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University
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Unleash the Silent Scream

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

The degree of Doctor of Education

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Social Sciences

Department: School of Education

July 2016

**Unleash the Silent Scream - Female Voices Crying from the
Classroom: Representing the stories of Four Trinbagonian
Female Primary Schoolteachers**

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Dedication

*This work is dedicated to my mother Ursula Edwina Stephens- Forteau
(deceased) who was my first and best teacher.*

Acknowledgements

This work could not have come to a successful conclusion without the assistance and input from several sources. Firstly, I thank the Almighty God, my creator, my strength and my Muse. I thank my husband Lionel Bertrand Jaikaransingh who was the impetus for my beginning and ending this work. I also thank my participants who generously gave of their time to relate their stories and who also encouraged me to finish the work. A very special thanks go to my sister Emelia Forteau who was my constant moral and spiritual support throughout the journey. My appreciation to my brother- in -law Kenneth Jaikaransingh who allowed me to peruse his library and to borrow from his treasured books. Special thanks also go to my supervisor Professor Patricia Sikes who offered support, encouragement and insightful critique and was at times the grain of sand that the oyster uses to create the precious pearl.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACP:	Associate of College of Preceptors
A-Level:	Advanced Level
AT1:	Assistant Teacher 1
AT11:	Assistant Teacher 11
AT111:	Assistant Teacher 111
ATP1:	Assistant Teacher Primary One
B.Ed.:	Bachelor of Education
BWEE:	British West Indies Airways
CUC:	Caribbean Union College
CXC:	Caribbean Examinations Council
CE:	Common Entrance
CEE:	Common Entrance Examinations
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
Ed. D:	Doctor of Education
GOTT:	The Government of Trinidad and Tobago
GCE: A' Level:	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
GCE O'Level:	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level

GCSE:	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTC:	Government Teachers Training College
HOD:	Head of Department
JA:	Junior Achievement
JATT:	Junior Achievement of Trinidad and Tobago
M.Ed.:	Master of Education
MEN:	Men in Education Network
MOE:	Ministry of Education
MTC:	Mausica Training College
NAPS:	Naparima Girls' College
<i>No pg. no.:</i>	no page number
O-Levels :	Ordinary Level
OAS:	Organization of American States
OJT:	On the Job Trainee
PE:	Physical Education
PHD:	Doctor of Philosophy
PNM:	People's National Movement

Para:	paragraph
POSTC:	Port of Spain Teachers' Training College
SEA:	Secondary Entry Assessment
STAR :	School Teachers Action Research
TNT:	Trinidad and Tobago
TTUTA:	Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association
TT:	Trinidad and Tobago
TP:	Teaching Practice
Trinbago:	Trinidad and Tobago
Trinbagonian:	A citizen of Trinidad and Tobago
TTDs:	Trinidad and Tobago dollars
UK:	United Kingdom
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UOS:	University of Sheffield
USA:	United States of America

UTT:	University of Trinidad and Tobago
UWI:	University of the West Indies
VTC:	Valsayn Teachers' Training College

Declaration and Disclaimer

I, Beulah Forteau-Jaikaransingh, confirm that the work that I have presented as my thesis is entirely my own. All references to, quotations from, and analysis or discussion of the work of others have been correctly acknowledged within the work in accordance with ethical principles and guidelines for the production of a doctoral thesis.

Beulah Forteau-Jaikaransingh

Abstract

In a world where the teacher's voice is often ignored, this study focuses on the narratives of four Trinbagonian female primary school teachers. Using an interpretive (qualitative) epistemological perspective, I employ a life history methodology with narratives and poetry inquiries as part of the data collection, analysis and representation process. I use the theoretical lenses of feminism and postcolonialism to deconstruct the narratives. Through the lenses of feminism, the narratives reveal how the teachers' identities, philosophies and pedagogies were shaped by feminine influences. Through the lenses of postcolonialism, they disclose how colonial factors are connected to the attitudes and behaviours in our post-colonial educational spaces. As the researcher, who was once herself a primary school teacher, I suggest that teachers can de-colonise their educational spaces through Freire's (1973;1985) concept of 'conscientisation'; that is, becoming aware that they have the power to transform their own lives, and those of their pupils/students. They can achieve such transformation by understanding the role that their colonial, historical past played in the development of present educational policies and practices. They should also comprehend how broader forces such as globalisation and other international interferences factor into the agencies that seek to keep them silent. I also submit that self-transformation must advance to philosophical and pedagogical changes and a willingness to break from a colonial stranglehold that makes them outwardly reticent while they scream inwardly.

Chapter One

Introduction

Educational studies which re-assert the importance of the teacher's voice are particularly valuable in building a knowledgeable counter-culture to stand against some of the cruder simplicities of political and 'managerial' views of schooling. (Goodson, 1992:3).

The notion of female, feminine, and the various roles women play in cultures have always fascinated philosophers and scholars serving as a topic of intellectual intercourse (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyde, 2007:2).

Scream

*Unwanted, rejected
Raped, robbed
Of ideas, of zeal, of will,
Waiting to exhale,
Wanting to explode.
Pain...physical,
Emotional, psychological
Pensive reflections
On what remains
And causes me to remain.
Longing for permanence?
Lassitude, lethargy,
Depression, despondence...
Scream- the silent scream
S c r e a m!
Thoughts fill my mind
Soliloquizing
Words, words, words
Senseless, voiceless words.*

A mask,

A blank stare.

Please someone...anyone

Pull me back.

Insanity is near.

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My Interest

In this work, I use a life history approach to study teachers' work lives. My enthusiasm for this approach was born out of my lifework experiences as a teacher for almost forty years in public schools controlled by the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago. As I reflect on that life, I recall that my voice was absent from the discussions on the educational policies that were affecting my teaching philosophy and pedagogy. There was, however, persistent criticism of and lack of appreciation for teachers by system administrators, and other members of society. During my tenure, I had heard many teachers at various times complain about their frustrations with the education system. I had also noted that teachers, especially within primary schools, were mainly women. Knowing that females have issues that are peculiar to them, I felt that they could bring a new perspective to the debate on education. I decided that part of my retirement should be spent on allowing female teachers to explicate some of the issues that are endemic in their work lives. This first chapter will comprise:

- Aim of the study
- Structure of the thesis
- Research design
- Context –Cultural, Historical and Educational
- Significance of the study
- Positionality
- Personal Life story

Aim of the Study

The aims of the study were to listen to, record and analyse the life work experiences of four female Trinbagonian primary school teachers at different stages of the profession. At the beginning of the study, one teacher was early in her career with just five years' experience. One was in the middle of hers and, should she remain in the profession, had another nineteen years of service. The other two had been retired for four and two years respectively.

Structure of Thesis

The work is divided into eight chapters. This Chapter One contains the previous introduction and the aims of the study. Hereafter, there is the research design; a historical, cultural and educational context for understanding the narratives; the significance of the research; and my positionality with regards to the work. The chapter ends with my life story. In Chapter Two, I present a two part literature review. The first part speaks about educational policies and their effects on teachers. It also examines the stress factors that militate against their life and work. A second part sheds light on postcolonialism and feminism- the theoretical frameworks used in the analysis of the participants' narratives. In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology and give a detailed explanation of the research design. In Chapters Four to Seven, I present the participants' stories. Chapter Eight deals with the analysis and discussion of those stories.

Research Design

I used the life history approach within an interpretative/ constructive paradigm because that approach has been tried and proven to be an excellent methodology that allows participants to use their own voice to explain their realities (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Chattopadhyay & Seddon, 2002; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Cole, 2009). The life stories of the teachers are represented as narratives while some of their feelings and issues are expressed as poetry. I sought to offer anonymity to the participants, especially to those who are still practising and felt that they could face victimisation for discussing and sharing some experiences. There were some institutions that I have

made no effort to disguise as this would be impossible in a small nation state. In the following section, I give a brief version of the history of Trinidad and Tobago; and a synopsis of its culture and of its education system. These will serve as the key to understand aspects of the teachers' stories since, "no educational practice takes place in a vacuum, only in a real context-historical, economic, political..." (Freire, 1985: 12). Additionally, it is felt that:

In order for the reader to understand an individual story, the context within which it is told, together with how it is recounted, has to be foregrounded and richly described (Trahar, 2013: 302).

Context

Brief History of Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island state situated farthest south in the Caribbean chain of islands. The islands were first inhabited by Amerindians. Trinidad, the larger of the islands, was conquered in 1498 by the Spanish who after almost annihilating the native Indian population (Williams, 1962) brought black African slaves to the island (Williams, 1962; Campbell, 1992: 1; Noel, 2009). After nearly three centuries, French settlers were allowed onto the island for agricultural purposes. The island was subsequently captured by the British who intensified the practice of chattel slavery. Tobago's relationship with Trinidad began in 1884 (Williams, 1962; Campbell, 1992). Over a period of time, apart from its original peoples, the island was populated by the French, the Dutch and the British. Under British rule, African slaves were also brought to Tobago to work on sugar cane plantations. When the lucrative sugar business collapsed, Britain made it a ward of Trinidad. The islands have since then been referred to as Trinidad and Tobago (Campbell, 1992). When the practice of chattel slavery was abolished, workers from India, China and the Middle East were brought in to fill the need for labour. This made Trinidad and Tobago, especially the island of Trinidad, the heterogeneous nation that it is today. Trinidad and Tobago remained a British Crown Colony until 1956; gained its independence in 1962 and adopted a Republican constitution within the Commonwealth of Nations in 1976

(Williams, 1962; Campbell, 1992: 1; Noel, 2009). The state now functions on an oil and gas based economy.

Culture of Trinidad and Tobago

The culture of Trinidad and Tobago can be identified in the language, religion, music, customs and celebrations; the stories that the people tell and lifestyle that they live. This nation state is often called TT, TNT or Trinbago. The citizens are sometimes referred to as Trinis or Trinbagonians. Furthermore to differentiate ethnicity, citizens refer to the two main groups as Indo Trinidadian and Afro Trinidadian. Those of European ancestry and with a fairer skin tone are referred to, by some, as Trinidad White. The official language is English but citizens speak a type of vernacular. However, in their daily social interactions, they frequently switch between it and some form of the Standard English (Burnham, 2008). Examples of this language will be seen in the narratives in this thesis.

Trinbagonians are a fun loving people and are fond of meeting and partying together. These activities are called ‘liming’ and can take place on the beach, a riverside, or at someone’s home, among other places. However, the biggest party is Carnival. Held for two days every year, it is a time when many citizens take to the streets for two days of wild abandonment. They dance to the calypso and soca music played by steel bands and Disc Jockeys on music trucks. The main songs of Carnival are the calypsos and they play an important role in the culture of the nation. The calypsonians use this time to give voice to the frustrations of the society. They become akin to African griots who tell society’s stories and make biting satirical commentaries on the political and social issues confronting the nation. The rest of the society is mainly silent having emerged from a British colonial past and having been schooled to be subservient under the guise of being respectful. Every day at school, children recite a pledge which states in part, “I will honour my parents, my teachers, my leaders and my elders and *those in authority*” (my emphasis). Ways of showing honour and respect include greetings of ‘good morning’, ‘good afternoon’ and ‘good evening’ and being silent when in the presence of those considered ‘betters’. In addition, many Trinbagonians are religious. They regularly attend their churches,

mosques and temples, where they are also taught that leaders are not to be questioned. For example, Christians are admonished from Judeo/Christian Holy Scriptures that speaking out will bring divine retribution upon the perpetrators (King James Version, Numbers 12:1-10; Romans 13:1, 2). Islam teaches much the same. The Holy Quran states “O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey His Messenger and those who are in authority over you” (Ch.4: V.60).

History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago

Education in Trinidad and Tobago was a requirement of the emancipation settlement made with Britain (Campbell, 1992: 7). Many scholars and historians have addressed the purposes for this measure. The education was supposed to be elementary in the sense of rudimentary, not first (Braithwaite, 1991: 23). It was intended to make the different languages of the citizens cohesive with that of Britain (London, 2002; Williams, 1962). It was meant to evangelise slaves in the dominant Christian beliefs which demanded obedience to those in authority (Gordon, 1963: 1). It was used to socialise the slaves into what was perceived to be the better value system and culture of the former masters (Reddock, 1994: 48). In fact, Lavia (2007: 288) sums it up succinctly in the following statement:

An imposed curriculum as a manifestation of imperialist ideology, sought to ensure that the education of ‘young colonials’ involved mastery of colonial values and ways of being, thereby limiting, excising and ignoring any semblance of anything that might perhaps be considered as emerging from the historical and social truth of the colonized.

It was birthed and nurtured after the bureaucratic principles of the plantations (Reddock, 1994: 48; George & Quamina- Aiyejina, 2003: viii; Bristol, 2008) which were based on a hierarchical structure of management, social oppression, discrimination and subservience (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2002). It incorporated practises of the British Education System such as promoting and institutionalising the corporal punishment of children (Pinheiro, 2012: 3). In addition, the system was designed to create the foundation of power and control to give the state the legitimacy to amass the capital that would represent the power elites (London, 2002: 56).

During the dying years of colonialism, education was conceived as a way of giving the non-white population the chance for upward mobility (Burnham, 2008: 222). In 1945, the government decreed that primary education should be mandatory in Trinidad & Tobago and by 1957, ninety-one percent (91%) of primary school age children were in schools (Burnham, 2008: 223). On the other hand, secondary schools were few. In 1949, there was one (1) government secondary and nine (9) government-assisted denominational secondary schools (Colony of Trinidad & Tobago, Education Department 1983 [1949]: 16) in Burnham, 2008: 224). Consequently, there was stiff competition for entry. The portals were through examination or through exorbitant fees. This meant that only the very “bright” or children of civil servants, businessmen and expatriates, often of fair skin, could attend (Braithwaite, 1991; Burnham, 2008: 225). Burnham (2008: 234-237) and Campbell (1997: 81-86; 99; 104) provide us with an understanding of the role of denominational schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The following paragraph draws from research done by these two scholars.

After the People’s National Movement (PNM) government came into power in 1956, it commissioned a review of the education system. The Maurice Report, named after the commissioner Hamilton Maurice, stated that even though denominational schools were contributing to education, they were also exacerbating the already stratified nature of the system. The report advocated for one that was “unitary and secularized ... financed and controlled by the government”. In spite of this, in 1960, the government and the Catholic School Board on behalf of other denominational school boards, negotiated a “Concordat”. This agreement guaranteed that denominational education would continue with certain conditions. Denominational schools would get government financial assistance while being responsible for their own maintenance and equipment. They would keep ownership for their lands and primary schools could be established with government permission. However, new secondary ones could only be instituted by government and both primary and secondary schools had to be monitored by government school supervisors. Most significant was the fact that principals of denominational schools would have the right to assign up to 20 percent of their school places as they saw fit, once the pupils had passed the national Common Entrance Examination.

New education policies which saw improvement in the secondary school system were started in the 1950's. These are of special significance to the teachers represented in this research, chiefly because the policies benefitted girls. In 1957, there were only two (2) government secondary schools in which there were one hundred and four (104) girls to the six hundred and ninety-two (692) boys (Trinidad & Tobago, Education Department, 1963: 52 in Burnham 2008). New coeducational schools were being built and there was accommodation for a greater number of girls (Campbell, 1997: 171). Even so, places in secondary schools were limited. Pupils were allowed two chances to write the Common Entrance Examination. If they failed at both tries, they had the options of going into the post-primary level of the primary school; attending private secondary schools if their parents could afford it or leaving school entirely (George & Quamina- Aiyejina, 2003: 6). Entering the post primary level afforded another opportunity to enter secondary school. After two years, pupils would sit a School Leaving Certificate Examination. If they were successful with high enough grades, they were placed in Form Two (2) of a secondary school (George & Quamina- Aiyejina, 2003: 7).

Primary Schools

Teacher Training. According to statistical data, in 2010, eighty-eight per cent (88%) of primary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago had been trained (UNESCO, special data collection for the Education for All Initiative, 2011). 'Training' means that teachers would have spent two years in a Teachers' Training College and had been deemed successful enough to receive a Teachers' Diploma. This had not always been the case. Between 1834 and 1870, teachers were inadequately educated and mostly untrained (Campbell, 1996/97: 58). It was felt that primary school teachers could be taught by the instructions and examples of headmasters [sic] (Braithwaite, 1991: 103). Bright primary school pupils were chosen to become teacher trainees or monitors as they were called (Campbell, 1996/97: 61; Burnham, 2008: 228).

When the monitor system came to an end in 1959 into the 1960s, (Campbell, 1997: 147; Braithwaite, 1991: 32) a person with any four passes at General Certificate of Education (GCE) O' Levels would be accepted into the primary school system as an

Assistant Teacher 1(AT1). Someone with five or more O' Levels would qualify as an Assistant Teacher 2(AT2) and one with A' Levels would merit Assistant Teacher 3(AT3) status. In 1985, entrants were required to have five subjects at CXC and /or GCE O' Level which should include English Language, Mathematics and a Science subject (George & Quamina- Aiyejina, 2003: 13). In 1993, the Ministry of Education started an On the Job Training (OJT) programme to encourage young people with CXC/GCE O' Levels and GCE A' Levels to think about teaching as a career (George & Quamina- Aiyejina, 2003: 13). During a 9 or 10 months period, they were instructed in the Foundations of Education, the Teaching of Reading, and the Teaching of Mathematics. They were then placed in schools to be monitored by principals and mentored by trained teachers. After the training programme was ended, trainees were interviewed and if they were successful were offered positions in schools as Assistant Teachers (George & Quamina- Aiyejina, *ibid*). After a period of service and as space became available, all assistant teachers would be admitted into training college for two years of in-service training.

Teacher Training Institutions. Campbell (1992; 1997) informs that over time, as the need for trained teachers arose, there had been the construction of the Government Training College (GTC), the Port of Spain Teachers' College (POSTC), and the Mausica Teachers' College (MTC). There were also three denominational training colleges. In the 1970s, government merged all colleges (except CUC- a Seventh Day Adventist American University affiliated training college) into two entities. Corinth Teachers' College in the south and Valsayn Teachers' College (VTC) in the east were thus established. Nevertheless, even though there had been calls for training reforms to correspond with the changing educational system, the model for training remained largely unchanged between 1956 and 1981 (Campbell, 1997). There were persistent complaints about the imbalance between teachers' knowledge and genuine professional training (Campbell, 1997). Suggestions were made to replace evaluation of teachers and concentrate on collaborative assistance during the practice sessions. There was also a call to discontinue the practice of selecting un-trained university graduates to be teachers in teachers' training colleges.

During the late twentieth and into the twenty first century the trends of globalisation put pressure on the government to improve the professional quality of its teachers. The government reviewed its programmes especially after signing the ‘Education for All in the Americas’ initiatives in 2004 in Domingo, Dominican Republic. Presently, entry to teaching is through a pre-service four year Bachelor of Science in Education programme for primary and secondary schools. The programme is supervised by the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). It also provides an evening and vacation programme for in-service teachers with Teachers’ Diplomas to upgrade their qualification to a degree level (University of Trinidad and Tobago, 2014). To date, there has been no formal assessment of the new degree programme at UTT but Betty Rohlehr’s (2012) unpublished Ed. D. thesis gives us some insights into what is happening there. Her data, collected from staff and students, suggests that there is need for further restructuring of the teacher training programme. She (*ibid*) points to several issues including bureaucratic mishandling of this educational change; undemocratic management style and disgruntled, unmotivated staff and students.

Status of Primary Schools. Primary schools have always been treated as the “Cinderella” of the education system. Campbell, (1997: 143) asserts that the “most obvious thing about primary education was its utter subordination to secondary education”. The colonial teaching service itself was fragmented between primary and secondary teachers (Burnham, 2008: 227). Burnham (*ibid*) suggests that teaching vacancies in primary schools were easily filled because the quality was not high. He cites the low salaries; the standards of selection for these jobs; the delays in teacher training; nepotism in the system of transfers and promotions; and the unsatisfactory working conditions as reasons for the subordination (*ibid*). Additionally, Burnham (*ibid*: 229) advances that in the fifties, primary schools were plagued by the autocratic leadership of principals and educational boards. Consequently, as Campbell (1996: 68) posits, secondary school graduates would never condescend to teach in primary schools except if in dire straits.

The “Cinderella” status was also seen in other aspects of the schools. For example, the education reforms of 1956 required the building of new schools because there were not enough and those already functioning were badly in need of repairs

(Campbell, 1997: 143). Nevertheless, in spite of the needs, the primary system got less funding than secondary schools (Campbell, *ibid*). Burnham (2008: 234) cites a 1964 UNESCO planning report which listed some of the problems affecting the primary school sector as: functioning in hall type inappropriate buildings; overcrowding; inadequate or inappropriate text books; inadequate equipment, aids and supplies; inadequate facilities for practical subject teaching and activity learning procedures. Ten years later, primary schools were still lacking. Campbell (1997: 145) speaks about the lack of resources in implementing a new Primary School Syllabus in 1975 and mentions, among other things, the lack of teaching materials, equipment and facilities to teach the syllabi.

Women in Primary Schools. In the 1950s, there was an increase of immigrants from the smaller Caribbean islands to Trinbago causing a population increase and a resultant need for teachers (Campbell, 1997: 170). This need was filled by women and this influx can be considered the beginning of the feminisation of Trinbagonian schools (*ibid*). Later in the 1970s, it was compounded when there was an oil boom and men moved into the lucrative employment opportunities of the oilfields (*ibid*). However, Campbell (1996: 235-236) also advances that the presence of girls in post emancipation primary schools had always guaranteed a place for female teachers. He (*ibid*) claims that because the West Indies was infamous for “sexual immorality” during slavery, women were considered protection for girls against male teachers and adolescent boys. They were also seen as surrogate mothers for infants (*ibid*) and since they were paid less than men (Campbell, 1997: 171), they were good economic value. Teaching was seen as a job for spinsters (Campbell, 1996: 236) and so, borrowing from British practice, they were expelled from service if they got married (Campbell, 1997: 171). To add to this discrimination, expulsion meant loss of both pension and gratuities (*ibid*). In 1946, these issues became the concern of female teacher lobbyists who while working in groups such as the Teachers’ Economic and Cultural Association and the People’s Education Movement, used their influence to see an end to those unfair practices (*ibid*).

Significance of Research

One of the most salient features of the current period is the way that for the first time for many centuries complete narrative control seems to be in the hands of corporate elites (Goodson, 2011:x).

Life history has been used by educational researchers in other geographical contexts to provide analyses of teachers' practice (See for e.g. Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). This research is significant in its attempt to be among the few in a Caribbean context to use it as a methodology to explore teachers' explanations of their realities. It seeks to remove "complete narrative control" (Goodson, 2011: x) from the mouths of politicians, education policy makers, system administrators and other dominant ones in society. It is an effort to encourage other Caribbean educational researchers to consider life history, using a narrative approach, as a way to allow teachers to explain the various issues that affect them as they traverse the sometimes rough terrain of educating in a postcolonial environment. However, I am expecting that the research will be particularly significant with respect to female teachers. Since schools are feminised, it is important to bring to centre stage the numerous issues facing female teachers. These participants' stories could have special resonance with other females who could benefit from the vast store of pedagogical, organisational and situational knowledge that they have amassed during their careers (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009: 13).

Positionality

When researchers are deciding what research methods to adopt they will inevitably be influenced by their underlying ontological and epistemological positions. This in turn will be influenced by their values... (Greenbank 2003:792).

