

SALISES 22ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

THEME: RE-IMAGINING DEVELOPMENT FOR SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

(SIDS): POST-PANDEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

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Title of Research Paper:

**Transforming the *illiteracy of the Imagination*:
Covid 19 instability and its impact on the
traditional face-to-face classroom in the Caribbean
region.**

Transforming the *illiteracy of the Imagination*: Covid 19 instability and its impact on the traditional face-to-face classroom in the Caribbean region.





Online Teacher Training

Continuous Professional Development

Anytime. Anywhere.

OBJECTIVES

- This presentation demonstrates that secondary school teachers in the Caribbean region must experience a transformation of the illiteracy of the imagination to the literacy of the imagination in order to generate a sustainable online learning environment for diverse learners during the covid-19 pandemic.
- This presentation will also illustrate that continuous online teacher training to promote the acquisition of mastery online-teaching skills is central to a transformation of the illiteracy of the imagination to the literacy of the imagination.

THE ILLITERACY OF THE IMAGINATION



Wilson Harris (24th March, 1921- 8th March 2018).
Guyanese/British writer and theorist.

- The “illiteracy of the imagination” is a concept developed by Wilson Harris, the Caribbean fiction writer and theorist (Harris, “Literacy and the Imagination-A Talk” 77).

Notable fictional works:

- *The Guyana Quartet*,
- *The Carnival Trilogy*, *Jonestown*

Notable theoretical essays:

- “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas”
- “The Absent Presence: The Caribbean, Central and South America”
- “Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization”

The illiteracy of the imagination

- **Wilson Harris:** many competent individuals experience an “illiteracy of the imagination” since they tend to operate within a “uniform function” (“Literacy” 77).
- Individuals who are locked within a “uniform kind of frame” conceive that it is “unnecessary to extend themselves outside of that kind of function” (“Literacy” 78).
- Subsequently, their inability to break with such rigid paradigm serves only to eclipse a conception of themselves as “agents within a world which needed to be revised fundamentally” (“Literacy” p.78).



The Caribbean Context and the illiteracy of the imagination

- Secondary school teachers in the Caribbean region may have experienced such *illiteracy of the imagination* at the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Such educators had previously operated within a 'uniform function' of face-to-face teaching and may have felt a "degree of uneasiness to extend themselves outside of that kind of function" (Harris, 1999, p.78) as they transitioned to online heterogeneous classrooms.

"In Jamaica, it is estimated that a total of 31 656 teachers are affected by COVID-19, of which 9 384 are in pre-school, 7233 in primary, 11798 in secondary and 3241 in tertiary education.

An estimated 627 000 learners have been impacted by the school closures due to the pandemic, with the hardest hit being students at the secondary level, followed by those at the primary level.

For many students, distance learning was a challenge during the crisis, especially for those living in remote areas. These include little or no connectivity, lack of access to online educational assessment equipment and the unwillingness of teachers to move from traditional classroom teaching to online environments"

(UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean 2020)

Lack inclusive education pedagogical skills represented a major difficulty of accommodating diverse learning styles in the online secondary school classroom during the Covid 19 pandemic

- **Inclusive Education of Seamless Education Project Report 2008- “45% teachers in Trinidad and Tobago had minimum knowledge of teaching in a diverse or inclusive classroom.... Teachers also lack other skills of inclusive education pedagogy.”**
- **The lack of such pedagogical skills was translated into significant proportions in 2020 as teachers in Trinidad and Tobago not only had to abruptly change their complacent face- to-face teaching methods but also accommodate students’ existing diverse learning styles in synchronous and asynchronous online modes of learning.**

