1	10.9	17.2	17.9	8.3
Private	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.3	18.6	8.5	0.4	0.3	0.0

Jerome De Lisle et al.

Presbyterians (18.4% males, 11.6 females) and Muslims (27.4% males, 17.3% females) were most reluctant to choose government schools for first choice. Presbyterians were more likely than other groups to choose private schooling for their daughters (18.6%) in the event they did not get a school of their own choice. Interestingly, although Hindus rejected the government schools for their daughters, many were willing to select the government schools for their sons (33.3% males, 17.2% females). Presbyterians (48.8% males, 61.1% females) and Catholics (43.3% males, 44.5% females) were more likely to put their own schools as first choice. Clearly, among both groups, Presbyterians were most likely to choose a school of their own denomination for their female child. The relatively low figure for Catholics is interesting considering that the large majority of high-achieving girls' schools were Catholic. Anglicans were often not attracted to their own schools (11.0% males, 26.3% females) and tended to favour the government schools, even though a number of high-achieving schools were also Anglican, including three in the top 10: St Stephen's College, BAHS, and BAHS East.

The qualitative study. Analysis of the text data identified 11 salient issues, categorized into three groups: (a) the school chosen, (b) the family and student choosing, and (c) the societal milieu. In terms of the school chosen, parents were most often concerned with (1) security, (2) public image, (3) single-gender schooling, (4) location, and (5) the management authority of the school. For the family and student choosing, frequently cited concerns centred on (6) aspirations and desires; (7) family, cultural, and generational traditions; (8) the student's own intellectual capability, perceived merit, or career potential; and (9) specific family dynamics and localized community experiences. Parents were also concerned with wider social issues impinging on their decisions, such as (10) mistrust of the placement process and (11) perceptions of a pervasive lack of fairness in the system.

The focus group interview data from parents confirmed an overwhelming tendency for families to choose high-achieving 7-year denominational schools located in the urban areas. In some cases where a government school was included in the choice list, it might be added as a third or fourth choice school and often on the advice of the class teacher. According to this data, teachers often assumed an advisory role in the choice process, balancing the school selected with the perceived ability of the child. This is illustrated in the following conversation with a Muslim female parent, who talked about the role of the teacher in choosing schools for her child:

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

Yes, I guess they really looked at their marks and how they performed to know [what choice to make]. As I said the teacher checked for the marks, and he advised every one of us, that this is a school way above your child's [ability]. We recommend [instead] this one; she has a quicker chance of getting into such and such [a school].

So this is where we were being guided along as well by the teacher. This is the scenario: the teacher and me. I am talking to my husband and I am telling him exactly what is being said so it is a joint thing with the teacher and the parents.

I am concerned about his marks and what the teacher said. I went to the school there and the teacher gave me advice about the school I chose. That is [my child's] level and that is the reason why I didn't choose any junior secondary school.

Therefore, the decision-making process might include parties outside the family circle. A more important finding was that students were never just inert onlookers but were often active participants in the decision-making process. In some cases, children's role could be dominant; more often, however, they were involved in a process of negotiation and compromise with adult decision makers. In such instances, children were keenly sensitive to the family's capability and needs and were therefore willing to make accommodations. This might mean accepting schools that were less than favourable. For example, although a particular prestige school might be highly valued, it might be located far away from the family's residence. Thus, the cost of transportation or the difficulty in accessing the school would make it difficult for parents to support the child's choice financially. In such instances, students were often willing to accept an alternative school equally highly valued but closer to the family's residence.

This ability of children to influence the choice process was often related to their emerging role as power-brokering early adolescents. As one student from an urban government school confidently said "*Well I sitting the exam so I put my two choices first, she [her mother] put her two choices last, since she had to write the list.*" At the same time, as expected, there was also continued ambivalence and dependence upon the adults involved in the decision-making process. Thus, it was customary to give greater weight to the voice of parents, teachers, and even members of the extended family. However, it was not always possible to weigh precisely the role of each participant and, in some situations, children could have a significant or final say. For example, one female student from a high-achieving primary school in the suburbs described her negotiated role in the choice-making process:

Jerome De Lisle et al.