The above quotation by Greenbank (2003) resounds with me. This study is influenced by the way I see the world, the way I seek knowledge and by my store of values. I make no claim to objectivity. Therefore, whereas I am writing as an academic researcher, I also write as a person whose schooling and education spanned a period in colonial through to independent Trinidad and Tobago. I write as one who has

inculcated the culture and values of a heterogeneous society that has been shaped by its colonial past; as one who has become conscious of and is critical of the negative ramifications of that past. I write as a female teacher whose life has been shaped by the many female influences in her life and as a retired primary school teacher who has been connected to the education system that she is researching. I write as one who has many un-resolved issues and un-answered questions regarding that system. I write as a person who values social justice and as one who believes in giving voice to the voiceless. I write hoping that the narratives of the teacher participants would be poignant, thought provoking, and action bearing. I begin with my story to further allow my readers a glimpse into who I am and where my biases might be located. This autoethnographic stance (*see Chapter 3*) will also situate me in the various contexts that I have previously explicated, while forming a basis of comparison to the participants' stories.

My Story

To narrate my story, I return to my first memories of teaching and learning. To do this I must speak about my mother who was my most influential teacher, for it is to her I owe my love for teaching and lifelong learning. The following poem speaks to the way my mother tackled her job of rearing and at the same time teaching her brood of eleven children.

Teacher Mother

*I see her now
Bending over her wash tub
A piece of cloth tied
Supporting the weight
Of the new life inside.
And on my slate she has written
My ABCs and 123s.
I sit on a stool and try to re-create
The symbols carved by loving hands.
I hear her now*

*That beautiful musical voice
Singing and speaking to me
My first verses of poetry.
I smell her now,
Mingled scents of familial love and toil
The early morning cooking,
The taking care of babies
And now the daily washing of the clothes.
I touch her now
To proudly show my slate
Brimming with beginning literacy
And feel her touch in turn
Supporting the efforts I had made.
I see, I hear, I smell, I touch...
My mother as she laboured
And became my earliest
And by far, my best teacher.*

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My schooling did not begin in primary school at age five. My first memory of learning in a formal way was sitting on a stool close to my mother as she scrubbed ('jooked' as it was termed) the family's laundry on the scrubbing board. My mother herself only had a primary education on the island of Trinidad and on St. Vincent and the Grenadines where she resided after her mother died when she was just eight. Armed with this rudimentary knowledge and with life experiences, my mother/teacher taught me more than just 'reading, writing and arithmetic'. She delved into history, literature, religion, etiquette, needlecraft, and cookery among other subject matter. She taught me to be kind, loving and sharing; to be good mannered and respectful to elders. She taught me to aspire to do better than she did and to not expect hand-outs. She knew that she could not provide much in a material way; so she encouraged me to strive to acquire my own possessions. One of her mantras was 'Mother has, father has, and blessed be the child that has his [sic] own'. It is from my mother that I learnt to

memorise and recite the poems that delighted the congregation at annual Sunday school concerts. She was an avid story teller and would regale her children with stories from her childhood experiences and with folk tales of Trinidad and Tobago and of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Before my mother took on the responsibility for looking after her own household and rearing children, she had worked as a domestic servant in households in Trinidad and Tobago. She often spoke about the hard life and the many indignities that were and still are endemic in that field of work. She was adamant that she did not want her daughters to go through the challenges of domestic labour. That was the driving force of her teacher/mother role. Learning was a delight and my mother modelled the behaviours that she wanted. Whenever she had the opportunity, she read whatever was available... the evening news that my father spent five cents on every day, her bible, and when we started school, our text books; every book borrowed from the library and those won as prizes for diligently attending Sunday School. My mother's teaching strategies had been so good that when I turned five and finally entered primary school, I spent one week in what was then called First Stage and was moved to Second Stage. This of course meant that I moved through school at a faster rate than those of my age.

My Primary School Experience

At the age of five I proudly entered Piccadilly Government Primary School. I had long anticipated going to learn from a real teacher. I was not scared because my mother had prepared me for the transition from home to school. My teachers were kind to me. I was not guilty of all the perceived "sins" of the classroom. I did my homework, learnt spelling, mathematical tables, and poems. I could read and write well and I was always or nearly always at the top of my class. I was punctual and regular, for even when there was torrential rain, my mother made sure that we went to school after the rain had ceased. I honestly cannot recall an incident when any teacher treated me badly though I can recount one incident when the headmaster gave me two lashes in my little hands for reaching to school late. I was probably five or six. My older brother and I, as customary, walked to school with some older pupils whose mother

was a friend of ours. I knew that we were late; for just as we were nearing the school we heard the school bell ring. My heart started to beat faster with fear because I knew that Mr Alfred would be standing there with the whip in his hand. He did not like late coming and the punishment for doing so was strokes from his tamarind whip. As I received my portion, my eyes stung with the tears that I did not let fall. Apart from that one incident, my teachers treated me fairly and one, Mrs. Smith, even made sure that I ate at lunch times.

Even though my teachers were kind to me, I had some negative experiences in school that have left their effects on me. The school, once Anglican, had been taken over by the government. It was a two storied building that housed the infants to the Standard Two classes on the lower floor and the Standard Three to Post Primary on the upper floor. It had an open floor plan with the blackboards serving a dual function of a writing surface and as partitions between the classrooms. The furniture was often in need of repair and there were holes in the floorboard causing debris from the upper floor to fall on those downstairs. These were part of the daily experiences of school but not the one that has haunted my dreams on and off for a life time. The toilets were situated outside the main building and they were always filthy. To make matters worse, it was the time of ‘milk and biscuits’ as we called it. This was when UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) provided skimmed milk and biscuits to schools and health facilities of countries in the developing world and to the poor in the developed nations. While most of the milk at my school went down the drain, the brave few who tried it contracted diarrhoea. The toilets were then filthier than usual and I could not and would not use them. My still maturing bladder could not stand the strain and I had several embarrassing incidents of urinating on myself. Those experiences have left me with a recurring dream in which I am looking for a clean toilet to use and cannot find one. The positive side, though, is that when I became a teacher I was always very sympathetic when pupils had, as we term them, “accidents”.

One of my favourite times at school was having outdoor activities such as reading, spelling, mental arithmetic, tables and recitation of the English poetry and quotations from Cutteridge’s Nelson West Indian Readers. Another favourite was the

whole school singing sessions ‘upstairs’ as we termed the upper floor. This was particularly exciting when I was an infant as it meant getting to sit in 'big children's' desks as opposed to the benches and tables that the infants used. Morning assemblies were also fun. We were arranged in four long lines; each representing the houses in our House System. The first order of the day was to examine our nails to see if they were clean and clipped short and if the girls’ hair was freshly braided and the boys’ was combed. Punishment for dirty nails was a rap on the knuckles with a ruler. Next there was exercise-time; jumping, running on the spot, marching and stretching. Then we prayed Christian prayers and sang hymns from the Anglican Book of Common Prayers; filed into our classes and were ready to start the day.

There was also playtime. The boys pitched marbles, spun home constructed tops and yo-yoes. I was of more a bookworm and most times preferred to find a quiet place to finish a library book than join in the games of skipping, moral, hopscotch or one of the numerous clapping games of the girls. I did join sometimes though when there was nothing to read. There were school concerts and speech days when we displayed our Arts and Crafts and were rewarded for academic successes, regularity, punctuality and good conduct. There was also an annual whole school outing. Then we travelled by train and visited the country side. There were times when we had to help paint our tables and benches. These were all exciting times.

One of the most notable incidents happened when I was nine years old. Everyone was excited because our islands were about to become independent from Great Britain. We learned our national anthem and other national songs such as ‘Our Nation’s Dawning’ and ‘God Bless Our Nation’. We learnt the colours of our flag and our country’s motto and watchwords. To commemorate the day, each pupil was gifted with a medallion; a small replica of the red, white and black flag; and a bar of chocolate wrapped in paper of the same colour. However, I did not understand then that independence would lead to educational opportunities that I would not otherwise have had.

And so the seven years of primary school passed. I had spent two years in Standard Five because of my having skipped First Stage. I had to miss the excitement

and the preparation the first year because I was too young to sit the Common Entrance Examination. Anyway, the year passed and my time came with all the anticipation, anxiety and hope that soon I would be off to secondary school. I did pass and placed within the first five hundred pupils in the nation for which I was awarded the grand sum of twenty- four Trinidad and Tobago dollars (TTDs) a year for five years. I will skip the excitement that followed. I must, however, mention my mother's jubilation. She actually jumped for joy. I can still hear her shouting to one neighbour, "She has passed! Beulah has passed!" You see, I would be the first in our family to enter secondary school.

This poem highlights incidents of this section. Teachers' voices are in bold fonts while my reflections are italicised.

A Day at School

Half past eight school bell ring

Dash through the gate, get in line.

Put out your hands, show your nails

Lines extend ...no touching your neighbours now

Hands up, hands out, hands up ...hands out

March two steps forward, now two steps backwards

In the name of the Father, the Son

And the Holy Ghost. Amen!

Straighten the lines. Off to class

NO TALKING!

Late comers step forward...NOW!

Sounds of lashes, signs of tears

Reading... Arithmetic...

RECESS ...RECESS!

Gone too soon, too soon.

Spelling... Penmanship...

In the name of the Father, the Son

And the Holy Ghost. Amen!

"Lunch time, not hungry

Ah Lord, Miss Smith will send for me

To make me eat her food.”

“I don't want to play today

Still have two chapters to read.”

Clang, clang, clang!

A rush to the taps, a push, a shove

Line up straight. GOOD LORD!

In the name of the Father, the Son

And the Holy Ghost. Amen

Single file inside.

NO TALKING PLEASEEEE!

“The bench is hard

It is so hot

If I fan with my book, it will mash up.”

Mental...Spelling...Poetry

Sounds of lashes, signs of tears.

“Today is Wednesday

Downstairs children coming up”

Move the blackboards, shift the desks

YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE SO MUCH NOISE!

No pushing, yuh squeezing.

LORD, NOT SO LOUD!

Singing sweetly does not mean loudly.

Three o'clock, time to go home

In the name of the Father, the Son

And the Holy Ghost. AMEN!

Time to go home.

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Secondary School

I went to a newly opened girls' Grammar school based on an English model. The school was a vast contrast to primary with respect to physical amenities, curriculum and functioning. There were classrooms, offices, a library, home economics and needlework rooms, music and art rooms and science labs. The grounds were extensive with manicured lawns and flowering shrubs planted all around. However, secondary school was challenging. My greatest challenges stemmed from the new curriculum and the fact that there were no systems to help those who were struggling. The help that I was accustomed getting from my mother was greatly diminished as she had not reached this level of education. Without my mother's help, my thrill at being at the top of the class was gone. I believe that this dealt my self-esteem and confidence a great blow.

At secondary school, I particularly enjoyed English Literature. Mostly, I was in love with the poets. I guess it was an easy transition to move from reading poetry to writing poetry. The poems helped me to register some of my teenage frustrations; to express my love for nature and to tackle some of the issues that troubled me. As a consequence of all the challenges and the fact that I was forever finishing some novel when I should have been studying, I did not do as well as I should have. I left secondary school with only four GCE O' Level subjects. I did not give up, however, and neither did my mother. She enlisted the help of a relative who lived in the United States of America (USA) and with the money forwarded, together with what she could scrape from the household budget, she sent me to acquire my full certificate and to do A' Levels at the Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies (UWI) now re-named Open Campus of UWI.

My Early Years as a Teacher

Becoming a teacher was not my burning ambition; it was simply a matter of economics. Firstly, I had naively thought that I could make a career in writing. However, my one interview for a job as a reporter with the Trinidad Guardian yielded

no fruit. I then applied to become a primary school teacher. I knew very little or nothing of what teaching would actually entail. I had no ideas about curriculum matters or pedagogical issues.

My first appointment was at my former primary school. The physical conditions were pretty much the same as I remembered. The noise level was high when lessons were being simultaneously recited and as a result, from very early, I started to have problems with my vocal chords and would sometimes lose my voice altogether. However, I was now seeing things from a different angle. Nine years before, I had been sitting in the benches and or desks; now I had a table and a chair. I controlled a whip or ruler and I was the boss. My teaching and classroom management style was informed by the practice of my former teachers and my present colleagues. Apart from those aspects of teaching, there was management of morning and after lunch assemblies. The principal ordered me to take charge of the school's Red Cross link which, for some, meant that I had become the school nurse. As a female teacher, I was also rostered to mix the UNICEF milk which meant that I had to leave the classroom while my class was left un-attended for long periods at a time.

Nevertheless, there are reflections of those early years that bring satisfaction. I followed the 'best' practice of my former teachers and there were days when I took my students out of the classroom to read, recite poems, to listen as I read them my favourite tales and to have them sing while I played my guitar. I was partly instrumental in taking children from the school to other learning spaces and helped in the organisation of extracurricular activities. I continued my practise of writing poems to express my thoughts. Thus, I forged my own identity as a teacher, formulated my philosophy and pedagogy and realised that I really enjoyed teaching when the pupils enjoyed learning.

Teacher Training at Valsayn Teachers' College

I entered Valsayn Teachers' College (VTC) in September of 1979. I was sceptical about how much I would learn in college because I had not seen newly trained teachers doing differently than I did. What followed were two disappointing years. The philosophy of individual differences and pedagogy to deal with those differences were

new to me and captured my interest. Additionally, I chose to do Literature as my elective subject and fell in love with the works of Guyanese poet Martin Carter (7 June 1927 - 13 December 1997). The disappointment was that there was little nexus between educational theory and practice. There were three teaching practice sessions which were really examinations. I tried out the things I had been told would increase pupils' ability to learn. A lot of what was done was to avoid the censure of my practice supervisors and also to make sure that I would not have to repeat 'Teaching Practice' (TP). After the two years, I successfully completed the training.

My Post- Trained Years

I was sent to a government primary school in Port of Spain and was given a First Year Infants class. In the Infant Department, there were four classes crammed into a small space and the noise level was very high. I was discouraged by the limitations of space, apparatus and the excessive noise. The problem with my voice, which had eased while I was in college, returned. I spent one year in the Infant Department and then was assigned to share Standard Three with an experienced teacher. This classroom was a lot roomier and had great potential for setting up areas of interest. Unfortunately, I soon felt myself being pressured to be like my roommate. She was considered to be a "good" teacher, but followed the old ways from which I wanted to break. It was only when ill health caused her to be away from school I was able to be myself. I was able to have pupils relax more and the sound of the belt lessened in the classroom.

My best opportunity to try new ideas came when I shared a Post-Common Entrance class with another teacher. It is then I can really say that I began to change from having a behaviourist philosophy to one of constructivism. My co-teacher and I, with the blessings of the principal, decided that the class should be conducted in such a way as to ease the after Common Entrance stress of the pupils and yet allow learning to take place. We involved the pupils in the decision making process. Apart from the academics, they wanted to have discussions on different subject matters. There was a class 'sou- sou (a *co-operative where economic resources are pooled and then dispersed to each members at pre- decided times*) which was run by the pupils themselves. There were also cookery classes, involving both boys and girls working in

groups. These classes culminated in a luncheon cooked in part by the pupils. It was an exhilarating feeling to see so much interest and excitement on the faces of the pupils.

Teaching in another District

In 1986, I transferred to another government primary school because I had been married three years earlier; had moved to the east of the island; and the twenty- two and a half kilometre commute had become too much for me. If I were to reach to school on time, I had to leave home in the dark. I did not own a car and had to depend on public transport which was particularly difficult since my home was in a new housing settlement and only a few taxis were servicing the area. In the afternoons, the wait for buses was long and the commuters mostly tired and disorderly. This was also a period when my husband was unemployed and I was carrying the burden of maintaining our home. Juggling the traditional roles of wife and bringing home work from school was interfering with my relationship with my spouse. I was usually tired and crabby especially when I had my monthly periods. In addition, I was dealing with infertility issues, which added to my distress.

The conditions at my new school were worse than those I had experienced previously. There were thirty -eight (38) teachers and over eight hundred (800) pupils. During my tenure at this primary school, there were many disruptions because of overcrowding, rat and flea infestations and poor infrastructure. I spent twenty seven years at this school and it is there that I matured in my thinking. I began to see issues that I felt demanded systemic change. I had a problem with the way education policy makers initiated school improvement programmes without listening to teachers. I was frustrated by the limited and haphazard workshops conducted by trainers who were not convincing about the vision they were trying to present. I was frustrated by the lack of resources and the mantra about being creative with the use of discarded material in the environment. Those materials were taking up space in my house and were a nesting place for mice and cockroaches. However, I was mostly angry by the fact that the blame for failed initiatives was nearly always placed on the schools and particularly on teachers.

While I was at this school, I worked under eight principals, all female, except one. I worked with the first two for approximately thirteen (13) years. This means that within the next fourteen (14) years the school changed principals six times. Previously, the school had had only six (6) principals in forty two (42) years. The rapid change of principals brought instability and division among the staff. My first two principals at this school had had a participatory style of leadership. They had come through the monitor system and were head teachers. By this I mean that even though they were leaders, there was a feeling, even when there were disagreements, that they were still one with the rest of the teaching staff. The new principals were employed to be managers of the school and I believe this removed the idea of head teacher from the position. The feeling of camaraderie of teachers with head teachers was removed and in place there was a supervisor wielding the master's stick.

It did not help when, in 2008, Heads of Departments (HODs) were introduced to become middle managers in primary schools. At that time, the minimum qualification requirement for HODs was five CXC or GCSE subjects and five years teaching experience. They were placed in a higher grade for remuneration and for future elevation to the positions of principal and vice principal. These neophytes were expected to supervise teachers who had far more years teaching experience and in some instances, first and second degrees. I was among those in that category. This new management set-up created a situation where important decisions of the school were no longer the business of the entire staff. Decision making became the responsibility of the principal, vice principal and heads of departments. These changes caused me to feel quite useless as an experienced teacher. Formerly, I could not speak out on educational issues involving the entire system; now I was debarred from meaningful voicing of issues at school level. I felt that it was time for me to leave the system that had not treated me well. I gave myself voice through my writing. I took to writing letters to the newspaper using a pseudonym because I was fearful of victimisation. I also wrote poems to express my frustration and seeming helplessness. The poem at the beginning of this work and the following are examples of this therapeutic action.

The system

This system encourages us to be:

Enablers of wrong,

Upholders of unrighteousness,

Our hands reaching out to grasp

The scraps that the leaders

Condescendingly hurl at us,

Our mouths filled with

Sycophantic platitudes,

Fooling ourselves that

We serve some nobler cause

When truth be told

We're downright scared to protest

Too scared to admit we're scared.

That is what this system has done to us.

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In spite of my dissatisfaction, the children remained the focus of my career. During the first six years at this school I had attended several educational workshops. These greatly informed my teaching methods and practice. In addition, to the workshops organised by the Ministry of Education, I did a course in Guidance and Counselling at the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies. In 1989, school libraries were being established in primary schools. I attended workshops, conducted by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the School Libraries Division, to train teachers to function as librarians in primary school. It was not a remunerated classified position. However, when my principal asked me to set up and run the school library, I willingly accepted. I spent twenty (20) years performing the function of teacher/librarian.

Being a teacher/ librarian afforded me the opportunity to interact with all the pupils. The library became a unique classroom with lots of teaching aids at my disposal. Discussions, debates, research, working as groups; writing poems, songs and stories; making posters and drawings were all part of my classes' teaching/ learning

experiences. However, things changed and my career ended as it had begun. In 2010, the work in the library was discontinued through circumstances that I will not mention because of limited space. I was hurt because many principals had invested greatly in sustaining the library through fund-raising, gifts from friends and the generous discounts from one book-company that unfortunately must remain anonymous. They had used means that some might consider subversive to keep it functioning even when it had been threatened by school supervisors who did not appear to see its importance. This time was different. I felt defeated as I saw all my efforts of giving pupils a chance to experience what I did not see happening in the classrooms fading. I was asked to return to a classroom. For the next three years, I floated around at the various levels of the school and ended my career in Second Year of the Infant Department.

Higher Learning

The blow of my final years was softened by the fact that I was pursuing my dream of continuing education with the aim of contributing to educational research and social and educational change. Throughout my journey as a teacher, I had concentrated on pupil learning and had neglected my own ambitions for higher learning. There were several reasons for this. In my early years of teaching, I could not economically access tertiary education. After that, I had personal challenges that caused me emotional distress and prevented me from pursuing it. However, my experiences at workshops and short courses had whetted my appetite to do much more. I felt restless; always thinking that I had not achieved my fullest potential. I had no ambition to become a principal. I did not trust myself to be “the rare peasant, who, once “promoted” to overseer, does not become more of a tyrant towards his[sic] former comrades than the owner himself[sic]” (Freire, 1973). In any case, I believed in what I was doing in the library. Throughout the years, I had done a course in journalism and short story writing. In 1998, deciding that I should earn a degree; I enrolled in an online university. This was a very disappointing experience that ended in litigation and my vowing that I would not use the credentials that I had earned as it would do more harm than good to my professional reputation. Nonetheless, not daunted, when the University of Sheffield offered their STAR (School Teachers Action Research) programme in 2002, I gladly embraced it. From the STAR programme, I transferred to

the university's M.Ed. programme and completed successfully in 2005. After that, I did a course in the Teaching of Reading at UWI School of Continuing Studies (Now Open Campus UWI) in 2007. It was four years before I would get back to formal studies and presently I am in the second part of my Doctor of Education programme.

Conclusion

I am now retired as a primary school teacher. I have come a long way from where I began my journey. I began as a child taught by my mother. I had teachers who were like mothers to me. As a teacher, there had been a lot of trial and error. I have had happy times and sad times; but I have learnt much. I left no longer seeing myself as the font of all knowledge which, in any case, I never was. I left no longer expecting the silence of the tomb in classrooms. I believe that I have contributed to the lives of my community because I have been to school. However, I have not given up on education. My journey still continues. I proclaim this in the poem that follows.

The Journey

*I started as a neophyte,
Directed by ghosts of teachers.
I thought the child was empty jar
And I... brimming container.*

*I proceeded as a trainee teacher,
Observed pupils' demeanour.
I saw that they were keen learners
And I facilitator.*

*I ended up as one obscure,
Resenting system's strictures.
I knew that teachers needed chance,
To speak for better measures.*

My journey has spanned many years,

*Experiences were varied.
And now I strive to lend my voice
To tell the teachers' stories.*

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Chapter Two- Literature Review

It is widely agreed that human-resource development plays an important role in social and economic development, and that education is one of the ways to achieve this. (Schrouder, 2008:273).

Introduction

The first of this two- part literature review pointed to the fact that educational policies place burdens on schools and on the teachers who must implement them. It pinpointed some of the internal and external issues that teachers generally confront as they traverse the vagaries of education systems. It added to my previous knowledge of the numerous internal and external factors that are stressors in teachers' lives and which can cause burnout and ultimately attrition in the system. It served to underscore that my perceptions and those of my participants were not simply isolated by our understandings but had been experienced by a number of others in differing and similar contexts. The second part enlightened me on the historical and theoretical underpinnings and usefulness of postcolonialism and feminism. It forced me to look at the conditions and practices in Trinbagonian schools that are post-colonial in nature. The literature on feminism directed me to the varying notions of feminisms. As a black Caribbean woman, I was particularly interested in the notion of Caribbean feminism. The literature pointed out that, for some, the notion of feminism as a theory in the Caribbean has been difficult to explicate and accept since it is tainted with the negative perceptions from its European heritage. However, the literature revealed that feminism has been used to explore women's lives in the Caribbean. The literature also pointed to some issues faced by women and underscored that there has not been enough work done on understanding the lifework of female teachers who make up the vast majority of the world's teaching force (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012).