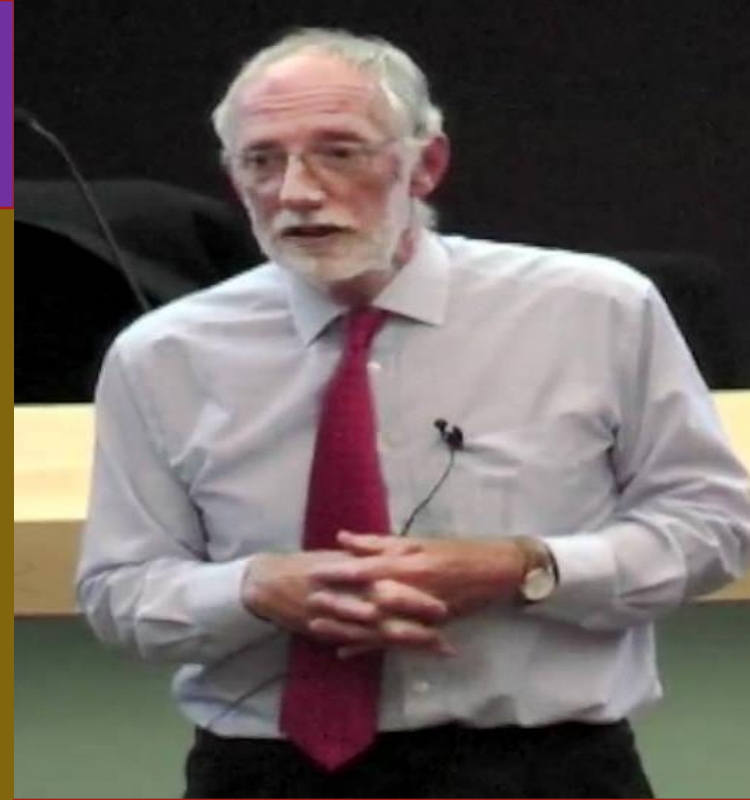


“UNESCO aims to help to safeguard inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”

**-Katherine Grigsby,
Director and
Representative,
UNESCO Cluster Office
for the Caribbean,
2005**

A lack of resources to implement collaborative online learning programmes for diverse students?

- **Many teachers in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean may hold the perspective that there currently exists a lack of resources to implement collaborative online learning programmes for diverse students.**
- **However, teachers must specify the resources and strategies for any action plan.**
- **The need to specify stakeholders who can offer expert assistance is essential to the creation of an online classroom that caters for diverse learning styles.**



Graham Gibbs notes in *Learning by Doing* (2010) that a teacher should identify individuals who can offer support and guidance in order to generate effective student-centred classrooms.

Training in the use of the online technology and pedagogy = a successful online classroom

- A teacher's initial and stimulating experience of online teaching may be eclipsed by his or her dominant teaching style.
- Such face-to-face teachers, therefore have a tendency to overlook and misread the urgency to translate their good teaching skills into the online environment.
- In order to remedy such a situation, such teachers should seek the assistance of the human resource personnel to develop continuous online teacher training that will promote the acquisition of mastery online-teaching skills.
- Head of Department, the Vice-Principal, the Curriculum Officer and the Information Technology Technician



"The effectiveness of distance learning strategies during the Covid 19 pandemic depends on the preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate online learning"

UNESCO Educational Sector
(2020)

SCHOOL PERSONNEL CAN OFFER TRAINING TO ENHANCE A TEACHER'S REAL-TIME ONLINE TEACHING PRACTICE

A teacher of a particular subject area at the secondary school level, can acquire the skill to use the visual and aural features of Microsoft Teams to easily guide and demonstrate a particular activity such as the intricate method of drawing a complex diagram to kinesthetic learners.



Not only for the visual and aural learners but also for the read/write, kinesthetic and multimodal learners

The Curriculum Officer, the Vice Principal, the Head of Department and the school's IT technician can collaborate and develop training sessions on the use of synchronous technologies to foster critical thinking skills among students with different learning styles.

The teacher can be trained to use the synchronous audio and visual technologies such as Microsoft Teams and BlackBoard

The teacher can use the text feature of Microsoft Teams to accommodate the read/write learners through collaborative online discussions about the complexity of developing flow charts.



This scenario therefore indicates how the visual and audio features of various e-learning tools can accommodate multiple learning styles.

THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP TO UNTRAINED TEACHERS

- Collegial mentorship by school personnel can enable the smooth transition from a face- to-face classroom to an online mode.

“A mentor is the most significant influence on the student-teacher’s professional development.”

-Elliot and Calderhead (1994).

- Such training will also motivate many teachers to translate their effective presence in the conventional face-to-face classroom to an online mode of learning.
- The teacher’s collaboration with other school personnel will not only foster team-building but also concretize the teacher’s confidence in the school’s human resources that was never sensed before.



CONCLUSION

- **All secondary school students need to be provided with the experience of a synchronous virtual online classroom that accommodates their different learning styles.**
- **Above all, teachers need to discover their hidden potential of online teaching through continuous collaboration with other school personnel.**
- **If such a dynamic linkage is not established, their role and function in the online classroom may give way to the recurring and implacable teacher-centred logic.**
- **An enshrined and finite teacher-centred logic which would prevent the transformation of the *illiteracy to the literacy of the imagination*.**

CONCLUSION

“COVID-19 offers opportunities to reimagine education, accelerate changes in teaching and learning, and strengthen the resilience of Jamaican education system to respond to the immediate challenges of safely reopening schools, and positions them to better cope with future crises. Supporting the teaching profession and enhancing readiness of teachers in online and blended teaching, is a key entry point to address the learning crisis and minimize losses to learning, especially amongst vulnerable learners and youth.”

— Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist for Education, UNESCO

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