Well, I was really planning a long time to go St. Augustine [Girls High School], I just had my mind set on that [school] because plenty people told me that to try for St. Joseph and not to go for St. Augustine Girls High School. Even my teacher recommended [that] I go for St. Joseph but I am still trying for St. Augustine Girls High School. [Interviewer: Did you choose St. Augustine Girls High School against your teacher's advice?] No, he told us that he was just recommending those, that they are just schools he recommended and that the parents could make other choices, but I did put in the other two choices (Student in focus group).

In another illustrative anecdote, a female parent from central Trinidad described how she worked along with her child in coming to the final list of choices:

Parent: I liked the history and discipline of the school, the reputation of the school, the track record, [it was] good for discipline, which no one else [in the focus group] really said but is that a factor for everybody else. Yes, not only academic reputation but discipline.

Interviewer: When you were making these choices did your child get involved and what was the level of this involvement?

Parent: Well I had to change some of my choices because I wanted her to be happy with the choices. I wanted her to be involved. She gave me a list of schools and I chose some and I chose the ones I think are the best.

Interviewer: So she gave you her preferred list and how many schools?

Parent: It was six schools. You chose four out of there and I even talked her out of one I chose and she didn't like.

In Tobago, families were more willing to invest in a new sector school located in their community. Surprisingly, however, not all the parents used their full four choices. This might be related to the lack of variety in the Tobago market or a different perspective on education and its purpose. For example, one male Tobagonian parent reflected on why he was willing to choose a rural secondary school ahead of the traditional high-achieving urban institution:

I live in Speyside and I actually see what takes place in the school. From my point of view . . . I would have chosen Speyside High School for my daughter so she will have more time for herself and she would study more and learn to finish all her school work. But if I have to put a school like Scarborough, it would be very hard for her because she would have to get up 4 o'clock in the morning and she would not have time to do her homework and time for herself; that is why I chose Speyside High

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

School. There are computers [there], and I bought one for her. She likes sports, they go and run. That is why I put Speyside as her first choice.

The decision-making process was fuelled by the dual process of valorizing and demonizing schools. This tendency to paint vivid pictures of schools as either heroic or villainous dramatically increased the emotional content of decision making, and raised the stakes and risks involved in making poor decisions. The dual and interlocked processes of valorization and demonization were based on strongly held perceptions of schools and snippets of information obtained from teachers, family members, and friends. For example, two female students of a high-achieving primary school in the suburbs of Port of Spain spoke about their impression of schools chosen:

Student No. 1 (African Trinidadian female): I want to pass for Bishop Anstey High School. Why? Because it is a very good school, the children are very educated and they come out to be very good people, some people turn out to be doctors and other good stuff like my teacher Miss Wright who is a very good teacher.

Student No. 2 (Indian Trinidadian female): I picked Holy Name Convent because my sister went there and she told me that they are a lot of nice people there and teachers really try to [help you succeed].

While valorization and demonization worked together as a dual process, painting the school as a villain was often the dominant process in many instances of decision making, with students and parents simply excluding schools they considered violent and corrupting. It appeared that families believed that these institutions could change the character of their children. The following excerpt from the focus group at the same high-achieving urban Port of Spain school reveals the prominent role of demonizing schools:

Student No. 3 (African Trinidadian female): I don't want to go D.M. because it have plenty real nastiness going on. And in CC, I don't find the principal is all that pleasant because my aunty used to go to that school and she was sick and my mother went to give her an excuse for my aunty and she said [bad things]. I don't want to pass for WS either, because I hear a lot of bad things about it and I just don't like the uniform. I don't want to pass for a Junior Secondary [school] because I would get so much licks . . . they might beat me up because I done already kind of shy and kind of mad and they does take advantage of people [like that]. So I don't want to be [taken] advantage of, I done already shy, I don't know how to fight because I didn't grow up in that kind of way.

Jerome De Lisle et al.

Student No. 2 (Indian Trinidadian female): I just don't want to go to a junior secondary school at all. There is a lot of bacchanal there. All the teachers are nice but I don't want to deal with these children in school and a lot of fighting everyday.