Educational Policies and their Impact on Schools

Schrouder (2008: 273) states that education impacts a broad cross-section of society and that schools are "a prime focus of public attention and political pressure". This is

because, as Sofialeiticia Morales Garza -Director of the Unit for Social Development and Education of the Organisation of the American States (OAS) (2003: 3) asserts:

Our generation inherited the school as the place where each nation's identity is consolidated and defended... as a fundamental space for the constitution of democratic political life ... [as] a central place for the formation of the values, abilities, and imagination necessary for our survival and progress as a regional and world community.

In other words, schools have always been a place where the values, norms and culture of a nation have been reproduced; sometimes transformed and where new knowledge and skills are acquired. It is also a place where, in democracies, there is an attempt made to produce a just and equitable society. Recently, due to numerous educational reforms, the functions of schools have been ever-increasing, putting a great burden on them to meet the expectations of society. Vollmer, in his 2011 book *'The Ever Increasing Burden on America's Public Schools'*, lists the numerous reforms that have taken place in the USA since 1900. Such changes are also prevalent in developing and underdeveloped nations which are controlled by national, regional and international political forces (Kovach & Lansman, 2006; Global Exchange, 2011; Sanders, 2013). Many times the reforms are based on globalisation and 'market led policies' (Kinman & Wray, 2013). Sometimes, they are imposed on developing countries as criteria for obtaining a loan from international lending agencies (Sanders, 2013) and are often contextually inapplicable. Some, such as Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, may be based on principled philosophies for nation building; but leave schools with hardly any autonomy to make informed choices that would benefit all stakeholders. Schools, then, are essentially spaces where "decisions made 'elsewhere' must be accommodated and acted out" (London, 2002: 54).

Factors Impacting Teachers' Philosophy and Pedagogy

There are many documented factors that impact negatively on teachers' wellbeing and thus affect their philosophy and pedagogy. Stress has been cited as one such factor (Espinoza, 2015; Are Schools Emotionally Well Places to Work, 2015). For example, stress can be brought on from teachers' isolation from one another (Chang, 2009: 193;

Joseph & Jackman, 2014: 73) causing them to become “frustrated, bored, and depleted as they privately struggle with their anxieties” (Chang, 2009: 193). The results can either be attrition or a number of teachers remaining who are discouraged, burnt-out, and ineffective. School improvement literature also claims that there are many other stress factors involved in the lives of teachers. The poor physical conditions of schools; large class sizes; the lack of educational resources; teacher workload and time; leadership styles and management practices among others (Nadeem *et al.*, 2011; Ayeni & Adelabu, 2012; Meador, 2014; Boffey, 2015) can cause teachers to become stressed. These aforementioned factors constitute what Herzberg (1968), in his two factor motivational theory, called ‘hygiene factors’ and while they do not necessarily motivate, these must be addressed so that teachers can become comfortable as they perform their daily functions.

External factors can also infiltrate the actual school environment. Chief among these is the silence of post-colonial societies. The silence of society, in a Trinbagonian context, is a legacy from our colonial past. It is also the result of functioning in what Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and activist (1921-1997), refers to as a “culture of silence”(1985:72). This is caused by a relationship in which dependent nations absorb the culture of dominant ones and become silent and neglectful of their own. The silence is repeated within the dependent nations where those with political and economic power in turn seek to silence their own people (Freire, *ibid*: 73). This condition is reinforced and reproduced in schools, where subordinates are forced to surrender their voices to the dominant ones who make decisions for them to follow. Goodson (2011: 2) posits that “teachers are being pushed away from the power to define education and schooling and curriculum.” His (*ibid*) comment mirrors the gloom that the participants and I have experienced in our tenure at our respective schools.

Researchers (e.g. Brand, 2009; Chang, 2009) have also documented other teachers’ stories that relate similar experiences and feelings; feelings that do not auger well for the retention of teachers in education systems worldwide. For example, teacher attrition is one of the negative consequences of denying teachers meaningful participation in policy and decision making. Joseph & Jackman (2014: 73) state that

teacher attrition is problematic because it affects the entire education system. Chang (2009: 194) quotes statistics that reveal that in the United States of America (USA) up to twenty-five percent (25%) of new teachers give up their practice before the third year and that almost forty percent (40%) leave within five years of having started. A recent poll quoted in the UK Guardian revealed that fifty-three (53%) of UK teachers are thinking of leaving the job within the next two years (Boffey, 2015). More significantly, according to Joseph & Jackman (2014: 73), researchers also report that those leaving the profession are the most capable, talented beginning teachers.

A main stressor for teachers comes from the proliferation of reform initiatives with which schools are bombarded. Meador (2014: *no page no.*) believes that these reform initiatives are plaguing American teachers and causing “inconsistency and frustration”. He (*ibid*) advances, “It seems that as soon as a teacher grasps something new, it changes again.” Moreover, one of the consequences of these reforms is the call for accountability based on examination scores which places an unfair burden on schools and teachers (Meador, 2014). Accountability based solely on pupils’ examination scores neglect to reveal the role that other factors play in the development and performance of pupils. For example, some writers and researchers (Apple, 2002: 206; Forest & Alexander, 2004: 66-67; Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005: *no pg.no*; De Lisle, 2008:106) have cited factors such as social stratification and poverty which stymie pupils’ performance and account for poor scores.

The demand for accountability has caused a drastic change in the culture, relationships, and practice within schools. Ball (2003: 215) uses the word “performativity” to describe the way that teachers are now expected to perform in schools. Performativity as defined by Ball (*ibid*):

...requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations; to set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation.

He (*ibid*) argues that performativity, far from allowing transparency, causes individuals and organisations to construct and maintain fabrications in order to appear effective. Ball (*ibid*: 216) reasons that:

The policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher...

Teachers are placed in a position where they have to change their philosophy, practice and their personality as they try to keep up with the pace of new educational reforms. Ball (2003: 215) continues:

[This burden] does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are.

Schools have now become stages where the staff members play to the gallery of policy makers, ministries of education and their hierarchy, and to public opinion. Many teachers feel stressed because of the additional effort that is needed to achieve (Chang, 2009: 204), or appear to achieve, stakeholders' expectations. If teachers would be given a chance to meaningfully contribute in the planning processes of reform initiatives, the call for accountability might be partly justified on the grounds that teachers are co-owners of the projects. However, this is not the case even though the literature advises that successful educational reforms depend on shared visions, trust, partnership and discussion (Brand, 2009: 88).

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is far from irrelevant to twenty-first century political goals and struggles, on the contrary, its conceptual tools and analytic framework can and should be harnessed in the interests of critiquing the colonial past and the contemporary world order. (Jefferess et al., 2006: 3).

The procurement of terrains by European nations especially during the late nineteenth century is defined as colonialism (Rosser, 2005: 14). Baksh-Soodeen (1998: 77) argues that the Caribbean has been hit hardest by European colonialism since the time Europe started its economic expansion in the fifteenth century. She (*ibid*) makes this claim based on the fact that:

In no other region were entire peoples wiped out and artificially replaced by hundreds of thousands of people from other continents for the sole purpose of serving European economic interest.

As such colonialism speaks of the subjugation and direct control of other people and their territories. Edward Said (1993: 3) believes that it goes much further. He (*ibid*) posits that colonialism is a state of mind in the coloniser and “cannot be identified with only economic gain and political power.”

Postcolonialism, on the other hand, is a hard to explain concept “replete with contradictions and conundrums owing to the varied forms of colonial rule and processes of decolonization” (Digole, 2012: 128). There has been, however, an effort to explain this ambivalence through the spelling of the word. According to Sawant (2012: 120) and Digole (2012: 129), when the word is ‘*post-colonial*’, it denotes the historical period after the Second World War at which time many countries became independent. When it is ‘*postcolonial*’, it relates and refers to the cultural characteristics of societies from the time of the colonial rule to the present day. Additionally, Lavia (2007: 285-286) theorises that the changeability is contained in two constructs of the word. Firstly, there is the notion of ‘postcoloniality’ as time period on one hand and secondly; the notion of it being a hope where ideas and actions struggle to “be articulated within the context of social transformation” (*ibid*). According to Sawant (2012: 120), post-colonialism can be considered as the termination of colonial dominance which allows the former colonised the freedom to make socio/economical/political, and cultural choices. Conversely, London (2003: 293) submits that it is a development of cultural production and “psychologization”, which did not end when the period of colonisation ended. In this work I refer to post-colonialism as a period and postcolonialism as a theory.

There are also differences as to when postcolonialism appeared as a theory. According to Digole (2012: 128), postcolonialism became the focus of metropolitan intellectuals and academics after various Third-World countries sought political independence in the 1960s. Sawant (2012: 120) positions the theory in the late 1970s when the concept was adopted “by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects

of colonization". Gupta (2013: 1) states that postcolonialism developed during the late 1980s as "a pro-active movement against any injustice, any kind of depravity and distinction". Speaking from a Caribbean context, Penier (2012: 26) notes that postcolonialism was established in the late 1970s and 1980s. It fixed its attention on the re-establishment of a genuine relationship between what was represented and what was the reality of the colonised, and also sought to establish indigenous identities in resistance to the coloniser's identity (Penier, *ibid*). In essence, then:

Postcolonialism bears witness to a process to decolonization that seeks to interrupt pathologies of preference for the *Other* (Lavia, 2007: 286).

It was important for me to understand postcolonialism's significance, especially in relation to this work. Sawant (2012: 120) argues that postcolonialism is important for examining what ensues when two cultures collide and the ideology and culture of one endows and deems itself superior to the other. He (*ibid*) also proposes that it can be applied in any debate against "marginalization or subjugation". Ramrao (2012: 135) suggests that postcolonialism can be used in contesting previous dominant western ways and in debunking the myth that the culture of the former colonised ones remains inferior to that of the former colonial masters or mistresses. Similarly, Rosser (2005: 15) believes in its usefulness for challenging the persistence that new nation states should restructure their capabilities to function in a global world order. Nevertheless, according to Jefferess *et al.*, (2006: 2), there are dissenting voices about postcolonialism's usefulness as a theory. In fact, Lavia (2007: 288) points out that:

Postcolonial critics have been strident in their views about the normalizing and disempowering effects of postcolonialism, in a way that it fails to provide any critical tools for understanding the current contemporary condition.

However, in nation states like Trinidad and Tobago, with a recent past grounded in colonial rule, postcolonialism is quite a useful deconstruct for actions in our society; it is "still the only methodological framework" that is "strongly committed to a critique of the global conditions of domination and oppression to which the "civilizing mission" has given rise" (Jefferess *et al.*, 2006: 2). Thus, researching educational

practice within a post-colonial context necessitates a perspective that takes into consideration our colonial past. It requires:

a philosophical and methodological approach in which we adopt a critical history of ourselves and of others; reflexivity through which we interrogate our taken-for-granted assumptions about society and our location within the cultural and political contexts in which we are positioned (Lavia, 2012: 14).

This kind of criticality and reflexivity compels an understanding of the notion of mimicry in post-colonial settings.

Mimicry

A critical look at the behaviours and attitudes in independent Trinidad and Tobago reveals that some colonial traditions and values remain. One of these values is the reverence and deference shown to those in high positions in society. For example, at the opening of Trinidad and Tobago's parliament, the president of the Republic is heralded by trumpets and is announced by the pronouncement of all his titles and given names while everyone stands until he takes his place. This colonial behaviour is mimicked in our schools where some still insist that teachers stand in respectful silence if a supervisor enters the room. Similarly, pupils must stop their prescribed tasks and jump up to greet the principal or any other 'important' visiting adult. Hence:

Colonialism does not end with political independence. Modes and doctrines put in place under a colonial regime may die hard, if they ever die at all (London, 2002: 68).

These modes and doctrines are identified not just in demeanours but in almost every other activity in the education system. Schrouder (2008: 273-274) points out that the British education system continued to control the Anglophone Caribbean even after some countries achieved political independence and even when the system may no longer be relevant to the new political realities. This has been a lament for a long time. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, the authors of the Draft Plan for Educational Development 1967-1983, in calling for change, had stated that:

The emphasis upon foreign frames of reference is so well entrenched in practice and is so difficult to remove by the typical slow processes that for all practical purposes the education system carries with it its false values for decades (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, 1967: 89).

It is this foreign frame of reference that, in part, accounts for the use of corporal punishment in Trinbagonian schools. The Judeo-Christian maxim attributed to King Solomon “Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die,” (King James Version, Proverbs 23: 13) had held sway within European schools for centuries. And as Pinheiro (2012: 3) affirms:

The ancient English common law concept of “reasonable” punishment of children remains in the legislation of many independent states and some territories in the [Caribbean and Latin American] region.

Lambert (2012: *no page no.*) documents the harsh punishments that were administered to pupils in British public and private schools during the 18th to 20th centuries. This reality was mirrored in the literary works of many authors (*see for example Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens and Tom Brown’s School days by Thomas Hughes*). However, even though corporal punishment was abolished in British state schools in 1987 and by 2003 in all schools in the UK; the practice has been harder to eradicate in our schools. Earl Lovelace, in his novel ‘Salt’, gives this insight on corporal punishment in a Trinbagonian context. In describing schoolteacher Alford George’s teaching practice, he writes:

...he put aside the educational psychology they had taught him at Training College... he hung, on a nail next to the blackboard in plain sight for everybody to see, a leather strap that he called Betsy, whose weight and flexibility he let us believe resulted from being soaked in urine, and a simple philosophy, Do, Die or Runaway, that he soon changed to Do or Die, since he realized that we had no place to escape (Lovelace, 1996: 56).

The word ‘mimicry’, as used by Homi Bhabha (1984), describes, in part, the uncertainty post- colonials feel as they try to emulate the ways and culture of their former masters or mistresses. Bhabha (1984: 126) posits:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite... the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.

Bhabha (*ibid*) says that colonialism enforces its power and authority by images of a farcical nature causing a mimicry that is a very subtle and effective tactic of colonial domination. This is recognised in the language, culture and ideologies of post-colonial nations. Strongman (2007: 83) and London (2003: 287) among others, believe that this domination was chiefly wrought through the colonial schools using the vehicles of English language and literature. Similarly, Braithwaite (1991: 16) speaks of the colonial years when the British culture was inculcated into primary school children through the celebration of Empire Day. The day was not celebrated as a public holiday in England; however Trinbagonian primary school pupils and their teachers, some of them descendants of former slaves, stood for long hours in the scorching sun singing songs such as ‘Rule Britannia’ in which contained “humiliating phrases” such as “Britons never, never shall be slaves”. Braithwaite (*ibid*: 17) posits that this celebration was one sure way of making people especially children accept wrong values which has been hard to eradicate. However, it is not just the language and celebrations that are copied. In Trinidad and Tobago, the negative behaviour of the colonising masters on slave plantations and also in the wider society has been presented, represented and reproduced. For example, parallels can be drawn between the bureaucratic managerial style of the colonial plantations and our education system. On plantations, as within our educational institutions, there was a clear division of labour and strict adherence to the rules (Bristol, 2008). There were overseers who acted on behalf of the master to ascertain that there was compliance. In the post-colonial schools, there are school supervisors, principals, vice-principals and heads of departments who carry out the same functions.

From my experience, many Trinbagonian teachers do not appear to understand issues in a post-colonial/postcolonial context. The issues that they face on a daily basis, for some, remain just “the things that are happening to us”. Even when they use the famous Eric Williams’ 1962 quote “Massa day done”, one gets the feeling that “massa” refers to the heads of their various schools or perhaps the MOE. They would need to broaden that concept since:

Pedagogical implications ... are linked to a notion of postcolonialism that provides a set of lenses through which the persistent and insidious legacies of European colonialism can be made visible (Lavia, 2007: 286).

Savickas (2012: 16) in his essay ‘*Life Design: A Paradigm for Career Intervention in the 21st Century*’ speaks about counsellors’ role in deconstructing clients’ story to aid in their understanding of “self-limiting ideas, confining roles, and cultural barriers... and ideological biases regarding gender, race, and social status”. The aim is to undo “a story’s uncritical domination over the client’s thinking” (Savickas, *ibid*: 16). Social researchers carry a similar responsibility when they deconstruct their participants’ stories. In this instance, deconstruction would assist teachers to look again at their situations to uncover what it means to function in a post-colonial space and how to begin to decolonise that space. In her paper titled ‘*Repositioning pedagogies and postcolonialism: theories, contradictions and possibilities*’, Lavia (2007: 285) addresses the function of post-colonial teachers and suggests ways in which they can change educational spaces. However, teachers firstly need to understand colonialism and postcolonialism from an educational perspective. It is only then educational practices can be birthed out of a yearning for and an obligation to change from colonial ways (Lavia, 2007: 294). For a start, this will necessitate “conscientisation” which is, according to Freire (1973), the ability to develop critical consciousness and take steps to change and unfetter ourselves from our domineering origins. Freire addressed the conflict that is part of becoming conscientised. He posits:

The conflict lies in the choice ... between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or

being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world (*ibid*: 4).

Transformation comes through knowledge of contexts. Bolman & Deal (2000: *no page no.*) suggest that “understanding the system is a first step toward moving things in more productive directions”. To do this would involve the practice of a critical pedagogy; an idea which is commonly connected with Paulo Freire. It deals with endowing learners with the power to reflect and perform critically with the aim of changing their lives (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011: *abstract*; Taylor & Medina, 2013: 6). According to Taylor & Medina (*ibid*), critical pedagogy emphasises the need for teachers to become consciously aware of the “established values and beliefs that underpin their seemingly natural teacher-centred classroom roles”. Criticality may assist them to identify, resist and address issues of social justice in society (Taylor & Medina, *ibid*) and ultimately bring about systemic changes.

Feminism

The notion of female, feminine, and the various roles women play in cultures have always fascinated philosophers and scholars serving as a topic of intellectual intercourse (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyde, 2007: 2).

In spite of the above quotation, feminism has always had a negative connotation. Many persons believe that feminists are:

... single women who have a dismally low probability of finding a man; lesbians; troublesome women who, if given half a chance will rule (stupid) men; and women whose only desire is to disrupt a God-given structure that requires men to be in charge and women to submit to their husbands (Castello, 2006: 1).

Feminism, therefore, as a construct is not always valued in the analysis of the situations and issues that women have faced and continue to face. However, Haslanger *et al* (2014) advance that “feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms”. It is often

categorized into what is described as waves. The first wave was characterised by its struggle to secure women's equal rights with men in "social movements" (Mohammed, 2003: 13). The second engaged in the fight for women to gain legal rights and equality in the workplace and in education (Mohammed, *ibid*). Third-wave feminism was developed in the late 1980s and 1990s based on work by second wave writers such as Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Mack-Canty, 2004: 157, 164). Their work served as advocacy for divergent meanings of feminisms in non-western cultures and also for new discussions on understanding gender relations (Mann & Huffman, 2005: 57). With third wave feminism, group membership was not a necessity; feminism was basically an individual consciousness (Baumgardner, 2011). From 2008, there has been what is considered a fourth wave. The main differences between this and the third wave are in the methods of communicating ideas and feminists' openness on topics that were once considered taboo (Baumgardner, *ibid*).

Caribbean Feminism

Funck (2011: 65) contends that post-colonial feminism has been disquieted by even more dangerous prejudices for "those historically cast as subaltern in androcentric western contexts". Nonetheless, there is a perception, by some, that the western concept of feminism cannot be applied to the Caribbean region because Caribbean women's struggles are different from those of western women (Mohammed, 2000: 116). For example, Soares (2006: 188-189) postulates that Caribbean feminism had its background in the experiences of "white middle class North American women" and was not innate to socio/cultural/historical experiences of Caribbean women. Additionally, she (*ibid*: 191) claims that Caribbean feminism is basically African Christian women controlled; age, race, class, disability, religious and culture issues deficient: and dismissive of the role of religion in the socialisation process and lives of many Caribbean women. Certainly, in Trinidad and Tobago, the earlier feminists groups consisted predominantly of university educated Afro-Trinidadian and not Indo-Trinidad women (Reddock, 2007: 15). Therefore, feminism was seen as an Afro-Trinidadian notion of womanhood. However, Reddock (2007: *ibid*) points out that this was basically because of the differences in the culture of the two groups. She posits:

The family structures and social control exercised over Indo-Trinidadian women's lives at that time [also] worked against their involvement in activist organisations.

On the other hand, their Afro-Trinidadian counterparts had greater freedom of movement and family backing which allowed for such involvement. In fact, Reddock (2004: 17) informs:

Whereas women have always been and continue to be primarily responsible for domestic life and work, women, especially working-class women of African descent have always been visible in public life and public space...

In spite of the preceding comments about the perceptions of Caribbean feminism, Beckles (1998: 34) postulates:

Historians of the Caribbean have had little difficulty discerning traditions, dating back to the beginning of European colonialism, of women's public activities... Collectively, their public expressions constitute the emergence within colonialism of the infrastructure of a feminist sensibility.

Furthermore, Castello (2006: 9) states that women's involvement in nationalist and anti-colonial struggles was the underpinning for the development of the women's movement in the 1940s and early 1950s. On the other hand, Beckles (1998: 48) claims that the birth of Caribbean states stymied feminism and further entrenched patriarchal values already part of the colonial legacy. Beckles (*ibid*) argues:

There was no autonomous, privileged place for radical feminism. Tokenism and paternalism, however, ran rampant within the formative years of post-colonialism... Feminist radicalism that could not be accommodated within the official parameters of the emergent nation-states was deemed subversive, anti-social and unpatriotic.

Nevertheless, Reddock (2004: 12) posits that the grassroots women of TT supported Eric Williams and the PNM, more than men ever did, seeing it as a duty to show

loyalty; a loyalty which brought the rewards of “short-term jobs for themselves and their children”. She adds, though:

At the same time because of their sex and class they knew they could never be members of the fraternity but never seriously sought to challenge this (Reddock, 2004: 12).

Additionally, Campbell (1997: 171) advances that women only had “stereotypical, inferior roles” and campaign declarations never addressed women either as students or teachers. Beckles (1998: 49) sees the masculinised management of post-colonial nation-states as a setback for the feminist movement. For example, Caribbean women still for the most part do not wish to be seen as “man haters, going against women’s essential nature, therefore, not the right “ ‘wife material’ ” (Mohammed, 2003: 19; Soares, 2006: 188). It should be noted, though, that feminism never targeted men as individuals; rather it was/is the universal, underlying nature of patriarchy that was/is analysed while addressing the unfair hierarchy within the relationships between men and women to the latter’s disadvantage (Mohammed, 2003: 19; Mohammed, 2000: 117).

Caribbean Feminism/Feminists in Academia and Research

Barriteau (2003: 39) notes that “both activism and academic output informed by an explicit feminist agenda are in danger of being pushed to the margins”. She (*ibid*: 38) and Soares (2006: 192) believe that within academia, feminism has been replaced by the more politically acceptable notion of gender. Soares (*ibid*: 190) argues that when the concept of feminism is replaced by “gender” both the focus and debates are removed from the understanding of patriarchy as a “system of dominance and control”. Furthermore, Castello (2006: 8) believes that the focus has shifted away from activism to theory articulated through language that disregards non-academics.

Notwithstanding, Caribbean feminists still see hope for feminism as a tool for challenging power relations; the creation of knowledge; policy formulation and implementation (Barriteau, 2003: 38). Academics, through unambiguous feminist research, can try to understand the world so that Caribbean women’s insights, experiences and accomplishments can be taken into account (Castello, 2006: 6;

Kempadoo *et al.*, 2013: 1). The concerns of such research are principally with the enablement of the group of women under review (*ibid*). Meanwhile, Kempadoo *et al.* (*ibid*) voice some issues with current Caribbean feminist research. They (*ibid*) claim that there is a paucity of enlightening published material on “feminist methodologies that emerge from specific Caribbean colonial and postcolonial histories and conditions”; and a scarcity of helpful resources about conducting such research in its unique Caribbean context. Their suggestion is that feminist research can embrace:

participant observation, discourse or media analysis, statistical analyses, oral histories, community discussions, focus groups, archival research, interviewing, questionnaire surveys, or even research in library holdings (Kempadoo *et al.*, 2013: 1).

The Need for Research on Female Teachers

In 2010, a staggering ninety percent (90 %) of teachers in the USA were women (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012: 243). In 2014, female teachers made up seventy-four percent (74%) of teachers in the primary and secondary school system of Trinidad and Tobago (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education [MOE], 2014). This phenomenon of such a large ratio of female to male teachers is known as feminisation. Galman & Mallozzi (2012: 243) point out that many reasons have been proffered for this trend. For example, in the USA, changes by the civil rights, labour and women’s movements; and fiscal requirements because of compulsory education have been used as some explanations (Galman & Mallozzi, *ibid*). They (*ibid*) also cite those who suggest that it is the evocative description of primary schools teachers as women naturally predisposed for the profession that accounts for the situation. From a Trinbagonian perspective, Campbell (1997: 170; 171) posits that the genesis of feminisation in our schools was the 1950s immigration from the smaller islands of the Caribbean and the oil boom in the 1970s (See ***chapter 1- history of education- women in primary schools***).

Still, in spite of being described as a feminised profession, research into female teachers’ life and work has been scarce in some countries. In her 1995/1996 foundational work ‘*Gender and teachers’ work*, Sandra Acker (*ibid*: 111) advances

that it is not easy to relate the life story of a female teacher without taking cognisance of the part her gender plays in her experiences. She (*ibid*: 112) finds it strange that discussions on teachers' issues should take place with little or no allusion to gender issues. Acker (*ibid*: 114) notices a range of treatment of gender in writing on teachers' lives. For example, she notes that, in some, gender is completely ignored; gender is included but in a stereotypical manner; gender is given a place on the periphery of the main argument; gender deliberations are integrated into the analysis or; gender is moved to "centre stage." Acker (*ibid*) posits that the penchant for gathering knowledge based solely on men's experiences with little or none of women's, forced some to develop a feminist methodology which placed women centre-stage of the research. However, almost two decades later, Galman & Mallozzi (2012) state that elementary/primary school teachers in the USA are no longer the focus of research and that the gendered nature of the teacher is not being properly addressed (*ibid*, 2012: 244). Rather, when feminisation is examined, it is in the context of the harmful effect on boys and the perception that there is a female agenda that promotes the achievement of girls. They (*ibid*) note that:

...even in the midst of these contentious debates about the supposed effects of elementary classroom feminization, scholars are not setting out to investigate the gendered professional experiences of female elementary school teachers in a focused, empirical fashion.

Galman & Mallozzi, (2012: 245) reveal that their perusal of literature, dating from 1995 and proposing to address the female teacher, unveiled a focus on "students", "maleness", "men as remedy to the female teacher workforce", and "women entering the masculine administration realm" (*ibid*, 263-267). In other words, women teachers remained "largely silent, absent, unnoticed, or disregarded as gendered workers and female beings" (*ibid*). If this is the research reality in an advanced nation, it is hardly likely that in a post-colonial setting where research has been predominantly of a quantitative nature that much has been done to get a female perspective of teaching.

The Role of Feminism in this Study

Savickas (2012: 14) suggests that individuals, in this instance female teachers, begin to form their psychological and social identities by “associating the psychological self with social roles and cultural representations”. Savickas (*ibid*: 14-15) adds that persons either act out or revise their identities when they become part of a group that fits their identifiable self. As such, persons may involve themselves, validate and self-actualise within that corroborative group. This identity formation takes place in the home, the church and in the school where a child spends at least eight hours of the day. This makes the school significant in the socialisation process. For example, Kangethe *et al.* (2014: 280) iterates that:

School as a social institution tends to repeat and instill the cultural labels and values into which individuals have been socialized at the family and community levels.

In this study, I used feminism to analyse the impact that gender played in a female teacher’s identity formation, her philosophy and pedagogy. A focus on identity formation is one of the keys to unlocking the reasons why teaching, especially in early childhood and primary schools, is seen as a feminised activity (MEN, 2011: 64) with caretaking being one of its significant functions. This focus provides answers as to why nurturing aspects have become rooted in school culture; why some believe that teachers should mother their children; and that the school- a place of learning, is also a home away from home. It explains the non- participation of and the high attrition rate of male teachers from the system.

Feminism is also used in this study to examine female teachers’ multi-faceted roles and their effects on the school and other areas of their life. Referring to this occurrence as “work-life balance”, Chawla & Sondhi (2011: 345) explain that it is:

the effective management and synchronization between remunerative work and the other roles and responsibilities that are important to people as ‘individualized’ human beings and as a part of the society.

Accordingly, work-life balance speaks of how household work affects professional work and vice-versa. Kelly *et al.* (2011: 265) argue that an imbalance can be identified when professional work or family activities are missed; or stress from work is brought home or vice versa. This is particularly true for women. Researchers have pointed out that basically, women spend more time than men on household issues while also maintaining a job (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011: 345). Similarly, Kelly *et al.* (2011: 268) point out that working mothers are more likely to experience work- family conflict because they normally spend more time in caregiving and housework. There is also the traditional expectancy that they should focus on the needs of their family by being available when needed (Kelly *et al: ibid*). Paradoxically, as Suk (2010: 13) theorises, the work place is geared towards the “masculine ideal worker”. This is a space where employers tend to visualise workers who are able, among other things, “to work full-time, move when the job requires it, and take little time off” (Suk, 2010: 13-14). Suk (*ibid*: 14) sees this visualisation as discrimination against women as a vast majority of them cannot fit into this depiction.

It is the preceding examples of marginalisation and unequal expectations that keep women from being truly equal in society; thus making feminism the most appropriate theory to address these issues. Feminism, in spite of the notion of waves, still foregrounds the unequal androcentric nature of society. The waves converge and the philosophy remains the same. Feminism is a consciousness that in spite of the rhetoric on gender equality, women still function in societies where professional work is analysed from a male perspective while women are seen as best suited for the work at home. For example, not taking into account the biological differences in women and making adjustments in the workplace to accommodate them is paying lip service to gender equality. My emphasis is identifying and advocating for women’s issues to take centre stage and not as issues brushed aside with comments such as “the time of the month” or discriminating suggestions of women “taking their correct god-intended place” by which is meant “stay at home”. Feminism as a theory is a way of saying that while women may have physiological, psychological and even emotional differences to those of men, these do not make them unequal or inferior to them.

Chapter 3 –Methodology

Narrative methodologies focus on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide insight into the complexity of human lives (Trahar, 2013: 302).

In **Chapter One**, I stated my positionality and how it has led to my epistemological choices for this research. I consider a system where voices are suppressed to be an oppressive one. It is one where the voice of the “subaltern” (see Spivak, 1988) is usually drowned out by those of the power brokers, and their agents. This ‘voicelessness’ and the resultant hopelessness had been my experience throughout my teaching career. In addition, compounding this frustration, is the fact that most of the research done on teachers in Trinidad and Tobago has been from a positivist perspective. Positivists assert that an impartial truth is attainable; one born from “scientific realism” that can be proven every time by scientific methods and driven by an “unchangeable law” (Rohlehr, 2012:32). Thus, teachers have been examined, investigated and studied through questionnaires and surveys; perceptions have been gathered from students, parents and others in society and findings have mostly been presented in numerical form. Those who adhere to the positivist paradigm also believe that research should be value free. However, I take an anti-positivist stance, firstly, believing that positivist approaches have failed to take into consideration the lived experiences of the teacher. This is particularly true within post-colonial educational settings which are still characterised by negative practices of colonialism. Carter (1993: 8) submits that:

At one level, the issue of voice centres on the extent to which the languages of research on teaching, with their emphasis on general propositions, allow for the authentic expression of teachers' experiences and concerns. At a second level, the issue is one of discourse and power, that is, the extent to which the languages of researchers not only deny teachers the right to speak for and about teaching but also form part of a larger network of power that functions for the remote control of teaching practice by policymakers and administrators.

Secondly, I take the view that research methodologies cannot be value free and that:

When researchers are deciding what research methods to adopt they will inevitably be influenced by their underlying ontological and epistemological positions. This in turn will be influenced by their values... (Greenbank, 2003:792).

The methodologies that I used build on other emergent methodologies that broaden epistemological “understandings of how research should be conducted within educational settings” (Marshall& Pahl, 2015:472). Most importantly, I sought to promote a paradigm that speaks of research as being lively, engaging, and understandable to a wider and more varied audience. Marshall& Pahl (*ibid*) suggest:

There needs to be a wider recognition of the way in which both methodological and theoretical perspectives within education departments can be informed by arts and humanities’ perspectives as well as the social sciences.

I do this by employing poetry which affects readers on both the cognitive and effective domains and lingers with us for a much longer time than the statistical data of positivism. The methodologies also signify that knowledge should be easily accessible in term of understanding and that:

the writing should be simple and direct and free of jargon because ‘the people we were[are] writing for were[are] the people we were[are] fighting for’ (Sivanandan, 2014 in Gordon, 2014:3)

I chose to use an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm because I believe that it is the best way to study human experiences. This approach states that reality is socially constructed (Andrews, 2012: *no pg. no*) and researchers need to gain an understanding of how participants give meaning to their lived experiences (Schwandt, 1994:222). Within this paradigm, I elected for a narrative life history approach hoping to show insiders’ perspectives of school life and teaching practice in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, I took an autoethnographic stance and included my story to explain and position myself and experiences into the similar contexts of the participants. Within the life history approach, I employ narratives as a way of collecting, disseminating and representing data. Furthermore, I utilised postcolonialism and feminism to explicate the issues that the teachers presented through their narratives. This chapter will include discussions on:

- Autoethnography

- Life story/life history
- Narratives in life history methodology
- Poetic inquiry
- Ethical Considerations
- Methods/procedure used in this research.

Autoethnography

To understand *autoethnography* one must first comprehend ethnography; a research methodology which has been defined in several ways. Basically, as a tool to understand, represent, and sometimes critique a “cultural practice, experience, identity, or group” (Adams & Manning, 2015: 351), *ethnography* enables researchers to use different perspectives to view the many contexts of their participants’ stories (Reda, 2007: para. 7). Ricci (2003: 593) suggests that ethnography is the attempt to ascertain the culture of others, and thus, autoethnography can be seen as the attempt to discern “the culture of self, or of others through self”. Similarly, Das & Mullick (2015: 266) propose that individuals’ understanding of others stems from reflecting on the self while interacting with others. They (*ibid*) cite Ellis *et al.* (2010) who postulate that autoethnography is a response to the sometimes colonising aspects of ethnography. Autoethnography makes no claims to objectivity (Ricci, 2003:593) but reveals the researcher’s ontological positioning with all its subjectivities. The word itself finds its roots in *auto* (self -directed); *ethno* (culture), and *graphy* (written or graphic representation) (Ricci, 2003: 593; Das & Mullick, 2015: 266). It is a marriage between ethnography and autobiography (Adams & Manning, 2015: 352; Reda, 2007: para.7). Thus, an autoethnographic study embraces:

a mixture of fieldwork, observation, acknowledgment of extant research and theories, and cultural participation and analysis (ethnography), as well as personal experience, memory, and storytelling techniques (autobiography) (Adams & Manning, 2015: 352).

An *autobiography* is a first-hand interpretation of a life and can include private stories that elucidate how a person makes sense of experiences in the past and the important

lessons that can be learnt (Adams & Manning, 2015: 351). Autoethnographies go a bit further by including an individual's interactions with others and the community, even when the focal point of the research is not on those interactions (*ibid*: 352). All the same, Trahar (2013: 303-304) points out that there has been criticism about autoethnographies being egotistical with the focus on self instead of others. Additionally, Das & Mullick (2015: 265) advance that while ethnographers utilise strategies such as observation and interviews to gather data there is no recognisable person performing the role of "observer" for the autoethnographer. Autoethnography, therefore, involves a lot of memory work and:

Memory is a self-selecting process, creating patterns through elision, emphasis, forgetfulness. Such transformations radically alter the "data" (Reda, 2007: *para.14*).

However, in spite of these critiques, I decided to include my story in the work because "elements of the writer's life story give clarity and authenticity to the text" (Trahar, 2013: 303-304). To assist in memory retrieval, I called on my sister, who is only sixteen months younger than I am, to verify some of my recall from my childhood's home and primary school experiences. I also asked a teacher who was part of my close circle of friends to confirm some details from my first teaching experience. The historical and cultural contexts of Trinbago also proved to be excellent for fact verification. I submit that reflecting on and including my story in the research assisted me in empathically comparing my experiences with my participants' while allowing my readers an opportunity to reflect on any possible biases which may be revealed in the work.

Life History/Life Story

Life history is a methodology that falls into the auto/biographical framework; the slash "/" in the word signifying that there is a "systematic, self-directed reflection undertaken in order to make meaning from other persons' narratives" (Hughes, 2012: *abstract*). Taylor & Medina (2013: 4) point out that this paradigm was born out of anthropological practice. It aims to comprehend others by allowing researchers to walk through a door rather than sneaking a peek through the window. Consequently,

the knowledge gained through this methodology is interpretive as “researchers construct trustworthy and authentic accounts of the cultural other” (Taylor & Medina, *ibid*). Life history work done by members of the University of Chicago’s School of Sociology laid the base for the present use of the approach (See Lutters and Ackerman, 1996). Nonetheless, life history has been with us for a much longer time. For example, painting and carvings left in caves in various parts of the world, such as Mexico, New South Wales and France demonstrate that humans were always interested in telling their stories and leaving a record behind. Life histories are also heard in oral traditions. The stories that we pass on from generation to generation; the folk tales that we tell to teach morals and values and the calypsos that we as a Caribbean people sing all depict life and are left as a legacy and thus can be considered life history.

Researchers use life history to gain insiders’ views of persons whom they wish to study (see for example work done by Richardson, 1990; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Park, 2011). However, Adriansen (2012: 42) theorises that depending on its purpose, the research interest might be understanding a person’s life story in its varying contexts, or the focus could be on the dynamics of storytelling. Sikes (2010 in Goodson, 2011: 16) sees life histories as valuable because they recognise the critical relationships, experiences and sensitivities of individuals’ lives; thus providing evidence to show how persons make sense of the complex world in which they live. Life histories also give ‘voice’ to individuals; a concept which may be seen as a narcissistic one (Cole, 2009: 564). Nevertheless, the notion of “giving voice” to the marginalised appeals to me. Speaking from an educational perspective, my philosophy is that teachers’ voices should be at the forefront of any discussions on schooling and other matters that affect their school life and pedagogies. Their stories can be useful tools to generate new and valuable contributions to the ever current debate on schools and the problems that are inherent in them.

The terms ‘life story’ and ‘life history’ are sometimes used interchangeably. However, there is a difference between the two. Savickas (2012: 15) theorises that persons create stories to sequentially arrange occurrences in their lives. Life stories, then, can be classified as the stories that we tell about the incidents that have happened

to us during our lives or a period in that time. Story tellers may leave out some accounts or details for personal reasons such as protecting themselves and/or others (Goodson & Sikes, 2001: 26). Some incidents and feelings may be simply skirted over because recounting them may cause a resurgence of painful memories and feelings (*ibid*). Some may even tell lies to impress the researcher (Sikes, 2000: 268), while others' memories may be unreliable (Gardner, 2001: 188). The transformation from life story to life history is the connection of story with various contexts. Goodson (1992: 8) explains that "the life story is a personal reconstruction of experience ..." while, life history uses the story as a foundation (*ibid*). The researcher builds on that foundation by gathering other information from documents, other persons' accounts and historical and other data (Goodson, 1992: 8; Reissman, 2008; Hallett, 2013: 1). Accordingly, in striving to produce life history, I have been very careful in Chapter One to provide grounding for the stories. Researching and reviewing the literature on the history of Trinidad and Tobago, inclusive of its education, and the cultural contexts enabled me to compare and validate certain aspects of the stories.

Narratives in Life History

Narrative research is not just a "let me tell you a story" activity. Through the use of narratives, one can begin to understand the very personal and subjective stories that persons have used to construct and maintain identities (Park, 2013: 9). Narratives can be found in all kinds of print (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012: 76) and electronic materials. They can also be located in speeches, conversations or in tales that people tell about themselves (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012: 76). Hammack & Pilecki (*ibid*) theorise that "the idea of narrative transcends disciplinary boundaries in that these storied accounts are located at every level of analysis" in many socioeconomic/political and cultural contexts. Accordingly, as they suggest, they can be seen as "windows into mind and society" and as such, "stories know no bounds" (Hammack & Pilecki, *ibid*).

Like 'life history' and 'life story' there is also interchangeability in the use of the words 'narrative' and 'story'. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'narrative' as "a spoken or written account; a story." Contrariwise, Miami University Digital Humanities makes a distinction between story and narrative. It states:

A *narrative* is some kind of retelling, often in words ... of something that happened (a story). The narrative is not the story itself but rather the telling of the story ... While a *story* is just a sequence of events, a *narrative* recounts those events, perhaps leaving some occurrences out because they are from some perspective insignificant, and perhaps emphasizing others (*Emphases mine*).

Most of us, however, use the word ‘story’ whether we are telling a story or retelling someone’s version of a story. In this thesis, I use the words ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ interchangeably; firstly to describe the stories that were told to me and secondly to describe the method that I used to re-create those stories. Narratives/stories have elements that make them readable and easier to understand than traditional research methods. They allow listeners/readers to feel emotions and to become engaged in a way that charts, tables, graphs and figures never can. They are important and have been with us even before humans were able to leave written records. Clandinin & Rosiek (2007: 35-36) agree that:

Human beings have lived out and told stories about living for as long as we could talk... These lived and told stories and the talk about stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities.

According to Savickas (2012: 15), “Storytelling makes the self” and also assist others in gaining an understanding of our world. Consequently, stories can be seen as the oldest form of analysis (Hendry, 2010: 72). Savickas (2012: 14) proposes that they offer the resourceful means whereby individuals construct personal perspectives about their working life. Within educational research, narratives can serve multifaceted purposes. For example, Park (2013: 9) suggests that they may help us to comprehend the numerous stimuli that influenced teachers’ decisions to choose teaching as a career. Furthermore, Nelson (2011: 471) suggests that narratives of classroom life can encourage “communities of learners, teachers, and researchers in claiming what Bhabha (2003) famously called the “right to narrate””. For Bhabha (2014: *no pg. no.*), the right to narrate means “the authority to tell stories, recount or recast histories that

create the web of social life and change the direction of its flow...” It is “a metaphor for the fundamental human interest in freedom itself, the right to be heard- to be recognized and represented...” (*ibid*). I iterate that teachers, like every other in society, must be afforded this right. Every story is a step forward to achieving this goal. Goodson (2011: 7) quotes one teacher who claims that “the song of the teacher is part of a larger song”. Richardson’s (1988) notion of the collective story is quite significant within this framework. She (1988: 201) theorises that:

A collective story tells the experience of a sociologically constructed category of people in the context of larger sociocultural and historical forces.

In her work ‘*The Collective Story: Postmodernism and the Writing of Sociology*’ Richardson (*ibid*) explains that “the sociological protagonist is a collective”. She (*ibid*) believes that this cognisance destroys the seclusion between people and, thus, empowers them. This resonates with me. I wanted the participants’ stories to be seen not simply as those of individuals but that taken collectively they would help others, especially teachers, to become conscious that there were others who were probably facing similar realities. My interest, therefore, was understanding and re-presenting the stories in their contexts and not so much the dynamics of storytelling (Adriansen, 2012: 42).

Nonetheless, there are various ways to construct narratives from participants’ stories. For example, researchers may use sociolinguist Labov’s construct which deals with the concepts of abstract, orientation, complicating actions, evaluation, resolution and coda (See Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Alternatively, they could also construct narratives paying attention to the basic elements; namely characters, settings, and a plot containing actions, conflicts and resolutions. What is vital, however, is to re-present stories in a manner that sincerely represents participants’ issues, ideas and feelings. Clandinin & Murphy (2009: 600) endorse this position advancing that:

The priority in composing research texts is not, first and foremost, to tell a good story; the priority is to compose research texts in relation with the lives of our participants and ourselves... Focusing solely on the role of literary

elements in narrative representation may suggest a separation of research text from the experience of the research.

More importantly, there is the reflective understanding that academic writing should not be convoluted; above the heads of the persons who participated in the research and from those who may most benefit from the findings. Convoluted writing can be seen as a form of power and arrogance that keeps knowledge, wittingly or unwittingly, within the reach of the academic few, politicians and those others who make the rules for the masses to follow.

Poetic Inquiry

*Come, read to me some poem,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling
And banish the thoughts of day.
(Henry Wordsworth Longfellow)*

Using poetry in my writing was as natural for me as is breathing. I have always loved poetry and have been using it to express my feelings since my teenage years. However, should I use poetics just because I loved poetry? It had to be more than that. I asked myself several questions. Why do I love poetry? What has it done for me? What do I feel, think or do when I hear or read poetry? It was a moment for reflection. In fact, this is one of the things that poetry does. It causes reflection. Poetry touches us in the affective as well as the cognitive domain. We use poems to teach lessons. They remain with us and we quote them, or from them, in times of joy, sorrow or pain. For example, the above verse is from a poem that I learnt as a primary school pupil and I still recite bits of it when I am feeling sad or depressed. Throughout time, poetry has been used to speak out on a number of issues and to share various experiences. Poets have written and spoken about love and sex; war; injustice in the world; and about religion among other topics. Brady (2009: xiii; xiv-xv) claims that:

Nothing is out of bounds for it... Sometimes it is aimed as criticism about what ails us in the weak spots of a shared planet. Some of it is pointed directly at the blindness of our conventions and wants to go off like a firecracker in the brain in the quest for change.

In the Caribbean and especially in Trinbago, the lyrics of calypso have been used effectively to entertain, educate and highlight societal ills, corruption and myriad issues plaguing the society. Calypso does not just present society but is also an “advocate of social and political change” (Hinds, 2010: 1). Thus, calypsonians who in effect are poets who sing and perform their work, can be seen as “agents of resistance” (*ibid*). They take on the role of sagacious messengers who act on the behalf of the marginalised masses in their “quest for self-definition and freedom” (*ibid*). This is the power of poets. I decided that combining poetry and narratives would help me to disseminate information to a wider audience. It would make the research more readable, enjoyable and accessible in terms of understanding. These sentiments are not peculiar to me. Brady (2009: xi.) suggests that:

A plurality of methods can cast a wider net, catch more, put us in the web of a truly productive artful-science- into a core of thinking that promotes robust discourse from ivy-covered halls to the hinterlands of humans being.

Similarly, Tuval-Mashiach (2014: 125) advances that:

A pluralistic stance holds that the employment of more than one qualitative approach helps one gain a broader spectrum of meanings of the studied phenomena.

What is Poetic Inquiry?

Poetic inquiry can be described in many ways and Prendergast (2009) gives several definitions. I have incorporated three of them to form an explanation.

Poetic inquiry is a type of qualitative methodology in the social science field that incorporates poetry in some way as an element of research in the attempt to more genuinely express human experiences (Prendergast, 2009: xx-xxi; *ibid*, 560-561).