It appeared that some school attributes did not have the same valence for males and females, so that while families were sometimes willing to allow males to travel a great distance to their school of choice, they were very reluctant to allow the same for females. For adults, the most important decision makers in many cases were mothers, although grandmothers, aunts, and sisters might be involved. While fathers appeared absent from this sample, they were often in the background and set the parameters for the final decision.

The relative importance of the child's involvement depended on the dynamics of each family. Where children's voices were dominant, they were at the centre of the decision-making process, often "informing" the parent of their preferences, with the parent acceding to the child's wishes; but in other cases the child had a say within the parameters set by the parents. Whether child or adult, consumers did not have equal sophistication in choice making, and in a culture where information was not readily available, awareness, autonomy, and self-assuredness became critical factors. Students in the Port of Spain area where there were many schools seemed to have a more elaborated decision-making framework, having reviewed the schools that appeared attractive or unattractive.

Parents tried to balance different functional and psycho-social consequences of school attributes. Thus, one parent rationalized her reasons for placing the same local secondary school repeatedly:

It is easy for me here; it is easy access for me. It is easier for me because I don't have to pay transportation. It is a financial thing as well as a system thing. As well as [what] you said, familiarity with the environment.

Parents in the focus groups understood the problems they faced in judging the prestige of the school and the risks involved in sending their children to schools that were rejected or demonized. In Central Trinidad, for example, although parents admitted that some new sector schools did not have a bad reputation, they were still concerned with being left with the choice of having to purchase space at a private school if they obtained a placement that was unacceptable. Thus, one parent reflected on the apparent inequity created by competing schools:

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

So how is a decision going to be made? Even with a credit system, how would a decision be made about who goes to Presentation and who goes to a [junior secondary school]? It should not have prestige schools and lower ranked schools, it should just be schools and [we] don't label the schools. That is where you don't have that happening abroad.

The complexity of the choice system created many anomalies closely observed by parents and children. These anomalies were often used as evidence of unfairness. Students at a high-achieving urban primary school discussed stories that supported their view that there was graft in the process of choice/school selection:

My cousin's friend had all his choices as colleges and he got in the 80s and he passed for a junior secondary school. I know some of my friends [who] scored 86 and 83, 80 in Creative Writing and still passed for San Juan Secondary when they were supposed to go a Convent or College.

When we did SEA, he made 86 or 87 in grammar and he was placed in Diego Martin Secondary. In [school named] here, some boys, they . . . get less marks than other boys . . . My cousin too scored in the 80s and he was placed in a junior secondary school because of where he lived.

While there were valid reasons for each outcome, even students perceived limitations in the choice process and considered their being placed by the Ministry as an unfair outcome.

The laddering interviews and the focus groups were concentrated on the deeply held values that led to the different decisions. Schools appeared to be repositories for many deep-seated fears, fantasies, and dreams. Moreover, the process of moving towards a secondary school in itself created anxiety, moral panic, and trepidation. This meant that the families had a strong emotional response to the process and they viewed the opportunity to choose in terms of ownership and power over their destinies. Indeed, some parents believed that much had already been taken away from them by the society and the school system, and that there was a need to steady the child, buffering them against foreseen turbulence.

The ideal product was a school that was efficient in building academic, emotional, and social competence; was at a safe distance from home; and in which discipline and order prevailed. Contrary to the expectations of some, academic criteria were not always dominant but were considered along with additional criteria. One parent from central Trinidad spoke at length about her choice of school for her son. As she did so, she balanced the valence of multiple factors, including location,

Jerome De Lisle et al.

nature of the school, intergenerational issues, and issues regarding the prestige of the school:

Interviewer: Why did you choose those schools?

Parent: [I chose] Hillview, because of location.

Interviewer: So where do you live?

Parent: I live in El Socorro and my [other] daughter attends St. Augustine Girls so it will be the same direction plus because of the reputation of the school. We chose St. Mary's because his father is [went to that school]. I don't really want him going into Port of Spain but we still chose what was considered the top school [in the country] and St. George's is also in our area. It is the last choice because I really don't want him going to a co-ed school. I really prefer him in an all-boys' school, but as I said those are all the top schools. In my book those are the schools that are doing well.