It carries many terms; some of which are research poetry, data poetry, poetic transcription, poetic representation, ethno-poem, anthropological poetry, poetic condensation of oral narratives and investigative poetry (Prendergast, *ibid*: 544;

Sjollemma *et al.*, 2012: 206). The various names used by different writers and researchers would be an indication of the part that poetry plays in the process and/or analysis and dissemination of the findings of their works. A bibliography compiled by Prendergast (2009: xx-xxi; *ibid*: 543-544) indicates that poetic inquiry dates back to the early 1980s. However, it appears that anthropologists had been discreetly writing ethnographic poetry based on their “field” study for a very long time (Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010: 5). Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor (*ibid*) cite female anthropologist Ruth Benedict who in the 1930s published her poetry under assumed names to hide this aspect of her work from her mentor and her colleagues. Nevertheless, it is sociologist Laurel Richardson who is accredited with the use of poetry in educational circles in the early 1990’s (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009: 3).

Poetics can now be seen as part of the arts-based inquiry movement and has been getting acceptance in both conferences and peer-reviewed publications (Prendergast, 2009). For example, in 2008, Prendergast compiled a list of peer-reviewed social science journals that contained poetry, though not all pertaining to research. Some of them are *American Anthropologist*, *Anthropology & Humanism*, *Feminist Studies*, *Journal of Family Issues*, and *Educational Insights/Studio*. Furman *et al.*’s (2006) ‘The research poem in international social work: Innovations in qualitative methodology’ can be found in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* and Reder’s (2016) ‘Transforming the Academic Classroom: University Students and Children in a Homework Program Write Poems Together’ in *Community Works Journal—Online Magazine for Educators*.

The value of poetry to research

There is a lot to be said for the use of poetry in research. Poetry can be used to represent, discuss and analyse data (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009: 3; Faulkner, 2012: 204). The genre is versatile allowing dissemination of information and also emotionally affecting readers in a way which causes them to analyse in a profound manner (Faulkner, 2012: 205). It is able to both describe and interpret; and in a sense can use “voice as a means to write *for* those studied rather than *about* them” (Faulkner, 2012: 206) (*my emphases*). Moreover, Davidson *et al.* (2012: 121) conjecture that

since poems are usually short and often rhythmic, they may reach a “distinct subset of individuals who may benefit from less traditional forms”. Butler-Kisber & Stewart (2009: 3) agree and assert that with poetry, “so much can be said in so few words and in such compelling ways”. They (*ibid*) contend that poetry portrays within its rhythms and features, “musicality and poignancy”. Thus, the language of poetry with its metaphors, internal and external rhymes, rhythms, consonance and assonance make them not only enjoyable but also memorable. That’s why we as Caribbean people can sing calypsos word for word. That’s why we remember poems that we learnt as children. “...poetics is designed to keep premature closure on thinking in check while encouraging creativity in both research and reporting” (Brady, 2009: xi).

I believe that it is vital that we remember. Too often persons read or hear about research findings and then move on. They have not been touched in the affective domain and because of this, they take no action.

The words of the poet can represent both researchers’ and participants’ voices, experiences and feelings. Those voices may be incorporated within the research in many ways. However, here I am relying on Prendergast (2009: xxii; *ibid*: 545) who posits that poetic inquiry incorporates three types of “voices”. She classifies them as *vox theoria*, *vox autobiographia/autoethnographia* and *vox participare*. *Vox theoria* are defined as poems that are written from a theoretical perspective of a particular discipline or about the concept being studied. *Vox autobiographia/autoethnographia* are those poems that are written from field notes, journal entries, or reflections during the research process. *Vox participare* are those written from interview transcripts or those written by the participants. These are the three types which may be identified within this work.

There are also different types of poetic forms; acrostic, haiku, cento, limerick and free verse are a few. Word limitations of this work do not allow for a treatise on all these forms. What is important here is to point to some of the devices poets use that add to the quality and presentation of the work (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009: 17). These devices would include, among others, imagery, metaphors, similes, metre, rhyme and repetition. Nevertheless, Brady (2009: xiv) posits that while writing poetry using

established procedures is brilliant, a fixation with poetic methods “is the equivalent of spending too much time nailing soles on shoes of known sizes and not enough time wearing them”. Readers may prefer to know what to include as content in a poem. According to Butler-Kisber & Stewart (2009: 4), there is the notion of “found poetry” as used by Laurel Richardson. Found poetry uses words that are removed from interview data and are represented in poetic form (Butler-Kisber. & Stewart, 2009: 4). Sjollema *et al.* (2012: 207) explain that this process uses words, phrases or entire passages from participants’ stories; and crafts poems from them by “changing the spacing, line breaks, and by adding and deleting certain words”. This method, though restricting, can be used by beginning poets (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009: 4). On the other hand, there is what is known as “generated poems” or “interpretive” poems (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009: 4; Sjollema *et al.*, 2012: 207). Butler-Kisber & Stewart (2009: 4) and also Sjollema *et al.* (2012: 207) advise that these are constructed from the researcher’s comprehension of the research “experiences”; “to explore and reflect upon research memories, roles and assumptions”; or “in response to a “usually personal” situation”. Nevertheless both styles can be used to re-present, represent or analyse data (Sjollema *et al.*, 2012: 207).

Just as qualitative research is still not totally accepted by some, so too poetry in research has to gain acceptance in many quarters. Cahnmann-Taylor (2009: 16) says that it is “a risky business”; seen as soft research that is not reliable, replicable, or generalisable in rigorously “scientific” ways. Cahnmann-Taylor (*ibid*: 15) advances the view that:

If researchers dared to speak of poetry in their research, they would be easy targets for dismissal from funding agencies and major research organizations.

She (*ibid*: 16) theorises that language can be used to demonstrate that “what we have done both builds on what has been done before and adds to it in fresh and vital ways”. Therefore, as qualitative researchers, it is up to us to prove that:

Their [our] ideas are the most exciting, their [our] research is worth talking about, their [our] theory understands paradox and contradiction, their [our] methodology is the most rigorous, their [our] excerpts are the most memorable,

their [our] relationship with participants is the most honorable and reciprocal, their [our] implications are most vital, and their [our] criticism is the most astute (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009: 16).

Totally agreeing with Goodson's (2011:9) call to "bring back the poetic, the joy, which should be crucially part of education", I made a choice to make research accessible to persons who would not normally be interested in reading what can often be termed as dry, boring and incomprehensible treatises.

Ethical Considerations

Within some of the seeming strengths of the life history approach there emerge some serious ethical and representational issues (Cole, 2009: 570).

Apart from the guidelines one can obtain from various ethics boards, there are additional issues that arise when undertaking qualitative research (Hallett, 2013: 4). In an enlightening review on Cole & Knowles' (2001) *Lives in Context*, Papantoniou-Frangouli (2009: 182) says that what is evident when reading the book is that the authors are very concerned about ethics in qualitative research and consequently they call for research that benefits participants, researchers and the readers. According to Papantoniou-Frangouli (2009: 183), Cole & Knowles introduced aspects of morality into ethical considerations; and pointed to a number of ideas that create gratifying relationships between researcher and participants generating:

conditions for a richer, more sincere contact that will in its turn allow life-historians to go as deep as it is humanly possible in the understanding of another human being (*ibid*).

These principles include *reflexivity*, *relationality*, and *authenticity* among others (*ibid*). Understanding and adhering to these would go a long way in making research ethically sound. *Reflexivity* would mean researchers' willingness to imagine themselves in the participants' position to get a feel of what it means to be researched (*ibid*). For example, Hallett (2013: 4) refers to "interactions that have the potential of harm" such as when stories of abuse are discussed during life history interviews. Imagining one's self in the position of the participant:

enhances the sensitivity of the researchers, their capacity of becoming responsive to the needs of the researched, of realizing how far they can go on sensitive issues, when they have to stop, what to do when it becomes painful for the participant to respond (Papantoniou-Frangouli, 2009: 184).

Relationality, according to Papantoniou-Frangouli (*ibid*: 183), speaks about the connections formed between the participants and the researcher which should result in relationships of “trust, mutual respect, and common purpose”. This is important because as Hallett (2013:2) reminds us, “the intimacy of life history places the participant in a place of vulnerability not always present in other forms of research”. Hence, relationality influences the choices that participants make about “what to tell, how to tell it, and what details need elaboration” (Tuval-Mashiach, 2014: 126). Additionally, Taylor & Medina (2013: 4), expanding on the 1989 work of Guba and Lincoln, incorporate credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability into the notion of trust. For them (*ibid*), credibility means that researchers spend lengthy time gathering data, verifying interpretations with participants and explaining the path to new knowledge. Dependability relates to the use of “emergent inquiry”; transferability to the application to other contexts and confirmability answers the question “can the research data be tracked to their source?” (Taylor & Medina, 2013: 4-5).

Papantoniou-Frangouli, (2009: 183) couples **authenticity** with relationality. Within the concept of authenticity is researchers’ presence in the research process. They should take ownership for the design and the product should reflect their:

intellectual, creative and moral passions and commitments...to the epistemological underpinnings and possibilities of life history methodology, the people and life contexts to be explored, and the professional communities and contexts within which one is situated (Papantoniou-Frangouli, 2009: 183-184).

Taylor & Medina (2013: 4) believe that authenticity is relational but includes fairness, the educative, the catalytic, and the tactical within its scope. For them (*ibid*) participants should be fairly represented in the research; they should also “benefit by

learning about their social world” and “identifying problems associated with their social world”.

The preceding thoughts about ethics in research make it incumbent that I explain fully my research process. This I do in the following sections.

Method/ Procedure

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Representing and interpreting another’s voice is not a simple task and needs to be done with respect and humility (Hunter, 2010:50).

I began the research process in July/August of 2014 as soon as I had received clearance to proceed from the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee. Thereafter, I was guided by research steps attributed to Plummer in his 2000 book *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism* (Monchery, 2010:74). These are initial preparation, data collection, data storage, data preparation and data analysis (Monchery, *ibid*). I decided to employ these steps as I proceeded.

Preparation

I mentally started preparation for the research before clearance was given by the UOS ethics committee. The first tasks were determining and sourcing participants. I decided to use purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is also termed judgment sampling and is the thoughtful choice of informants according to the qualities they possess (Tongco, 2007: 147). Basically, the researcher having determined what s/he needs to know, seeks to find people who are willing to share their experiences (Tongco, 2007: 147; Papantoniou-Frangouli, 2009: 184). Palinkas *et al.* (2013: 123) advocate it for:

the most effective use of limited resources , importance of availability and willingness to participate, the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

It was the viable choice for me. I needed female teachers at various points of their teaching career. I needed them to be articulate when it came to sharing their views. I needed teachers who I knew would be reliable and would not go back on their word to participate except in extenuating circumstances. I also needed participants who were within easy reach to me as far as travelling was concerned. These reasons were important given my constraints of time and finances. I made a list of several retired and practicing teachers and then eliminated those whom I felt would be hampered by various constraints or whom I would have difficulty in accessing. The four that I settled on met my above stated criteria.

Contacting participants

Papantoniou-Frangouli (2009: 184) advocates that one can use an informal method when making contact with participants. Approaching mine was not difficult as I already knew them as members from my teaching community. I contacted them by telephone; explained what I was doing and enquired about their willingness to participate. I followed up by visits to have preliminary chats about the research process. During those visits, I gave each a formal information letter with the research details and my responsibilities as the researcher. I also presented a consent form for her signature advising that she was willingly and perceptively participating in my study (*see appendices 1, 2*). These were essential not only for the ethical requirements of the university but also the relational issues discussed in the section on ethics. I gave a memo pad to each and asked her to pre-note what she wanted to speak about; so that I would have her share what she wanted to instead of me asking what I wanted to hear. We negotiated the times and venues for the interviews (Papantoniou-Frangouli, 2009: 184-185). The plan was that the in-service teachers would be interviewed during schools' July/ August vacation of 2014 and the retirees at any time that best suited them. It was not difficult to reach my participants because of the way that I had sampled but I did have some other challenges. For example, I had to re-schedule two interviews because of participants' unexpected personal commitments. In fact, one of them eventually met with me at my home because it was difficult for us to meet anywhere else. During the research process, in addition to physical contact, I used the

telephone and electronic mail whenever I needed supplementary information from my participants.

Data Collection and Storage

The Interviews. Researchers have different views about how interviews should be conducted. Adriansen (2012: 42) suggests that:

it becomes important for the interviewer to be silent, not to take over the interview with too many questions or a set frame for asking questions.

Goodson (2005: 4) believes that this strategy yields the best results. I asked my participants to share with me their life stories with relations to their teaching careers. My questions then served as back up for when they had exhausted what they wanted to share; when I felt that there was a gap that needed to be filled or when I needed clarification. Three of them had used the note pads to pre-note what they wanted to share and one of those also electronically pre-recorded part of her story. In this instance, I used my questions to ask her to fill in gaps and to continue her story. To manage the burden of data collection, Goodson (2005: 4) makes a case for the use of the tape recorder. I had previously informed my participants that the stories would be recorded so that they were well prepared for this part of the process. Again on Goodson's (2005: 4) advice, I took no notes during the interviews because I wanted to give my participants my undivided attention. I used two cell phones with recorders in case one malfunctioned and which were also to be able to pick up the dialogue from two different angles.

Data Preparation

Transcribing the interviews was long and tiring. I was glad that I had been guided by Labaree (2006:125) who suggests small sample sizes for this type of research. Using the Listen and Write software (*available free online*) to assist me, I personally transcribed the interviews with little or no editing because I wanted to reflect on the data even as I copied. After transcribing, I e-mailed the transcripts to three teachers for review and approval. I personally carried a hard copy for one participant, as she found

it easier to read in this format. She also took the opportunity to make additional notes before she returned it. I used the transcripts to create the narratives. Savickas (2012: 16) speaking in a counselling framework, about the construction and reconstructing of clients' narratives explains that:

In working with the micronarratives, the counsellor actively gathers the story threads and weaves them into one tapestry... Integration of small stories about the self in social situations constructs a large story ... The macronarrative reconstructs experiences to make sense and to sediment values, attitudes, and habits into grand story about the person's life.

This paradigm made sense to me in a research context; so I used it to create participants' stories. This means that I used the smaller stories from the narrative transcripts and striving for a chronological order, represented them as one larger personal story (*See appendix 4*). To avoid colonising their stories, I used the teachers' own words as much as possible in representing the stories and stuck to the Trinbagonian vernacular which they spoke. I then returned the stories for the teachers' approval (*see Appendix 5 for further data matters*).

Data Analysis

Nelson (2011: 465) claims that in narrative approaches, while data collection processes are often explicated, those of analysis are nebulous or missing. I am seeking here to clarify how I proceeded with my analysis. After crafting the narratives, I read each story several times. I reviewed my own story and compared it with those given to me by the teachers. I then looked for evidence and examples of what I considered postcolonialism or feminism. Here, I note that my participants have not suggested these as theoretical frameworks to examine their stories. These are my interpretations and certainly readers may see the stories from differing perspectives. Nevertheless, Nelson (2011: 467) points out that:

The narratives serve as a sort of window pane through which researchers examine particular themes of interest to *them* or to their research participants (*my emphasis*).

Under postcolonialism, I pulled out the sub-themes that I saw emerging in each story. These were issues such as practice of colonial traditions; corporal punishment; cultural traits such as silence in the presence of authority figures; and mimicry of curriculum content from foreign frames. I did the same for feminism. I trawled for issues and experiences dealing with the feminisation of schools; childhood female influences; female teachers' models and influences on younger teachers; female teachers' feminised practice; and home and school roles convergence. The teachers' experiences are varied. Some stories raised issues and spoke of experiences that others do not; so I reiterate that I do not seek to generalise. Still:

Stories formed and informed by the wider historical, social and cultural contexts ... may provide us with more widely applicable insights (Trahar, 2011: 49).

All the characters have been given pseudonyms. In the following four chapters I have re-presented the four participants' stories. I begin each story with a preamble which gives an insight into the scenes in which the interviews were conducted (Goodson, 2005: 3). The preambles also explain other details I deem important to the interest of the stories.

Chapter 4 - Marcia's Story

Marcia is one of those persons who appear to have drunk from the fountain of youth. Looking at her, one would not believe that she had been in the teaching service for nineteen years. I sat down to listen to her on a day of intermittent rain. It was easy talking to Marcia since, as I have indicated, I already knew her. In fact, it was Marcia who made sure that my two recording devices were in order. We sat side by side on her couch with her holding one of them and with the other beside me. In many instances, her stories brought laughter to both of us, even though the narrated incidents and issues were serious ones. This seeming nonchalance is all part of the TT culture where laughter often hides pain and comedy is used when answers are not readily available. I re-present her story, on some occasions using my words but, in the main, I allow her voice to be heard which means that the TT dialect will be in evidence because that's the way "we Trinis does talk" or most of us sometimes do.

School Days

Marcia began her story by making the declaration: "Primary school life for me was a wonderful life". She started at a private primary school in Port of Spain where she had the same female teacher from infants to Standard Two. She said that:

The principal of the primary school was a no- nonsense female...anything you do she cutting your tail...she putting it on you one time... no questions ...no nothing ... she dealt with her students... she had no problem with discipline.

Marcia recalled that at Standard Two she was transferred to a denominational primary school at which she had another "no-nonsense female principal" and was taught by female teachers. There, she was afforded the opportunity of taking part in a great deal more extra-curricular activities; that school having many more than her previous one. She was a bright child getting only A's on her tests and she laughed as she recollected the copious tears she shed the one time that she got a B.

Marcia's first encounter with male teachers was when she went into secondary school and she said:

I did not have a good thought of males as teachers because before that I only had female teachers and then when I did experience male teachers it was a terrible, terrible thing.

In fact, she insisted that male teachers "in my opinion were...were characters". She related incidents to demonstrate why she considered them characters. Here is one of them:

We had another Mathematics teacher... He used to ask you questions on the spot and if you did not have the correct answer, he would have some kind of snide remark and everybody would laugh. So, when we had him, we were tense; everybody sitting down very tense and praying that he did not call you on that particular day.

That does not mean that she never had negative experiences with her female teachers. Marcia shared:

I had to apologise in front of the school to a female teacher for not saying good morning, which I *did* say but she did not hear. I had to apologise in front of the whole school...I will never forget that. It was a traumatic experience...a very traumatic experience... I would never forget.

Marcia Chooses Teaching or Teaching Chooses Her

When she left school, Marcia applied to take part in the OJT programme (*see chapter I*) for aspirant teachers. She admitted that it was an economic decision and not because she had a burning desire to teach. She laughed when I asked if she always wanted to be a teacher and responded:

No...I only got into teaching because I was called. They were the only persons who called at the time... only ones interested in employing me at the time in any shape or form.

Marcia reported that the OJT training was very informative, giving her an insight into the philosophies of the great educators. She believes that it was there that she started to understand what teaching was all about. After the training period, she was placed in a school as an OJT (On the Job Trainee). Her experiences there were varied. She had to spend one year at each level to be mentored by qualified in-service teachers. Marcia recalled:

The first mentor I had was an infant female teacher. She was real nice. The first day I entered was hugs and welcome. It wasn't bad teaching with her because she used to show me what to do and I would do it. I am very stressed out when I have to go in front of a class and teach with other people looking on. I am self-conscious when it comes to that but she was so nice ... she would show me what to do and then she would say "now you try a lesson" and I would try the lesson and it was good.

She had a similar experience in a Standard Two class with her second mentor and then moved to a Standard Four class.

I moved on to Standard 2 and it was the same thing... it was a female mentor. Then in Standard 4, I had a male mentor (*laughs*). Well mostly with him ...well I didn't teach much. I just sat and listened. He did the teaching. It must have been once or twice that he listened to me teach. It was not like in the infant and junior level where I taught and got feedback. I would more sit and correct books... He was not as interested in helping professionally. It wasn't a nurturing kind of story.

The principal did nothing to ease what must have been a daunting task for a young recruit. Marcia stated that:

The principal would come and listen... that was stressful though... he was a man and I didn't know him as well and he was not as welcoming. He used to come in and listen and he was stony- faced and it was a stressful experience.

Her problems were not simply about pedagogy. As a young trainee, she was quite shocked to hear the teachers and principal in un-professional behaviour. She said:

The principal was a serious man. He was a kind of tyrant. He used to fight with the teachers a lot. Apparently, he wanted his way and they wanted theirs. I used to hear the fights in the staff room and that kind of thing ... As an OJT, I was out of that...

She was also asked to take on responsibilities that should not have been given to an OJT; such as taking pupils out of the school.

... he [the principal] would ask me to do things and I would do it... because you are OJT and you are doing anything that they say to do. I had to go netball with the girls and whatever extra-curricular activities...

Nonetheless, Marcia managed to complete the three terms as an OJT. However, the transition from OJT to Assistant Teacher in the Teaching Service was not automatic. The only promise that had been made to trainees was that they would be interviewed for positions in schools after the training was completed. After the interview, Marcia waited for nearly a year before she was finally placed in a primary school. She was offered a position as an Assistant Teacher Two at a school in the east of the island.

The school was a hall with a small population. There was one first year and one second year class and Marcia was given the first year with about eighteen pupils. The children were pleasant and she had no problems with discipline or with parents coming in “to make trouble.” On the other hand, the teachers were not sociable and she had issues with the principal. This is how she describes her experience with him:

The principal was another story... He tell me that I had to come half past seven to walk around and get to know the children...but he not coming that hour in the morning... he coming nine o'clock ... minutes to ten. He used to come in a short pants track suit after he run in the morning... check in and check back out.

However, Marcia believes that the term spent there was not a bad experience. She declared:

It was nice to start teaching on your own and to start using your own techniques after the OJT programme... putting into practice the things that you learn... things that you come up with on your own.

After that opening stint, she was returned to the school where she had done her OJT training. It was an old wooden building but with separate classrooms. The population was small because “they were not getting many good passes at CE (Common Entrance) so parents didn’t want to send their children there”. Marcia was given an infant class to teach. The principal was still there and the in-fighting remained. She learnt to stay away from what she called ‘the politics of the school’ and to do exactly as she was told.

That principal although he was a tyrant with the rest of the teachers ... I never really had any problem with him pushing me around or anything like that; but you see I was on the outside still. I was doing anything anybody tell me to do. He used to ask me to do stuff and I used to do it and whenever I can’t, I didn’t used to do it. When I told him that I couldn’t do it and I told him why, he would leave it at that.

Marcia chalks up the experiences at that school as “bad times”. She reported:

Nobody came to listen to any lessons... I had to make things work the best that I could. We had no supervisors coming at that time into the schools; so you had to do what you had to do from the learning that you got.

She went to “the ladies who I bonded with as an OJT” to borrow teaching apparatus. She also had to make some out of scrap materials.

Well, obviously I had to make things too. So on Saturday evenings, before you [I] go out to lime (*socialise*) or whatever, you [I] making charts. (*The word ‘before’ in this context is a Trini expression for ‘instead of’*) You had to make everything from scratch because that is what you were told you had to do... to take trash to make treasures. So I had my house full. And buy everything with your own money. So I bought everything and Saturday evening, I making charts...

Marcia spent three years at that school and then moved on to the next step of her journey in becoming a teacher.

Off to College

Whereas Marcia started her episode of her primary school experience with the words “Primary school life for me was a wonderful life”; she prefaces her training college experience with these, “College was a trial”. There were two training colleges and she was placed in the one which was further away from her home. She wrote letters to the MOE because she knew that there were students who wanted to exchange places. The letters bore no fruit and Marcia stated that:

I didn't understand the logic in that. That is when I started to think about educational politics. That is when I started to think about the process involved in education. Where was the logic? What it is really going on with the people in charge? That was so strange to me. I couldn't understand...

Since the transfer did not take place and because she did not want to make the daily commute, she linked up with two other female teacher trainees and together they rented an apartment. It lacked some physical amenities and so she travelled home every week- end to do her laundry and to get assistance in the challenging areas of her studies. It was after one of these weekend journeys that she had what she, tongue in cheek, called her fondest memory of college. She was returning from home one Sunday afternoon, tired and ready to rest in preparation for an exam the next day. She got into a taxi after placing her duffle bag in the trunk. When she arrived at the apartment, the taxi driver drove off before she could retrieve her bag which she eventually did but after much angst.

It was not just the physical conditions and the strangeness of being away from home that caused Marcia to be distressed. She believes that college did not deliver what she expected. She compared the activities at her college with stories that she had heard about the activities at the other one. There was not enough time for stress relieving activities at her facility but she had heard that there was a ‘liming’ culture at the other. At hers, she proclaimed, it was simply:

work, work, work... exams, exams, exams... sometimes you didn't get enough knowledge in a particular course and then you have a mid-term [exam] and then an end of term... I was studying the thing for the first time to write the examination. I find that they had more exams than learning. I only learnt while I was doing the exams and that going out of your head right after because you only cramming it down... I find that we didn't get enough learning... enough pedagogy. Probably I learnt something... some little thing but not enough for the stress that I took for the two years.

Marcia also has awful memories of teaching practices. These centred on wide ranging issues such as accessing basic materials for her classes to the incongruence in thinking of the lecturers who supervised her practice. She spoke about the difficulty in having her teaching units approved before she went on her practicum. In the following episode she tells of one such experience.

They did not want to pass my units. ...But you had different people who would come and supervise... different people meaning that it might be the PE teacher not the Reading teacher who is the supervisor. But the Reading teacher and the PE teacher don't have the same idea of what reading should be like. The PE teacher has some past idea of what a reading unit should look like and how teaching in reading is supposed to be and the Reading teacher is teaching new stuff. ...so when you put your new stuff in the unit, the PE teacher (your supervisor) tells you that is not how it is done. And when you are telling the PE teacher that this is what the Reading teacher says... the PE teacher not going to the Reading teacher to ask nothing ... telling you to change it to this, that and the other. And I am stubborn and I know what I know and I am not changing it. So we had problems there. So I sat down in that staff room and cried. I had to go and find the Reading teacher and he is saying, "Yes, this is how it is supposed to be done," but the PE teacher who is supposed to give you a grade is saying something else.

Even though Marcia was able to stand up and conquer by getting an A on this practice and in fact on all her subsequent ones, the experience was a harrowing one. She did

not then know what would be the outcome of her stubbornness and that caused her many sleepless nights culminating in one very frightening episode:

It had a night I got up. Well, I had dozed off and I get up and I'm feeling like I'm out of my own body; that I aint myself. I had to come outside; I opened the door; I took fresh air... I was feeling like I moving around but I aint in my own body... I said "like this is a sign of madness"... I start thinking "I going mad". The next day I had to go to a drug store and get some sleeping pills...I never take pills to do nothing before...Well, I never took them. That was stress all in itself.

It was these kinds of experiences that began to awaken Marcia's consciousness about the system to which she was about to commit herself. She declared that:

So I realise that these people... left hand don't know what right hand doing in any circumstance... not even in the Ministry; not in Training College. I started to realise that people weren't sure what they were doing... people who were teaching you ... people who were supervising you weren't sure of what was going on. I used to call it madness. I just could not understand how things had to be so... how things had to be so inefficient and so scattered and so ...incoherent...

Marcia ended her narration about her stay at training college with these words, "and so training college was a stressful time". However, she was successful and was ready to take up the challenges of being a Teacher One.

Teaching In a Depressed Community

Marcia confessed that she enjoyed the year that she spent teaching in what had been and still is considered to be a depressed community. It was a school where teachers stayed for as short a time as possible. The school was in Port of Spain and the traffic was such that "you had to wake up in the wee hours of the morning". The drive up the hill to the school was fearsome and the taxi drivers scared the living daylights out of you by "driving right at the edge of the little precipice." In spite of what she had

heard, Marcia found that she could easily work and get along with the teachers of the school; and with the parents and pupils of her Second Year class. The principal, though, was an enigma. Nevertheless, Marcia shows a depth of understanding of this woman's dilemma.

The principal, a female, was mad in my opinion... but I does call everybody mad who I can't understand. Everybody coming and going at Hillside because nobody wants to stay there because of the reputation. And most people who they sending, coming from far. So she used to have teachers coming, spending a year and leaving. So when she meets you, she aint treating you too nice because she knows that you only coming to leave again and she telling you that... "You aint coming to stay here"...

Marcia had almost no contact with her except when she greeted her as she signed the attendance register at the start of the day. Whenever she needed a little assistance, Marcia turned to the other second year teacher. Even so, she stated that she was on her own.

Of course, I was on my own again [be] cause no principal coming to check... no supervisor... no nothing like that. I was my own ... doing my own thing... tweaking, refining my practice ... what wouldn't work today, I tried something else tomorrow...

And just as the principal predicted, Marcia, though she enjoyed working at the school, left after one year. The distance that she had to travel and the harrowing drive up the hill were instrumental in her making the move.

Closer to Home

In response to Marcia's request for a transfer, she was sent to a school closer to home. At that school she worked with several principals and had varying experiences. She reported that the first thing that bothered her was the dilapidated condition and cramped space in the school. The principal had acquiesced to her request and had given her a First Year class to teach but the school practised streaming and that class

was considered 'the last group'. Additionally, she had to share a room with a Second Year teacher who Marcia believes had problems with disciplining her pupils. Marcia reminisced:

That teacher didn't have a grasp of discipline. Discipline was lacking; so it was very noisy and that was the first time I started experiencing noise at that level and having to teach in noise. Twenty-five children in the same room with another teacher with twenty-five plus children was not a nice experience. I couldn't hear myself tell them anything and I could not hear what they were telling me...all the time. For phonics, I couldn't tell whether they were getting all the sounds of letters. I couldn't hear children read or talk to me one on one.

Marcia spent two years in that room and then moved to share another with a First Year teacher with whom she had a lot better experience. There was also another First Year behind the dual -purposed chalkboard board which separated the classrooms. She recalled:

Ms. Greene and Ms. Francis were very warm and inviting and open and they would share ideas. They would share their resources and whatever they had was yours. You could go and borrow... You could talk to them about anything so I was comfortable in that sense.

However, the problems with discipline in the close, cramped situation continued.

The last group of children always had discipline problems. We always had problems keeping children's voice at a particular level. They up close under one another so they always fussing and fighting. You had more to do with discipline than with teaching... more to do with keeping these children interested and wanting to learn and listening to you.

Marcia related how she tried several strategies to have better discipline in her class but was unsuccessful. She borrowed a book on behavioural change but saw no difference and felt that the suggestions offered by the books and the MOE bore no fruits. Finally, she decided to seek new knowledge and techniques through the acquisition of a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). However, she

does not have fond memories of her university days. Her numerous questions about the education system in general remained. She explained:

I had decided to go to UWI and do early childhood... to further understand and better my practice... not for any promotion or anything... just to better my practice... hoping that that step would lead into clearer territories... clearer waters... so that I would now be able to expand on what I had before. But that too was a very stressful experience; because early childhood was something new at UWI and they were still experimenting. So we did more courses than anyone would have done. We did ... in the end, more courses than any one has done in three years. Our summers were mandatory and because they did not know what would have been accepted as a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood, they put in every course they could imagine.

Marcia questioned the proclivity in the system for taking educational policies and practices from foreign contexts and introducing them in our own without trying to modify to our reality. This was one of the issues that frustrated her.

I thought that university was a place where you could have challenged certain things. By then, I had my own ideas about how certain things were supposed to be; how they were supposed to look... Nobody wanted to listen. All they wanted you to do was to take the same idea from the book and put it your practice...write it down and then practise it...You not cutting it and putting it to your circumstance... and our circumstance is not the same as any other country. All the literature dealt with [those] who had space; [those] who had assistant teachers; [those] who had things that I didn't have. They had a lot of resources that was given to them. Everything was about how to get children to discover on their own. When you go in the classroom, it's you teaching the children; and you don't have space to set up that kind of scenario where children could learn on their own; or discover; or be the centre of attention. They just wanted the magic to work. ... It was just frustrating that there were things that you couldn't do, but people expected you to do. You questioned yourself why you couldn't do it. I couldn't understand why they just could not

accept our reality; and try to work things around our reality or change our reality...change it. So the politics started to bug me more and more because there were a lot of blocks... obstacles that I could not cross. I did not know how to cross; and all I could do was talk about it and frustrate myself.

Nevertheless, Marcia feels that she benefitted from the experience. The university allowed her the opportunity to write. The reading and reflections that she did helped her to grow professionally and she expressed the view:

I think that is where I started to shine; because I was able to read on my own and understand things and write them down to make papers. So a lot of my understanding of things in education came from my reading to write papers.

However, the problems, questions and issues at her school continued to plague her. She couldn't understand why most teachers were silent at staff meetings when she knew that there were concerns that needed to be discussed. With one principal, the teachers were silent and some would sleep. In her early days at the school she was also silent because:

It was still early for me... I still didn't get into the politics of the thing... you know... caring what the Ministry said and was doing. I was still trying to hone my craft...still coming into my own. So at that time, I didn't really pay too much attention to Ministry policies and those kinds of thing.

When she did find her voice, as she became conscious, she found that no one in authority wanted to listen.

But after a while as you go along and you start to come up with ideas that you think would improve your teaching... that would improve your school... you start to think about those things because you now comfortable with your teaching. And then you start to talk and nobody is listening. Then you realise why nobody used to talk.

Another thing that troubled her was the division among the staff. This division, she believes came about when a new principal was appointed to the school. She

indicated that he tried to change the direction of the school and that this caused discomfort with some who did not agree with his philosophies. These like-minded teachers tried to step in to change the direction that things were going and they tried to talk to him about what they saw as shortcomings. Others just went along with him for “whatever their reasons”. The two camps challenged each other and “bacchanal erupted... and the children were forgotten because now we were fighting each other”. Marcia was one of those who were in disagreement with the way things were evolving. She specified:

We clashed in terms of philosophies. I am not sure what his philosophy was. *My* philosophy was that you had to get the children to learn by any means necessary and try to get the discipline under control; that you had to think out of the box and be unconventional and try un-conventional things. I want to run to the library to find a book to help them better understand something that they ask a question about; he don't want me to leave the classroom. He said, “Don't bother to go and get any book. Learning will take care of itself.” He never used to come to listen to anything in no classroom... He never used to come and listen to teaching... He never used to come in staff meetings and make suggestion for pedagogy or discipline. He used to walk around; for obviously he wants to see everybody quiet and looking as if they doing something.

This principal moved on and was replaced by others who Marcia believes just wanted to make a mark....

Everyone having their own ideas ... wanting to make their own mark...and mark not on the children. Why are these things being done and you not really seeing anything being done for the children?

These internal issues compounded with others in the external/ political environment added to her frustrations.

Then the Ministry policies...Head of Department being put into place who had no credentials ...who would have to come and instruct teachers who had more experience and knowledge. I just questioned everything. I still am questioning.

Daily Routines and Dreams for the Future

Marcia became very pensive as she continued her story. She is midway in her career as a teacher. Her routine is mainly teaching and disciplining but she believes that she offers a lot more to the children. On a daily basis, she faces children who come in with problems and they want to talk but:

I don't have time...I have so many children I hardly have time to talk. I hardly have time to counsel or mentor or be with the children like that because you have a curriculum that's so filled... so packed with just work that you have to cover. But I would squeeze in a little time for a child who may just want to say that a grandparent died or they had an argument with their parent or something like that...

And for her, the teaching goes way beyond what is written in the curriculum.

I always teach them a little street smart... A little way of surviving the school because there would be children who would come from sheltered environments. There is so much bullying in the school yard and people pushing you around and that kind of thing. A fair amount of time is spent telling them how to manoeuvre around that ... and how to stay out of confrontation and if confrontation does come how to move away from it... how to get away from violence...violent situations. And when children do fight or curse each other ... give them advice on how to do better next time... and a lot of psychology...

There are other needs that must be taken care of as they arise. For example she cited times when she has had to take on the "mummy" role.

There are children who would have accidents. You would have to take care of their cuts and their bruises and give them hugs and kisses and tell them that everything will be alright. There are children who have accidents in the toilets. You'll have to go and change them and that kind of thing. There are children who you don't see their parents at all and you don't know what goes on at

home; so you have to teach everything... how to look fresh... how to keep yourself smelling nice... how to tie your shoe laces. Everything that occurs you have to put a plaster on that sore. You really kind of do it all in one day.

Marcia believes that she is in teaching for the long haul but there are still so many questions left un-answered. She has worked with quite a few principals and wonders whether they ever passed through the same system that she is traversing or faced the same issues that she is facing. She is very decided about the direction that she would like to see her practice take. Nevertheless, she confesses that she is tired of trying to make things better. These are her words on her present state of being.

I have gotten to a point where coming to school is a stress... It's a chore because what you are coming to meet is a fight. At this point when I get to school, I just want to survive the day. I don't even think that I have the energy to try anything new because I don't feel like anything new could help...

Yet, even as she faces her frustrations, she gave thanks for the victories that she has achieved throughout her years of practice. Those victories she summed up as the way her pupils learned to read and to express themselves; the way that she has seen her teaching grow and children respond to the way she teaches; and to her in terms of liking their teacher and respecting her. She has dreams for the future of the nation which she wants to accomplish through her pedagogy while "making learning fun and interesting". She spoke passionately about those dreams.

I want to see a different child... a child who will question things and challenge things... that they will feel that they have a choice...because in this country, right now, I don't think that people feel that they have a choice in anything or that they have a voice in anything. That's what I am looking to see. I'm hoping that teaching would bring that out. In my class, I try to give them a voice and to teach in a way that's not too conventional. That's where my philosophy is heading in terms of teaching. I am seeking to give children a choice...and a voice. Yes, we have small victories... little things, little things but not enough... not enough; ...to have a different child at the end of the process... a child who would question; who would talk out; who, when they get

themselves in different areas of life... different places... who would change how things are going in the country... That's what you want to see... You want people thinking... You don't want people just following. You want people who would lead and who would think and who would talk... That's what I want now as opposed to when you just wanted children to just listen to you and take in whatever you say. You want people to question... and I'm not seeing that.

Marcia is hoping to stay on and fight to see these dreams fulfilled but she still has many questions that remain un-answered. The following poem is indicative of her present state of mind.

System Inquiries

*So many questions, so few answers
Indeed, it appears no answers at all.
What's going on with the people in charge?
Say, what's going on inside their head?
There appears to be no logical thought.
I wonder if they'll ever sought it out.
Can't they see it's not reality?
Or is it my misplaced anxiety?
Right hand doing that; left hand doing this
No one seems to care what I feel or think
I mean, what on earth do they want from me?
How do I survive this uncertainty?
Should I surrender; or should I fight on?
So that a revolution from me is born?
??
And the many other questions linger!*

Beulah Forteau-Jaikaransingh

©Sept 2014

Modified June 2016

Chapter 5 -Ayesha's Story

Ayesha was the youngest of my participants. At the time of my research, she had been teaching for five years. I gave her an insight into what I hoped to accomplish in my research and asked her to share with me a bit about her educational journey and some of her teaching experiences. When I was ready to interview her, Ayesha had just been married for three months and she and her husband were house hunting. It was because of the challenges of settling into her new life that she was finding it hard to find the time to sit down for an interview. She, therefore, tape-recorded some of her issues and experiences. However, after listening to what she had presented, I asked if she could possibly find the time to meet with me to fill in some gaps in her story. She consented to meet with me at my home. Subsequent to this meeting, Ayesha answered additional questions through email. The story presented here is constructed on these three foundations.

Childhood Experiences

Ayesha began her story thus:

I lived with both my grandparents and parents at separate houses. I spent most of my childhood with my grandparents as my parents worked shifts at the hospital.

Her parents and grandfather provided her basic needs while her grandmother, a seamstress, was the caregiver and her pre-primary school teacher. Granny made learning fun and used the bible as the basal reader for her young pupil. From those beginnings, Ayesha went to a denominational girls' primary school where all the teachers were females. However, with a boys' school right next to the girls', she did have limited exposure to male teachers. She said, "You still had that co-ed feeling. You knew the boys' school teachers and you had interaction". Ayesha provided a description of the school and its surroundings.

The school itself was large... two stories... upstairs... downstairs. It was joined by a staircase leading to the boys' school. The class rooms were separated by

boards. You had a big gallery downstairs where you played... where you said prayers... had assembly... You lined up outside on the pitch in the hot sun.

Primary school for Ayesha was a place of learning and also a place for exploring possibilities. It was a place where teachers encouraged you to “try new things- things that you never tried before but would just because you wanted to please that special teacher”. She described one such teacher.

She built a confidence that... I never had. She would make us go and find out about things and made me enter competitions... things that I would usually shy away from... but just because of the extra things she would do for us... I guess that we just wanted to please her.

That was not the only teacher who impacted her primary years. Another one did not mind interacting with her at lunch time and teaching things that were not on the curriculum. Ayesha spoke of a time when the teachers’ union was involved in protest action and this teacher took the time to explain the term ‘work to rule’.

You know the way you bother teachers at lunch time when they are in class. You go to talk to them and it is [was] work to rule. She took her lunch time to explain to us that TTUTA (Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association) was protesting and it was work to rule and that she was going to do her work and nothing else.

There was strict discipline at this school. Ayesha recalled that no one dared make a noise if the class teacher was absent because another teacher would “come across”. In fact she pointed out that as a child:

You did not want to cross grownups. You would not put God out of your thoughts. You had a lot of respect. You just knew that that was Miss and you were straight as a pin. We didn’t do anything to get the wrath of anybody, especially teachers. When teachers watch you, you just froze; firstly, because they are adults and secondly, because they are your parents in school and you don’t want to get them angry or vex with you.

Nonetheless, she got through the seven year journey through primary school without negative incidents. After successfully completing the Common Entrance Examination (CEE), she was placed in one of the prestige schools of Trinidad and Tobago.

Convent Culture Shock

Ayesha alleged that secondary school was quite different from what she was expecting. It was quite a shock in terms of ethnic composition, religious beliefs and other expectations. Saint Bernadette Convent was strict in disciplining its girls. Those in infraction of its rules were punished and Ayesha knew from early that “I am not going to get on anybody’s bad side in this school...so you just stay as quiet as you can and get through”. She related an incident concerning two girls who dared to fight in the heart of the city and another about some who laced an orange drink with alcohol. These girls were suspended; made to sit out of class when they returned to school; and were debarred from entering sixth form even if they obtained excellent results at GCE or CXC. Ayesha said that she remained “asleep” until Sixth Form. By that time, the school administrators felt that the girls were now mature enough to voice their opinions and she decided to take them at their word. Ayesha had been viewing teaching practice and had opinions on what was good practice and what wasn’t. For example, she explained that:

In Forms Two and Three especially, the teachers would just come and sit down in class and ... like in Chemistry class... “Turn to page 32 and...” You turn to page 32 and for two periods- forty five minutes each, you are just reading word for word from a text.

Thus, when she felt that she was given freedom of speech and probably because the teachers were young, she decided to make an input to change practice. She stated:

That was when I got bold enough to tell people that..., “I don't think this is how...I am not saying that this is not how you are supposed to teach but...allow us to be more engaged instead of just going through the books.”

After sixth form, a successful Ayesha was ready to move on to another phase of her life.

Training to Become a Teacher

After she left school, Ayesha lived for two years in Barbados. When she returned to Trinidad and Tobago, she was offered a job at a private secondary school. That job lasted for a little over a year and then she decided to study law at UWI. While in the second year at law school, she got involved with delivering Junior Achievement (JA) programmes to schools in Trinidad. Junior Achievement of Trinidad and Tobago (JATT) is a non-profit youth organisation developed in 1970 to help students develop money generation, management and other entrepreneurial skills. Ayesha reported that it was while she was thus involved she realised that she really wanted to be a teacher and especially at the primary level. However, she wanted to enter school as a trained teacher. She confessed:

I was always fearful to go into teaching because I didn't want to poison any child's brain and then God have to get vex with me; so I decided to go into College first before I began to teach. I signed up with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) because I had decided at that point in time that the University of the West Indies was not providing for out of service teachers...just an in-service programme.

Ayesha went into the university to study to become a primary school teacher with a specialisation in Special Education. She was told that this programme would allow her the opportunity to become either primary or secondary school teacher. The four years of study took her to two of the university's campuses. The first one was designated to students studying in several fields. Mingling with students from different fields of study was, for her, an enriching experience. She said:

The common ground was to meet in the lobby and lime and talk and share ideas... I think that helped in broadening certain aspects of teaching for me... Even though you were talking about life and other things that were going on... You got to find out how their teaching experience was... Although they

were in a class listening, they talked about their teachers and what they wished were different.

When she moved to the campus that was designated for teachers only she believes that she was expected to be silent. She expressed the view that:

UTT treated you as if you were primary school children. I felt as if I went back to infants; back to “do as you are told or else”.

She recalled that she was criticised for doing too well when she handed in assignments or wrote examinations.

I had teachers tell me that I am shooting too high. I want to give them too much information when I do exams or when I do a paper and what I feel it is ...and if this is a PHD level... that kinda thing...it was very discouraging.

These situations discouraged her, together with what she saw as differences in what was being taught and what actually happened in the classroom. The pedagogical situations that were discussed at the university seemed to be impractical and Ayesha spoke sarcastically when she said:

...of course you know all the situations are idealistic and if you present a reality to them, they watch you like “yeah, yeah. We know; but we dealing with what the book says and the book say it is a perfect system... You don’t have time to thrash out or say, “Prepare me for reality... prepare me for what I am going into.” I know that they buy books from away and it is based on an American System... but we are supposed to be working under a British system. But when is the day coming when teacher training will be based on reality in our context, in a Trinidadian or Caribbean context... I would really like to see that happen.

She also felt isolated as one of the few who voiced their opinions on these inconsistencies. Ayesha stated that:

You would hear the other students complaining about it ...my colleagues but for some reason... I am one of the persons to voice it.

By the time she got to her third year, there was a need for teachers in the education system and she “took the opportunity ... to start teaching and I think that’s where my eyes opened.” Ayesha stated pensively:

I realised that all the things that I am learning... I could quote you the theories but they can’t be applied to the situation that I am going through... and I would be asking questions about that and they would be watching me as if I crazy.

These are some of the issues that Ayesha faced during her stay at the institution. However she is still having problems. Presently, after graduating successfully, she is still being considered and paid as an Assistant Teacher Primary (ATP). Due to some accreditation standards with the UTT degree, graduates from the programme are waiting to be upgraded. Ayesha is therefore teaching alongside some teachers who do not have degrees but who are paid much higher salaries.

Primary School Teaching

Ayesha started teaching formally in the government service in 2009 and to date has taught at only one school. While she was dealing with issues involving training and development at UTT, she was also struggling with internal problems at her work place. Very early into her appointment, she got involved in a situation which she declared:

I have honestly had my heart broken and my joy sucked out of my experience. I guess that my eyes were glittered...a little gold... thinking that this was the best...the best profession.

Ayesha explained that several girls shared with her that they had been sexually harassed by a male teacher. She recalled the distress she felt when the girls said that they had spoken to their class teacher but as far as they knew nothing had been done. She consulted the teacher who said that it was hard to produce evidence. However, Ayesha recounted:

I went home for the weekend... and I could not sleep...It bothered me... I got sick... I could not go to school on the Monday because I was sick.

Eventually, she had conversations with the principal and other school authorities and the situation became a police matter. But she claimed that even though she was asked to keep it confidential, that confidentiality appeared to have been broken at the administrative level of the school. There were also some negative reactions by some staff members and by some of the girls' parents who would have preferred to "let sleeping dogs lie". Ayesha believes that she was castigated for the good that she tried to do for the children. This was particularly daunting for her as a young teacher. She stated:

As a new teacher it was horrendous...because you're now settling in and trying to make friends and you didn't find your footing and your trust is being betrayed by admin.