In summary, families expected that the school would (1) provide their children with access to the subjects they need to pursue their career and their lives; (2) help their children become the persons the parents envisioned they could be; (3) help their children develop and grow without fear of becoming tainted or hurt; and (4) help their children to reach psychological maturity free of fear.

Choices and Placement Outcomes

Table 8 provides data on the number and percentages of students in the eight education districts who received one or other of their different choices. The table emphasizes that, in the end, choices may simply be wishes. Therefore, in the Trinidad and Tobago system, greater choice opportunities might not lead to desired outcomes because students have to compete for available spaces in a small number of highly valued schools. As shown, despite the increased number of schools built to accommodate universal secondary education, less than 20% of the students in most education divisions in Trinidad received their first choice school. In Tobago, with a relatively small population, the situation is quite different, with close to 50% of the children receiving their first choice in the period 2001–2005.

Table 8. Percentages of Candidates Receiving Each Choice Across Educational Districts

----- 1995–2000 CEE Choices -----									
All Administrative Districts	Percentages Receiving Each Choice								MOE Assigned
	Nos.	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Unplaced	
Caroni	25,395	13.0	13.0	16.3	15.7			7.7	26.6
North Eastern	10,357	11.9	13.5	12.2	13.4			13.0	23.0
POS & Environs	33,562	10.1	6.7	10.6	18.3			5.7	42.9
St. George East	40,158	9.8	7.8	11.4	16.5			7.2	40.1
St. Patrick	18,428	12.8	12.1	18.5	32.1			2.3	19.9
South Eastern	14,191	14.0	15.0	19.4	14.6			7.8	21.4
Victoria	25,755	14.4	12.6	15.7	23.8			4.6	24.3
Tobago	8,099	21.9	18.0	4.6	4.5			21.0	7.0
----- 2001–2005 SEA Choices -----									
All Administrative Districts	Percentages Receiving Each Choice								MOE Assigned
	Nos.	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Unplaced	
Caroni	15,004	15.2	14.7	15.1	15.1	14.3	12.4		13.6
North Eastern	6,059	16.3	20.4	15.9	13.6	11.0	8.5		14.3
POS & Environs	19,728	15.0	7.0	8.4	10.6	12.2	16.7		30.1
St. George East	24,024	14.7	19.1	10.6	11.8	13.7	14.4		24.7
St. Patrick	11,161	14.6	13.8	14.4	13.3	12.3	17.7		14.3
South Eastern	8,120	18.4	13.4	19.8	16.7	13.3	9.3		9.5
Victoria	14,960	17.0	12.0	12.7	13.6	15.3	16.3		13.2
Tobago	4,748	27.6	23.7	9.0	15.5	6.5	7.0		11.2

Table 9. Percentages of Candidates Receiving First Choice in Selected Communities in the Port of Spain & Environs Educational District

	----- Percentages receiving each choice -----									
	Nos		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Min.	UnP
	BNI †	*								
1995–2000 CEE										
Goodwood Park	75	63	49.2	0.0	3.2	9.5			28.6	0.0
Bayshore	73	61	52.5	1.4	4.9	6.6			1.3	0.0
Victoria Gardens	71	70	32.9	14.4	5.7	7.1			34.3	1.4
Beetham	41	389	4.4	51.0	11.1	14.7			48.8	14.4
John John	43*	145	7.6	7.7	11.0	7.6			17.2	51.0
Caledonia No. 2	49*	191	4.7	7.9	11.5	11.5			57.1	7.7
2001–2005 SEA										
Goodwood Park	75	39	59.0		12.8	5.1	5.1	2.6	2.6	
Bayshore	73	21	57.1		4.8	9.5	4.8	4.8	14.3	
Victoria Gardens	71	31	71.0		3.2	3.2	0.0	0.0	6.5	
Beetham	41	291	6.2		6.5	11.0	23.0	21.3	23.5	
John John	43*	97	5.2	6.2	10.4	10.3	15.5	22.7	33.0	
Caledonia No. 2	49*	107	4.7	6.5	9.3	13.1	15.0	17.8	34.6	

*Community BNI estimated from the reported BNI of general neighbourhood

† Basic Needs Index-Measure of Poverty in Community

Min. = Ministry Assigned School UnP = Student unplaced.