She reported other experiences that led her to believe that her principal does not want to promote, among her staff, the unity that is vital in moving the school to become a better place. She recalled hearing her principal say, "I want disunity. I don't want unity among my staff. Let them bicker." She paused in her narrative to wonder what could be the reason and to ask if it was "because of fear of what could happen if that they stand against her?" She mused:

But then, over all, what does it say about the standard of the school if we can't band together to bring up the standard ... to show students how to... to model the behaviour you want from them...

Ayesha also questioned the judgments and dictates of those in authority. Her lenses have been trained on administration and administrative issues. It is there her greatest challenges have been. She continued by pointing out:

You know when you are teaching a class and you are all excited and you get them to a place where you want them. And then there is interruption; or the principal would come and demand your attention and she would be angry that you did not jump immediately and come running. You know of course that you have to settle your class and give them instructions; but they expect that you

would just answer when you are called. No matter what you are doing you're supposed to drop whatever you are doing.

These negative experiences were not only related to staff and administration. Ayesha teaches at the Infant Level and has had to face problems with pupils and parents. In her very first term at the school, she was shocked when a boy threatened to "tell my father and he will bring a gun and shoot you." Her shock was compounded when the father was belligerent when he was called in to discuss the matter. She expressed dismay that she often mistook grandparents for parents. She believes that the youthfulness of the parents is affecting the discipline of the children that she teaches.

The parents are ... a lot younger than I would have seen [when I was] growing up... I have grandparents who are like thirty-six who come to me now and I am shocked because I would think that they are the parent not realising that the parent is about early twenties or teenager...so children parenting.

Ayesha thinks that discipline has negatively changed from the time she was a pupil at school to what she is seeing presently. She explained:

They would tell you to your face you can't beat me...and they would watch you most defiantly and do what they have to do. It is challenging; so much so I have taken to calling parents in and I have told them "if you don't want to discipline your child... and I am not allowed to discipline your child; I will harass you until you step up." and that so far, for me, has worked.

Nonetheless, when I listened to Ayesha, I heard nothing but love for the little ones that she interacts with on a daily basis. She declared:

I love my infants...You are guaranteed a laugh for the day just because of their innocence in some cases... and though there are some silent and stubborn ones because of their life experiences thus far, I still get to see...get to mould them ...

Ayesha stated that teaching contributes to her growth and development not just as teacher but also as a person.

They see you as Mummy; and they are inquisitive. They want to know not just about school ...but about what makes you -you. They make you reflect about yourself as a person; your attitude and even your aptitude...

When asked, she enumerated some of her functions as a teacher:

You are a listener because you have those children who just want to talk; who need to talk... you are a counsellor; you are a provider because you have children who don't have lunch; who don't have money; who don't have pencil or anything and you have to provide because this child won't be able to function unless they have these things. You are mediator... a parent and you are doctor. Sometimes, you have to be lawyer/advocate. And this is all before 8:30 when you start to teach. And of course there are the other related duties that you have in terms of extra-curricular duties...that you have to man or oversee. There is still mentorship. There are just so many hats that you have to wear on a daily basis depending on the situation...

In spite of the disappointment in her career thus far Ayesha has a philosophy about children that drives her on a daily basis. She declared that:

They are human beings and not just to be ordered around. They really want to learn and you just have to find a way to make learning fun and to get to their heart; and when they realise that you are there for them they will open up to you.

It is also this philosophy that caused her to listen to children's concerns even when burdened with her own situations and dilemmas within the system. Ayesha stated that she could not ignore children when they wanted to offload the many burning issues which they face. She shared these moments:

You reach early and there are children who were there from six in the morning and no one else there but the guard. You know that as soon as you step on the compound, work has begun. By the time you're ready to teach you are already talked out or you are just drained because you are hearing stories. Students telling you about Mummy run away from home last night because Daddy was

beating her; or Daddy take out a cutlass... and you know there are deep concerns. They want to get it out and you can't say well "I'm tired and hungry...I need to eat...I need to prepare." You know you're compelled to listen because you know nothing going into their heads before that come out...

She continued:

I am one of those who would allow children to come and hug you...sit down and listen to them and talk. You feel when they don't have lunch. It's an emotional thing...When they leave you cry. You feel as if you are losing your own...even though you know that they are just going to a next class... but it has been emotional... You know, children who have left the school; I would still call or email to find out how they are going.

To Stay or to Go? That is the Question

Even though Ayesha has only taught for five years she has profound thoughts on the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. She shared thoughts that ranged from curriculum implementation to the treatment of teachers who she sees as being unappreciated. She asserted that she cannot understand some of the policies that the MOE are trying to implement. For example, she mentioned the practice of supplying students at secondary level with laptops:

You giving children laptop but you have no infrastructure in place ... You have no technicians in place... It does not make sense... You need to make sure that everything is covered... and maybe that's an idealistic situation that I am describing, but if you have to plan... plan holistically... You want children with laptop... plan right through... What do you need? What happen if there is a breakdown? Could teachers monitor what children are doing on the laptop while they are in class? Do we have the programmes? And then, the laptops are supposed to be connected to the network of the school so that one is supposed to monitor but there is no technician...that doesn't make sense

Ayesha confessed that she does not know whether most of her problems are rooted in the education system or in her present school. She has issues with both; but she suspects that it might be her school. Her outspoken ways have placed her at odds with her principal and other school leaders. Consequently, in five short years, a certain ambivalence has crept into her life. She has seen her attitude to her job and her disposition towards the pupils changing. Once, to use her own words, she used to be skipping; now she no longer feels inclined to do so.

I dread getting up in the morning to go to work. It started being I would be at school by six and I would leave at six in the evening... now huh... bell rings and I am out of there... Lunch time I no longer sit and talk to the children or try and get work done in between; or take in the children. Now I would leave and take my lunch. And I have come to just lock myself away into my classroom; to lock away from it because I don't want to be involved in anything where you are going to spoil my name or spoil my reputation because of victimisation... because of vindictiveness which I have also experienced.

However, Ayesha was quick to point out that it has not been all bad. She has had teachers at the school who have made great inputs into her life. She insisted:

During this time I have had wonderful mentors... wonderful mentors; people who have encouraged, pray you [me] up... who have shown you [me] the road. I've had some good times. I've had those times when you [I] see a transformation happening... when you [I] see the love of others ... so I just try to hold on to those things and try to block off the negative things that have taken place; which has been really hard.

Nevertheless, she is questioning if she is on the right career path.

... due to the changes and the things that are going on... whereas where I thought that it would have been a career path ... You know I have started to doubt ... I know that you not supposed to doubt because of others or what you are seeing but it doesn't seem as if I'm going to be happy.

Still, Ayesha also believes that one school is not enough for her to use as a benchmark for the way all schools function. She stated:

I have heard such a lot of lovely things from some of my colleagues from training college...where their principals band together [with staff]... They bought laptops for them... Anything that is for the progress of the school they are for it. They are willing to stand up against the Ministry... the system... just to say this is what we need to do to progress; or I've heard other colleagues say that their staff on a whole lime together or they take trips to Tobago. I am yet to experience anything like that...

Ayesha indicated:

I have been thinking a lot about the transferring out so I can see what... well I mean I have been blaming myself for a long while. It has to be me. All these things just can't be happening just so; so I am transferring out. That is my plan...That's the course of action.

She declared that she wants to be able to give of her best to the career for which she has had the utmost respect but that she does not want to perpetuate a bad situation. She sounded hopeful when she acknowledged:

Maybe a transfer might help...I might change my whole view again... or maybe I might get fed up of the system. When I look back I want to be able to say that "yes I had made a correct choice"... I don't want to break down before my time. I need to resolve myself because I don't really want to become a clone. I really do want to make a difference especially in the lives of the children I teach.

However, it seems to me that:

According to the system

This teacher is guilty!

She should be indicted:

For speaking when not spoken to;

For not running when she is called;

For taking action without permission;
For refusing the status quo!
This teacher should also be indicted
For practising:
Medicine without a licence;
Counselling without the same;
Nursing without registering;
Policing without the training;
And Law without being called to the bar.
In fact, most teachers should!

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Chapter Six -Emma's Story

Emma lives in East Trinidad. At the time of my interview with her, she had been retired for four years after having taught for thirty-seven. Emma keeps busy taking care of an aged mother and an ailing husband; and also, sometimes, babysits her grandchildren. She was very gracious about fitting me into her busy schedule and gave up on a Sunday afternoon siesta to sit down for our conversation. We sat down in the quiet of her neighbourhood to talk about her life as a teacher. Emma was well prepared for this meeting. She had used the note pad that I had given to her to write some of what she would eventually share with me. After I returned the transcript of our two hour long discussion, she added a bit about her acquisition of her First Degree in Educational Management and in a subsequent telephone conversation gave me permission to mention the fact that she also holds a Masters' Degree in Public Service Administration.

The Story Begins

Emma grew up in an extended family. She explained:

We lived with my aunt and her husband. She had six daughters and my sister and brother and my mother (mother was single). She [mother] used to be a domestic [house help]...a live-in domestic and she used to live in places like Bayshore and St. Ann's [*these are places where upper middle class and the upper class resided*]... So we would be with our grandmother. My grandmother would see after the children while my aunt and husband were out so it was that kind of extended family. It was my aunt's six daughters, my sister and I; that made eight girls and my brother as the only boy in the house.

Emma's aunt was a teacher and her uncle was a police sergeant. She and her siblings were well cared for, but she admits to feeling the difference of not being in a nuclear family.

I felt different from my cousins because I had a mother and they had a father and mother. I had a mother who was not always there and they were different

in the sense that they would dress and I would get... All of us [siblings] would get something that was hand me down or something that was not as nice.

The difference was also felt when there were school activities and when she had to get school supplies.

I would get my secondary school books, one this month, one next month...from my grandmother's pension or whatever and I remember that I was the only child who did not have a book ...I would borrow a book lunch time or I would run across the road in the evening by a neighbour and I would borrow or I would get my cousin's book.

Another such incident was when, as a Primary School pupil, she became a member of the Brownies.

I remember the first time we all went to Brownie meeting. My two cousins got enrolled because they got their uniforms but I couldn't because my mother could not come up with the uniform.

Emma was the caregiver in her family. She recalled that there was always someone in her family who needed tending.

In my family, when somebody was sick, I would be the one who would stay home and help take care of them. My mother was a psychiatric patient when I was nine; and off and on she would be in hospital or she would be at home... she stopped doing domestic work at that time and took over from my grandmother... she was sick... somehow I was the one who would deal with her. My aunt died of cancer when I was sixteen or seventeen and during her last few days... I stayed home for about two weeks. I remember one stage my grandmother became blind...She had cataracts... She would have to go to the clinic in Port of Spain. I would be the one to stay home from school and go with her... When she became really ill... I would be the one who would be with her...

In fact, she believes that it was those roles that shaped her and defined how she functioned when she became a teacher.

As a child, Emma attended the Valley Green Government School. The school was housed in a building that was representative of primary schools of colonial Trinidad and Tobago.

I remember we had a concert ... and my cousin fell through the flooring... it was wood and just blinds to divide the classrooms. Sometimes it just used to be so noisy and we still have some schools like that.

Emma recalled that she always wanted to be a teacher. She felt that it was a way that “I could help other children who came from the same poor conditions as I did.” She figures that while she chose teaching, teaching also chose her. This is how she put it:

As long as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher. At home we would play school and I always wanted to be the teacher and I had an aunt who was a teacher and she was my role model. The job of being a teacher seemed attainable because we were not very rich and even in my family, my siblings and I were the depressed group so that that seemed to be attainable...and I would have to say that teaching chose me because a lot of my friends and some relatives applied and did not get through and I applied and I got through.

After graduating from secondary school, Emma worked for two years in the public service as a temporary clerk and then “I was selected and I went into Mausica College.” Mausica was a residential college and a new cultural experience in teacher training. This caused some friends and relatives of these young teacher trainees, especially females, to be fearful about how it would affect them morally. Emma spoke about a friend of her aunt who expressed her alarm. She cautioned by remarking, “I don’t like what I hearing about this thing. People sleeping with one another and...” This warning did not worry Emma who maintains that she enjoyed the social life and the residential experiences that remain fond memories. Emma recollected those days:

...we used to get a stipend. It was supposed to be sixty dollars a month during the term. ... They would give you forty and they would save the twenty to give

in the holidays when you didn't get. I remember us getting our stipend and we would go to town and buy a pair of shoes. ...So we lived really good ...a pair of shoes must have been about six dollars you know... We got the books from the Ministry and whatever like folders we would buy out of the stipend. There were people who had their parents to give them but there were people like me who lived quite well on your [our] stipend.

The real challenge for Emma was teaching practice or 'teaching prac' or 'TP' as she called it.

Teaching practice was torture for me. I remember the first TP we went to. I remember the first teaching 'prac'. When I reach in front the class... the teacher of the class to which I was assigned was nice and she had done some stints [teaching in primary schools]...a three months here... a three months there. After about two weeks there, she was transferred and I had that class by myself. I was the teacher and you know I aint no teacher; so it was torture. So after the first two weeks, the Friday afternoon, when everybody happy and they free up they self, the girl in the next room, the first year...we got together and we had a good cry. (*Laughs*) We feeling like nothing. We feeling like we have no help. We just going every day and supervisor have to come and listen and you feel like you doing 'ta- ta' [*faeces*]. We had a good cry.

Emma believes that the practice sessions were very stressful because the modelling of good teaching was not adequate. She admitted that:

They used to do some demonstration lessons in the hall. You would have the second years and the good ones but is not the same when you get into the classroom. I was ok until teaching practice. You know ...you thinking about it [the practice] whole night Sunday. You have to go out Monday and you don't know ...you dressing...you eating yuh breakfast but yuh heart heavy. (*Laughs*) But it was actual torture for me...the teaching prac. The theory and other things was alright for me because it is easy to read and write thing on paper and say what this one say...but the actual teaching that was hard for me.

This practical aspect remained a challenge even after Emma had successfully finished her training.

Teaching Experiences

After training, Emma was placed in a government school in East Trinidad. It was a one room school with just partitions as dividers. She described it as sub-standard. In fact, she said that all four schools that she taught in during her tenure as a teacher “were sub-standard” as far as the physical plant was concerned. She stated:

It was a wooden building. The land was high in the front and it had a drop in the back so they had a space under the school in the back. So they block it and they made a classroom there.

Emma recalled:

The principal would quarrel because it was a sweat box down there. He would send home the children. He used to get in trouble with the supervisors because he used to do his own thing. The land was graded so somebody had the bright idea to put steps. He said, “It is little children here. If they fall down...they burst their head on the concrete...I have to carry them in the hospital”. So he would like do his own thing without the supervisors’ permission ... have lunch and then dismiss early and they go home...

As a newly trained teacher, Emma faced the same challenge with her efficacy as she had done while in training. She stated, “I had theoretical knowledge... I didn’t have any practical and it was unsettling for me...” She remembered that she acknowledged her weakness in teaching and that she asked for help. Even though she felt that her principal was a difficult man, she approached him and he proved to be quite helpful. He encouraged her by giving her a Teachers’ Manual and provided an example that her teaching was bearing fruit. She recounted:

He had a great nephew or some relative in the class. He said, “You feel that you not teaching but you are teaching” and he gave me some instances where

the little boy was correcting some younger sister when they were counting...so he said, "you are working".

There were others who also helped and mentored her. She stated:

During that insecure period, I would seek out friends of my family or friends of my sister who were teachers and who had been teaching before me and I would get advice from them.

In spite of the tentative start, those early years after training years were full of laughter and the formation of lasting friendships. She happily reminisced:

Karen and I and Luke used to sit down... Luke was living with his grandmother and she would cook food because it was his first appointment and Karen and I used to eat all the food and when he come it's an empty bowl there... Luke had a distinctive laugh... The principal had to talk to him about it...When we sit down at lunch time and we crack our jokes, he say the laugh he hearing is not nice and he say what really hurt him is when he hear children trying to emulate that laugh. (*Laughter*)

When Emma moved on to other schools, it was pretty much the same. She asserted that she found others who were willing to befriend and help her.

At Valley Greens (*her childhood primary school*), there was a bigger staff and you had the cliques... but there were a lot of people who knew me as a child and who I could go to for advice and who would help me.

When I went to Eastern Government, it took a while for me to fit in but I remember Mrs. Gill in particular... We shared a cupboard when I got there and she really helped me..., "this is this... this is that"... We would mix milk together and she was very helpful to me.

Emma believes that her experiences as a child shaped her dealings with the pupils with whom she came in contact. She declared:

I was always there nurturing and that came out in my teaching... so that if a child did not have breakfast ... I remember a child who went home for lunch in Montero... It must have been a mile inside and she came back and [while]we were doing nursery rhymes, she just got up as if something pushed her and she came and said “Miss I aint eat anything”... I just left the class and I took her across the road by the parlour and fed her because I couldn’t understand how she could walk bare-feet- no shoes on this hot pitch road and just come back... I remember it all the time.

She narrated another story about a time when she jumped into the role of provider. This happened when she was married and had children of her own. She was then teaching a Standard Five class and it was lunch time. Emma narrated:

I remember Gillian... one particular day... I can’t remember what she had done...but I had beaten her just before lunch... Well, Sandy (*one of Emma’s daughter*) ...would come to eat with me and sometimes she would watch... She don’t want what I have and she would leave it there...and Sandy came, she watched and she went. And Gillian came to me and said, “Miss, I could get Sandy lunch?” so I gave her it...and she ate it.

Emma said that it was important to her to “take these children out of the vicious circle that they are living in.” She got a joy out of exposing them to experiences that their parents could not give them; the kinds of experiences that she did not have as a child.

It was thrilling to take children, who had never left their home or their school environment, to the airport or to ride an escalator... you know or to see the sea for the first time. That was really nice for me...I was happy to sew sports uniforms and Brownie/Guides’ because I didn’t have.

She has also kept in contact with some of these pupils. Because she spent thirty-seven years teaching in basically the same geographical district, she has taught children and grandchildren of pupils and so continues to help both academically and also financially whenever she is able to do so.

While settling as a new teacher, Emma continued in her role as care giver to her family and especially to her grandmother. She would go to school knowing that afterward she would have to visit her if she was hospitalised. She explained how she would manage the situation in those early years.

I remember that it didn't appear to interfere that much with my performance in school because I was always punctual working in Eastern Government and even in Montero. The principals, were always helpful and sympathetic, so that even if I had to leave early that was no big thing. [They would say], "Go on girl, I know the problem"...but I would come to school on time I didn't like to reach to school late... and if I had to leave early... I liked to organise... I would walk with my basket of clothes if I had to go see my grandmother directly after school...

Challenges Balancing Home and School Roles

Emma got married in 1975 and she related that there were changes and challenges in her life as a result. However there were always persons who were willing to lend a helping hand. She recollected this episode from being a first-time mother:

There was a family friend and she said, "Bring the child." She was living up by the hospital and Valley Green Government was in the other direction... Sometimes when I reach up, there was no car... You have to take another taxi, go up by the hospital and drop off the baby and then come back down and then walk to school because the taxi ent going all the way up there... So, I always had help... I always had help and I managed.

Then she changed residence and that brought on new challenges. The distance from home to school was nineteen kilometres. Emma remembered:

Jenny was about a year when we move down here...and I was still working in Valley Green; so I would wake up 3 o'clock and sometimes 4 o'clock and fix up.

Fellow teachers and the vice-principal tried to help ease the trials she now faced in filling the roles of being wife, mother and a teacher. Emma recalled:

I had to find a nursery down here when I got transferred. I got one or two persons to stay in but that didn't last long and eventually we had to take her to a nursery. I remember the vice principal, Miss Lorie saying... she must have been about 2 and 1/2 [years] "you could bring her to school" and my husband said no ...because ...they reach up in Std. 5 and had to stay there two years until they sat CE. So we found a nursery. Miss Gilbert said, "Let me show you a short cut"... (*Laughter*) because I used to take a taxi, go up the road, walk back down... So I always had help...I always had help.

From her conversation, Emma did not appear to mind the challenges. She spoke about them as a 'matter of fact'; as if she saw them as a natural part of her life. She declared that, "it wasn't a burden... I was young and I had the energy that it required." She went on to relate what is now for her an amusing incident.

I do remember stopping a taxi in the rain with Jenny. She was on my shoulder, the umbrella, the baby bag, my handbag and the taxi coming; rain falling and I want the taxi. I remember sticking out my foot to stop the taxi (*Laughter*) and the taxi did stop and when I reached in everybody in the car was laughing but I got my taxi...

Even though Emma saw her multifaceted roles as natural. She admitted that it probably caused her to make certain family choices that she may not have otherwise made. She believes that the experiences such as the one just recounted, "...might have been a deciding factor because Jenny was six years old before Sandy was born."

I remember Jenny was already in school and ... Mary Ellis and someone else had a baby sister and some other teachers' children. I think it was Mrs. Howard who told me about the conversation. She told them, "It is only my mummy who can't have children."... She would be playing with the chairs and she would cut out... I remember that I had some comprehension books and when I was ready for them she had cut out all the children and lined them up

and when I looking for the book it was well cut up... so because of all the challenges I had at the time to see about Jenny and see about my mother that might have determined the distance between them and the fact that I only had two.

When Emma became pregnant with her second child, she was at the fourth and last school at which she would teach. It was here that she found two principals who she deemed a “disgrace to the profession”. She narrated anecdotes to illustrate why she makes such a claim about one of them. The following happened when she was pregnant.

I came and I met the classroom wet and I start to cry. Fred was teaching still. (*Fred is someone with whom I am acquainted*) He say, “Doh fret up yourself. Why yuh crying?” I went in Miss Gilbert class and I sat down and Mr Singh (*the vice principal was in charge because the principal was away*) tell me, “OK, you can’t work here... take your children and go in that room” (*an annex to the main building that Emma explained the principal had converted into a conference room*). He came and organised the conference room and ...I ended up inside there. But he [the principal] vex because he don’t want me inside his conference room with the children. So [one day] he come about quarter past two and tell me that he having a meeting with some teachers so I have to take the class and go outside. I took my class and I go outside; but by half past two, it started to rain... a little drizzle... but I couldn’t stay there... half past two, the infants going home so I tell my class go home. Well when he hear about it he was mad. And then he had me in his craw and I had him in mine. From then I really had no respect for him.

The other incident happened after she came back from Maternity leave.

I had perfectly good benches before I went on Maternity leave. When I came back from leave I complained to Mr. G, “Where are all the benches? The children have no benches.” You know what he told me? “I can’t put children on my head to sit so if they have no benches, let them stay home”. He told me that.

Taking care of her children was not the only duty that brought dilemmas to Emma's life. Her husband who was also a teacher became ill during the final years of his career. During this time, he was hospitalised many times. This was particularly challenging for her as far as managing her and his leave taking. Emma believes that this caused her to lose the opportunity of becoming principal or vice-principal. She asserted that:

The greatest challenge that I had between the home and the school was later down in my career. I remember that I had applied for principal or vice-principal and they look at your last five years of leave taking. I went to the supervisor, and she asked, "What happen... you were sick?" and I said, "no but my husband was sick." That is one of the problems that I have with the Ministry ...you don't get support from the Ministry. They don't value that people will have problems. You have 14 days sick leave and 14 days occasional [leave] but he is sick. He is in hospital. He was a patient. If I want to get sick leave for him, I have to go down in the hospital at 6 o'clock [a.m.] and wait until the doctors passing; so that I make sure that I get that sick leave to send it; so that his pay will not stop and he would have some kind of security. And you do that... and you have to make arrangements for whatever you have to do at home. I have to take a day and I have to go there and I have to wait and they don't consider that... You know, they so impersonal and callous... That was one of the things. So mine [leave] skyrocketed and I wasn't called based on that.