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

Comparing the two periods (1995–2000 and 2001–2005), it was apparent that although the situation had improved in Port of Spain and Environs and St. George East in terms of the number of students obtaining their first choice school, there were still notable deficiencies in the period 2001–2005. As shown, fewer students received choices 2 to 6 in these education districts. The impact of this finding is significant because these divisions have the greatest number of eligible students in the eleven-plus. As a consequence, 30.1% of the students in Port of Spain and Environs and 24.7% in St. George East were placed by the MOE, even with six available choices. The lowest number of students assigned to schools outside the choice list was found in the South Eastern Education Division.

Table 9 provides data on the numbers of students receiving their choices across six communities located in the Diego Martin and San Juan-Laventille administrative regions. Both regions fall within the educational district known as Port of Spain and Environs. The Basic Needs Index (BNI) was used to classify each district in terms of economic status (Kairi Consultants, 2007). As shown, outcomes varied sharply, with the more disadvantaged regions reporting low numbers receiving their first choice (Range = 4.4% to 7.6%) for both time periods. Communities with a high BNI (low deprivation) all reported relatively high percentages receiving their first choice (Range = 32.9% to 71.0%). Interestingly, of the six listed communities, the disadvantaged communities like Beetham also reported the highest number of candidates. At the same time, the numbers of students assigned by the MOE and those not receiving a school during the period 1995–2000 were also high.

Discussion

This study explored the issue of family choice of secondary school in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago using a mixed method approach. System-level functioning was investigated using a quantitative descriptive study of 279,749 decisions over a period of 10 years and two different administrations of the eleven-plus examination (176,002 family decisions for 1995–2000 and 103,902 decisions for the period 2001–2005). This amounted to a total of 1,327,420 choices analysed for the secondary schools (704,008 for 1995–2000 and 623,412 for 2001–2005). During the period 2006–2007, a small-scale qualitative study was conducted among parents and children using three schools in Trinidad and one school in Tobago to provide insight into the construction of school choice among students and parents. The qualitative study was

designed to illuminate, elaborate, and validate key issues identified in the system-level quantitative study. This discussion section seeks to integrate findings from both data sources.

Trinidad and Tobago has operated an education market in which there is competition between different types of secondary schools. These different school types vary by governance, years of schooling provided, and age built (London, 1991). The government-assisted schools in the secondary sector were older and many were more highly valued than the newly built government schools. The government-assisted schools were run by the various religious denominations. The systematic open enrolment system operated at the transition to secondary schools in a formalized component of the selection and placement system at eleven-plus. There are few restrictions as to individual choice so that, in theory, a student in the furthest part of the island can gain access to a highly valued school in the urban areas. In reality, there were specific markets or circuits of schooling created by the accessibility of highly valued schools to students from all areas.

Most of the highly valued schools were of the denominational type. However, the top 10 ranking included the oldest government school, Queen's Royal College. The market appeared relatively dynamic so that some newly created schools could become highly attractive to consumers in a short time. Examples of this dynamism were seen in the case of BAHS East in the quantitative analysis and Speyside High School in the qualitative analysis. The apparent dynamism of the market suggests that once a school is perceived as a quality product, it could quickly position itself within the education market. This was also evident in the case of the most recently built high schools such as Cunupia and Waterloo built under the SEMP loan. Families found this product more attractive than the new sector junior secondary school. The question seems to be, though: How do we determine what factors contribute to consumers placing a high value on the product? The data from the focus group interviews with parents and children suggested that families most valued schools which contributed to the development of the child academically and socially. While different families placed different emphases on the two areas, the ultimate focus was on the protection of the child from physical, academic, and emotional harm. Academic prestige was important for first choice schools, but parents increasingly weighed other factors in the lower choices.

The mechanism of making choices involved both the demonizing and valorizing of schools within the circuit. In many cases, demonizing of some schools led to rejection and, in some cases, this process appeared to be the dominant factor (Croft, 2004). However, in many other instances,

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

valorization was also a significant factor. Most families placed the highest value on traditional denominational schools and this valuation remained relatively stable in the absence of formal information. The valuing of schools was related to personal consumer values of safety, security, and growth. Government new sector schools rarely provided information about the quality of education offered, and hence were more often demonized and some families even considered them as spoilers in the education process. Such demonization led to rejection of these schools as worthy agents of socialization and education for young ones in the family. Information about schools in the system was relatively limited so that even when schools were valorized, families often relied on anecdotal accounts. It might be that many decisions, then, were made on the basis of inaccurate information. This lack of information coupled with the nature of the system maintained the hegemony of the traditional schools. So that while there was some dynamism and fluidity in the education market, the traditional product retained the highest value.

Multiple factors guided the decision-making process and no one attribute, including religion, was deemed critically important. Indeed, both the quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that not all families valued religion as an important attribute governing their choice of school. It appeared that some groups (those that did not have their own schools) were quite prepared to choose government schools. It might be that these groups perceived a level of discrimination in the system. While, historically, denominational schools are accepted by all members of the society, the discourse surrounding *Sumayyah Mohammed v Board of Management of Holy Name Convent Secondary School* (1994) suggests that there were multiple tensions in this plural society as upsurging and traditional religions vied for support and popularity (Mahabir, 2004). It may be that government schools provide the best solution to developing a culture of true inclusion in line with stated constitutional guarantees.

A notable finding was that it was families who made choices and not just parents. In many instances children had considerable say in determining their fate. In some instances parents negotiated with children, and in other instances children were allowed to choose within a set of parameters. Teachers and other members of the extended family could also play a significant role in guiding families in the choice-making process. The role of a teacher in this instance could be pivotal since some teachers understood how the choice system operated and hence their advice could be critical. Whether or not other members of the family had a say depended upon the dynamics and culture of the family. In some instances, since the mother had the role of protector and

Jerome De Lisle et al.

educator, much was left to her, with the father on occasion as background guard of the moral and value component.

Educational Implications

There were many nuances involved in the choice process within Trinidad and Tobago. For example, it appeared that families made very different decisions for males and females based on differential valuing of school attributes. Thus gender was interwoven into the mechanism of choosing schools (George, 2007; Stambach & David, 2005). It may not at all be possible to develop a unified school choice policy agenda which will ensure equity and fairness until consumers become convinced that most schools can deliver the expected outcomes. Once the school system is highly differentiated, some parents and children will choose primarily by rejecting certain schools. As London (1994) has suggested, new sector and government schools might have to better market themselves. The quantitative data suggest that the market is dynamic and fluid enough to allow quick recognition of excellence. For example, a school with the proven quality of BAHS East was quickly accepted by consumers as having high value or prestige. Informing and involving parents must begin at the MOE level and filter down to individual primary and secondary schools under a system of school-based management.

The MOE's decision to reduce the number of choices from six to four was an interesting one. The data suggested that the fifth and sixth choice had little value for many respondents but not for all. There were different circuits of schooling and these lower choices were critical in some of the areas where placement was difficult, such as in Caroni and St. George East. The fifth and sixth choices were also important for female candidates, as revealed in Table 4. For these reasons, it seems that the MOE might wish to reflect on the fairness of reverting to four available choices, especially in districts where there are many available schools. In any case, it is better to allow families to choose rather than to impose a choice as occurs when the choice is four. The MOE should certainly avoid any attempt to regulate choice until more data are available on functioning and outcomes associated with the particular choice system in Trinidad and Tobago. In any case, it is apparent that increasing choice opportunities is a growing educational trend that may enhance some outcomes if structured right.

In the end, as shown by the quantitative data, few students obtained their first choice anyway. Students from disadvantaged communities were very unlikely to be placed in any of their four choices, which raised general questions of fairness and equity. These concerns are not easily

When Choosing Might Mean Losing

addressed as Trinidad and Tobago continues to grapple with persistent achievement gaps in both the primary and secondary sectors. Such inequity is not directly related to the choice system alone but more directly to the great differences between schools. The current system of rules for parental choice and the differentiated systems of schools may not allow the majority of students to be winners, both in terms of making efficient decisions and in receiving their desired outcome. In the end, then, both students and schools may be losing in this unique system of choice.

Notes

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Notes on Contributors

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