In addition, her mother now aged and living with her, also needed care. Taking care of her mother caused her, at least on this occasion, to be late for school. Emma recalled:

I remember I was dressed and ready but I had to stay back and clean my mother ... I mean you just can't be early and leave that at home... and that was very disconcerting and disheartening for me... They [officials at the Ministry] don't care about their teachers.

Nevertheless, she gives kudos to some supervisors who were helpful and encouraging to her. On one occasion, one of them helped her to organise her leave.

I went to the States and I got in a few days late and the principal (*the other for whom she had lost respect.*) told me that he did not know what leave to tell me to take but he praying about it...so I went down to the office in Tortula [supervisors' office]. When I went to Miss. B, she told me... I had written a letter... She read it and said, "Nah, we can't put in this"... She said, "Blame it on B'Wee" (British West Indies Airways) and I got my leave... I mean I know that there are rules; there are laws but they have to be more human you know and more caring about teachers...

Disappointments and Rewards

Emma spoke about some other general issues that she had with the Ministry of Education. In particular, she mentioned some of the programmes that she believes either were not implemented or were improperly done. She thinks that these initiatives failed because of lack of support for teachers.

Those were good programmes. ... They didn't give the teachers the support that they needed. I remember the Health and Family Life Education. You can't just have a seminar with the teachers and expect the teachers... It put too much of their work on the teachers there; and it wasn't really implemented.

She also mentioned the introduction of a Student Support Service in schools; a service that she feels is not really bringing relief to teachers as it was intended to do.

You see that Student Support Services; that is a big joke. That is necessary, that is needed. They have people, though their number might not be adequate... but they just have social workers there doing nothing; and the teachers dying in the classroom. That makes me feel to cry. You understand. I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

Another disappointment was on a more personal level. Even though Emma enjoyed working in the classroom, she also had had ambition of moving up the professional ladder to become either principal or vice-principal. However, in spite of the fact that

she acted in both these positions, she ended her tenure as a Teacher One. As she reminisced on her journey through the educational system, she stated:

The last three years of my teaching career were the absolute worst. The Ministry of Education managed to make me feel so useless and as if I didn't matter and as if what I had done was of no consequence. I deeply regret the choice I had made to apply for the post of principal and vice principal. I felt as if I didn't have a chance; as if I was already targeted as a non-qualifier.

She believes that she learnt two very important lessons in her relatively brief stay in the office of acting vice-principal and principal.

The short stint that I had in the office revealed to me... I guess that this might be true anywhere else... but it revealed to me how devious some individuals... it's frightening... how devious some individuals could be. But, as a bright light, I did find out that there were a few genuine ones.

Emma did not dwell long on her experiences in those positions but she concluded by declaring:

I did really enjoy thirty of the thirty seven years that I spent in teaching. When I was in the classroom and I had no thoughts of being an administrator, I enjoyed it.

Throughout our conversation, Emma spoke about the positive things that happened to her as a teacher. She spoke about the impact that she feels that she has made in the lives of her former pupils. She professed that as a teacher, she wanted to "take these children out of the vicious circle that they are living in."

I believe that I made a difference in the lives of many of my charges. It was like kindred spirit when I met a child who didn't have... And I always liked teaching the weaker classes. Somehow it was more fulfilling when you met them here and you could take them one step further. I could identify with that. I know about that...; so to help children...sports whatever...that was a thrill for me. That was good.

She also reminisced on lasting friendships and complements that she had got from her peers. She stated:

Another rewarding feeling was the comments that I got from the principals and other teachers that I worked with from various schools.

Emma said, “I had good relations with the teachers.” She had recently met a former colleague who reminded her of a service that she had rendered during her stay at her last school. The colleague told her:

“Girl, I always have to thank you”... “My husband used to make out my income tax and I never used to see no refund. You said, “Bring it and let me do it for you.”

It is incidents like these that add to the satisfaction she feels about her tenure and helps her to get over her disappointment of her final years. One other thing that adds to that satisfaction is the fact that she was able to achieve a lifelong dream. This is how she put it:

I always wanted to do a B.Ed. I remember when my children were younger; it was not an option because I did not want my children to be latchkey kids. I thought I would get a degree after I retired for my self-fulfilment. When my husband spent most of the last year of his working life in and out of hospital, there was urgency for me to get that degree as soon as possible. I’m glad that I managed to fulfil that wish.

Not only did Emma achieve a Bachelor of Education in Administration from the University of the West Indies, she also went on to acquire a Masters of Public Administration from the same university. The following poem attempts to speak to her perception of her life as a teacher.

Female Teacher

Teaching, she is sure brought her fulfilment

Enlightened her pupils, enriched her existence.

Attainability, admiration brought her to this arena

Challenging times; balancing roles was not magic

Home and school parts clashed she fought to establish

Equilibrium between the multi-faceted life.

Roles of female- wife, mother, caretaker, teacher.

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Modified June 2016

Chapter Seven- Donna's Story

Donna is a retired teacher. As a matter of fact, she retired voluntarily three years before it was compulsory for her to do so. She lives a single life in the East of Trinidad and enjoys working in her garden, taking care of her vegetable and flowering plants. Donna is the type of person who attracts others by her warm friendly personality. I must confess that I know her very well or should I say I thought that I did. I use the word “thought” because in relating her story to me, I found out that even though I have known her for a long while, a lot of her story was new to me. I knew that Donna could be very open with her emotions; being swift to tear up but also equally quick to laugh. These emotions were part of the interview experience with her. I had two interviews with Donna at her home which is just a street away from where I live. The first one ended abruptly when she seemed unable to continue. I emailed the transcript of that interview and asked her to approve it and also asked her if we could meet again to get the rest of her story. She agreed and the second interview was conducted about two months after the first. Her story is represented from the combination of the two interviews with additions from subsequent telephone conversations which served to clarify bits. Like all the other participants' stories, the voice is the Trinbagonian vernacular. There are also breaks in the narrative which could be attributed to Donna's emotions and style of relating.

Beginnings- Happy Days

Donna, the eighth of nine children, grew up in a southern village of Trinidad in the 1950s and 60s. Her father worked in the oil fields at Texaco (now Petrotrin). Her mother was a stay at home mom who tended her garden, and took care of a few animals to supplement the family income. Donna began her story by saying:

I remember that I started primary school early. I was in first year before five. My school was a Hindu school... It wasn't far from me... just up the road...I used to walk.

The school was constructed on land that was donated by a resident of the community. It was a wooden building with wooden floors and Donna reminisced that:

There were two main teaching areas that ran east to west... and another that ran north to south... that was where they used to do agriculture... In those days, they did a lot of agri [agriculture] so they had a garden ... Down on that side they had the big children... You know Post Primary and they used to look after the garden.... And in the next building ... the infants used to be in that building.

She recalled that the space was limited and a tight squeeze for the pupils. The walls of the building were finished with BRC wire for ventilation. Donna described the inside of the building as having:

... Big cupboards that they use to call press... The blackboards were the separations and it was very cramped you could say... and it had these big heavy desks. It had the normal infant desk as we know it but down at the infant part you had three First and three Second Year [classes] push up in the corner... And when you leave First and Second Year and go up to Standard One which was immediately after, there was only just a corridor going north to south where the teachers would pass... There was a Post Primary class on that side... So it was cramped going up the road...

The toilet facilities at the school left much to be desired and Donna made noises and held her nose in a demonstrative way as she tried to describe them. She said:

The toilet was hmm and smelly and whatever but I lived near and so I could go home or when I go home I could use what we had home. And in those days you used to get milk and (*laughs*) it was not nice... it was not nice when it was milk days ... Well in those days... at one time you used to get milk almost every day ... after that about three times a week or so...milk and biscuit ...

The school was very much part of the community and Donna's home being so near was part of the school. In fact, she recalled that once you lived close to the school there were certain things that you did that you would not normally have done.

When you live near to school... if the teachers needed anything, you run home for it...Every day... well I can't remember exactly when we got a fridge but

along the way...but we had to carry ice water... We had to carry it in a jug... not we had to but it was like... a courtesy. And even when it ran out Mr. Baloosingh would say you could go home and get some... It wasn't far ... You just ducked and you go and get cold water for the teachers. It was like that; not just my home, but once you lived in the area around the school, you ran home and got things. So school was like that... going to a country school...

It was, Donna believes, a family kind of living. In fact that is how she describes the relationship among the teachers, principal and the parents of the village.

It was more family; because my mother and they knew the principal. They used to call him 'Headies'. You know headmaster... You know that's what they used to call it in those days. So that if at the end of the day, Headies ent ready to go home as yet, he could stop off by a parent, sit under some body's house and 'old blag' (*Trinbagonian expression meaning chat informally*). That's how it used to be.

There was also the flip side to this. Donna said that it meant that the teachers' eyes were always on you and their relationship with your parents made you vulnerable.

They looking out for you... and you have to be on your best behaviour because you don't know when they will see your mother... even if they step in to talk or if they are walking along the road you know... things like that ... So you always have to be straight... At least for me... because I don't want to have anybody telling my mummy anything.

There were many things that Donna stated that she enjoyed at school. She regaled me with some of the playtime fun. There was a playground at the back of the school -a part of the philanthropist's land:

So when it's break time we used to go and run in all this bush and in the bush also had fruit trees... It had portugal, mandarin (*citrus fruits*) all kinds of things; and we used to be running through the bush and ... Maybe things used to happen then but we never used to be fearful... We could run in the bush, hide, play, all kinds of stuff ... It was really good.

There were also sporting activities on that playground and it was a great achievement to win back some of the glassware that had been donated for the event by the parents of various pupils. Among all the enjoyable stuff were the concerts. She recalled some of them with much pleasure and laughter.

We used to have end of the year concerts and from infant school I took part, you know. I remember that year when we did a doll song... We dressed up as dolls. (*Here she sang the words of the song*) “Dolls for sale. Sweet dolls for sale.”

Donna enjoyed the whole school learning activities that were common to those times as I recalled from my own childhood. She shared some of those experiences.

Another thing I enjoyed at primary school is that we had whole school singing and whole school tables... I enjoyed that... I just liked that the whole school thing when Headies would just come and his voice would just go straight through. You would sit up and listen to whatever news you needed to know... whatever was going on the country... whatever he needed to inform the school of...

She recalled the days leading up to the attainment of the independence of Trinidad and Tobago. She shared her recollections of those activities and the fact that she didn't fully grasp the significance of it all.

When we became independent and we got pencil and chocolate and the medal ... I'm sorry that I did not know the real significance of the thing... I would have had mine [the medal] still.

Donna was a primary school pupil in those days when there were monitors in the school system. (*See history in Chapter 1*) She recollected:

At my primary school there were monitors... There was Miss Gita who ended up being principal of that school sometime after.

She declared that there were teachers whom she never wanted to be like while there were others whom she wanted to emulate.

In those early years, I always had teachers who encouraged me... They saw my ability and encouraged me to be the best that I can be. So I had other teachers but you see Miss Irene and then Miss Tara; I always wanted to be like Miss Tara... She was very patient ... She would listen to you... She would make sure you understand...

In those days, corporal punishment was a norm in primary schools and in Donna's school it was no different. Both girls and boys were subjected to the use of the strap or whip. Donna told of the beatings that she saw others endure.

The thing is I didn't get licks but it is what you saw around you... not to say I never got licks but not for school work. I don't think I got licks for school work but reaching in the late line and... You [pupils] used to get licks for everything... when the bell ring if you stay too long by the pipe...if... You used to get licks for everything... nails... licks... licks... Mr. Pangroo... He was one... hmm...licks... If you see them boys when you see he pulled the pants... khaki pulled tight and he put the stick...

It was one of the things that she learned about teaching. She confessed that she always had a desire to become a teacher and wondered what part the beating she saw played on her decision. There was the fact that she had good teachers but she said:

There was nothing else like teaching... beating up my mother's furniture... which is a bad thing because that is what you took away... I think... was it the power of being a teacher? I taught the furniture [at] home ... I used to be teaching... well my sisters and cousins when they want to play with me and be the students; that's fine. But even if they were not there, I teaching away the steps... I love teaching... I always loved teaching... Sometimes when I think about it; it is how I used to beat... I used to well put licks on them chairs... So in my eyes, I suppose I used to see that as some kind of power and control.

Happy day flew quickly. It was soon time for her to sit Common Entrance Examination. However on receiving the results, it was found that she had not been placed in a secondary school. This episode was painful for her to recall. She stated:

I was not pleased and my principal... He could not understand why I was not placed. And it wasn't just me... it was a thing in school... I think that year it was about four or six of us. He didn't sit on it ... He was up and down... Well school leaving was coming up and he made me sit the school leaving (*Primary School Leaving Examination*).

This painful episode had a happy ending because the results of that examination brought the excellent results that she and her relatives had expected from the Common Entrance Examination. She had scored highly on the examination and was placed in Naparima Girls' High School (NAPS); one of the most prestigious secondary school for girls in Southern Trinidad. This was even more significant because she was now the first member of her family to get free secondary education.

Secondary School

The school was in city of San Fernando and quite a distance from Donna's village home. She recalled that she had to be up early to catch the bus to reach school by eight- thirty. NAPS had been constructed by Canadian missionaries for girls only and was taught by mainly female teachers. There was once an experiment with male teachers but it was short-lived. Donna declared that secondary school offered some challenges. Firstly, post primary students were placed in Form Two of the secondary schools to which they were assigned and because she had missed the first year, her choices of examinable subjects had to be limited. Donna was channelled towards English Language, English Literature, History, Geography, Human and Social Biology and Mathematics. Her other challenges came from the fact that she was now working with some affluent pupils with a wealth of social experiences that had not been hers. Donna claimed that some of these girls were pleasant enough but others were not so kind. However, she believes that it was the snobbishness of some and the brilliance of others that gave her the impetus for her to do well.

NAPS was the first choice for many and so you know that you had to work hard and you had to excel...and you realised that here is excellence as compared to where you are... because in your [primary] school you were at the top and in another [primary] school they were also at the top... so you know when compared, I was just an average as it were... at the end of every term you are trying to break that ceiling you know...

Donna stated that she was also able to overcome her challenges because the school had counsellors who worked with her to settle her and give her constant support throughout her stay. Her teachers, too, encouraged her to work hard. Some of these teachers, she specially remembered for paying a lot of interest in her but she also believes that some of them were just “cruel”. This is how she stated it:

... There were particular teachers who took interest in you in a particular way, like Mrs. Sookoo, Mrs. Smith. You know it have some teachers they come and only the bright children could do well, but Miss Sookoo ... I got opportunity to read out my work in front of the class and with Mrs. Smith and Miss Chandra, I got an opportunity to read out my work. And then there are teachers who I know were just plain cruel...nobody can tell me different... Miss Lee (*Laughs*). At NAPS, we did not know about corporal punishment and I don't know where she was from but she used to want to beat and hit and pinch and thing...

With her determination to succeed and with help from her teachers, Donna was successful at both GCE O' and A' Level examinations.

Becoming a teacher

Donna reiterated that she always wanted to become a teacher. After leaving school she taught at a private secondary school. Meanwhile, she had applied to the Government Service and was called into the Public Service (*once Civil Service*) as a clerk in the Ministry of Education. She recalled that she remained in that service for nearly six years. However, she stated that she did not forget her dreams of becoming a teacher. She declared that:

Even while I was at the Ministry, every time an advertisement [for teachers] would go out, I applied until they called me for an interview...

She was accepted into the teaching service in 1981 and was sent to a primary school in the heart of Port of Spain. Donna believes that the experiences that she had at that first school, and more so the input of the principal, have remained with her and shaped her philosophy and practice as a teacher.

I will always say that who I am as a teacher is because of that first experience that I had with Mr. Harold. Mr Harold was ... You know he was there... When I came, more than just welcoming me, he was a good mentor; a very, very good mentor. You could go to him and talk about anything that you did not understand. You could go to him to ask questions and he would direct you... He made you feel comfortable and he instructed you in a way that you could get the best out of you... and because it was something that I knew I could do and I knew that I could do it well, I just applied myself that way; so that even today we still have a good relationship.

Donna related that she did not have to wait long before she was selected as a candidate for training. After only one term at the school, she was entered into Valsayn Teachers' College to face her two years training.

Training At Valsayn Teachers' College

Donna enjoyed her two years at college. She indicated that for her:

There were two parts to college... There was the academic side where you went and learnt because you know you have to get your teachers' certificate. College was ... where I grew up socially... You met people from different parts of Trinidad and Tobago... that came in with their own way of doing things and culture and whatever. You learnt a lot from that... and we bonded with the Tobago students. We would lime (*party*) with them a lot and we went to Tobago ...lasting relationships...

As far as the academic side of college, it appears that Donna was quite conscientious.

She vouched for herself.

You know how some persons would break way [*come away from the groundings on which they were brought up*] when they come to college, I am not like that...break class ... I would attend to my class ... take notes...

And then there was teaching practice. Donna spoke positively about teaching practice. She had her practice sessions at one government primary and two board schools- Anglican and Roman Catholic. It was also a great pleasure for her to do the third practice at the school where she had spent her one term before entering training college. She spoke about her teaching practice experiences in a matter of fact manner.

It was not bad... In those days of course you had to write out all your lessons and notes of lessons and had to present your file before... and plenty, plenty work... Many times you go into teaching practice and you finishing that as you go along... I suppose that there were the few who had all finished. You had to do everything... You had to make charts...make apparatus ... You had to do a lot, a lot of work.

Donna acknowledged that during her practice, her cooperating teachers were supportive and the only nerve wrecking experience was the fact that she knew that teaching practice was a test.

well you would get a little nervous when you hear that they were coming to listen to you but you teach your lessons ... Miss Cuffy came to listen to me when I was at the school on St. Xavier Street...Miss Cuffy, principal of Valsayn Teachers' College...

Teaching at Two Depressed Schools

Two year later, Donna had passed the final examination and was declared apt to teach children at the Primary Level of the Education System of Trinidad and Tobago. She remembered her short stay at a school situated in a seaside village at the western end of Trinidad. The school itself was a small one housed in a large building. Donna reported that:

Western End was a very small school... it was a very under-utilised school. When I went there, the numbers were so small that she [the principal] had to pull children from the little that they had for me to get a class. Some days I would get seven. I don't think it went above that... a small group of children.

It was a community school in a depressed area and Donna felt that she would have liked to spend more time there because, "it was different from my experience at Port of Spain and even from teaching practice ...to have such a small group of children and parent involvement..."

After that, she was placed in a girls' school in Port of Spain. There was a female staff and there, according to Donna, she faced some of her first challenges as a young teacher. It was an inner city school in a very depressed area that was stigmatised by poverty, petty crimes and other social ills.

The children who came to Midtown ... they could handle themselves... They not afraid to tell you things... You had to be wary of the parents... Parents were those who would come and lick down teachers you know... those kind of thing. Midtown is upstairs/ downstairs. They would stay in the yard and call out (Demonstrates sounds) you know... You didn't have security like now... so that was the atmosphere. Their home life not pleasant and you know I couldn't manage with that.

She was given a Common Entrance class because she perceives that:

In those days they thought that when you just come out of college, you bright. You know everything.

Even though she was placed near to an experienced teacher for guidance and support, the pupils decided to test her.

I didn't even mind a Common Entrance class but the children O-lah... It was the discipline. I had to be sending them down to the office all the time and she [the principal] coming up all the time and she was kind of old school and that was rough, that was rough...

Those children in that class were nearly big as I was. They used to give trouble... not everybody... like a group of five... and no matter what... They tell themselves that you young ... a little girl kinda... and they used to be very, very troublesome... They used to push you, push you. And it's not only that they don't want to learn or they are not learning but they are being very disruptive and they are encouraging the others ... others who, you see after a while, want to come out in that kind of way.

Donna confessed that she spent a lot of time appealing to the principal for help to bring some kind of sanity in the class and to allow her some control. She described the principal as if she was standing in front of her.

I am seeing her. You know how long time principal used to look? She was strapping like how you would see a female police inspector. And she used to wear a suit and even if she wore a dress, it was with a belt. She used to wear solid shoes with heels... well-dressed you know because she used to be well put together; well dressed, pearls earrings... and stockings. She had strong feet... big feet. Now that I think of it I was a little afraid of ... well I wouldn't say afraid because I used to be able to go to her, but she had a presence.

Together with her powerful presence, Donna indicated that she carried a strap which she wielded with great force.

She used to beat you know ... well in those days they used to. She had a strap and she used to wrap it in her hand like this (*she demonstrates*) and she used to... you know how it looks in those cowboy movies? And she aint making joke with assembly and thing. ... You [the pupils] don't know when she coming around the building ... you playing and you don't know when you got that strap. I see children ... I remember this girl when she get it so ... she wasn't expecting it. Oh my!

Donna recalled:

I remember this day when I just could not take it anymore. I just marched downstairs and I went to the principal's office and I let her know that I had enough of these girls... She came upstairs and they got some good straps...

In spite of her ways with the strap, Donna felt that the principal was a good one. When Donna entered the school, she welcomed her kindly and showed to her classroom and placed her near someone who could mentor her. Donna felt that she had a good command of the school and the interest of the children at heart.

Donna formed good relationships with some of the staff members. But she recounted another side to this school.

It had its clique or "click" as they does say. When they have staff meeting it's like they come to war. So, when they come to staff meeting, they sit down like that and they used to gravitate... Other than having their cliques; those cliques used to be very adversarial. Now that I think of it, I wonder if it was the Midtown influence.

The in-fighting was also outside of staff-meetings. Donna described the commotion that she would oftentimes hear coming from the office.

They used to go in the office and you could hear them shouting, "Tell Miss so and so, this, that and the other" You used to get that. You used to have loud thing [confrontations]. It used to be adversarial; who aint talking to who and not only that. You knew that there was a lot of taking and going and underneath [carrying news to the principal] ... really literal you know.

Donna believed that the principal encouraged the news bringing. When I asked about the principal's handling of this situation, she responded:

She liked stories. (*Laughter from both of us*) Well ok let me... if you understand she liked stories; I supposed when you come with stories and she understand then she would know how to deal.

On the other hand, Donna felt staff meetings, though rowdy had positive impacts. She declared that:

Staff meeting was like Parliament... That lady [the principal] not sitting there and saying anything and [not being challenged] that voice talking, that voice talking, that voice talking. And in those days you used to take minutes you know and when it come back the next staff meeting, it is who say this and “I didn't say so.” (*Laughter*)

She compared this noise with a school where she experienced too much silence.

That was not a bad thing. It was not like Success Government School. Even if you feeling something, you didn't say ... I think that their voices used to make things happen, you know. Those teachers were a few years older than me but they had voice. It aint have nothing like “she is principal”... She used to get it.

Donna spent nearly two years at that school but she claimed that it was always the intention she would return to the school where she had her first appointment.

Back Home to Pre- Training School

Donna said that returning was like going home. The principal continued to be an excellent mentor and support. He encouraged her to teach at different levels until she settled at the infant level. He also encouraged her to get involved and learn the administrative aspects of the primary school. She participated in various activities that involved the pupils. She was in charge of the make shift library that the school operated on the corridor. She also participated in Red Cross, annual sports meetings, school bazaars and the annual concerts. Donna said that she spent approximately five years at her favourite school. At that time, she lived at a hostel for young working women in Port of Spain and for a brief time she rented an apartment outside the city. Then, she acquired a government constructed house and moved out of the city. The house was in the east of the island and there was a long commute from home to school. The journey was tedious and so she applied for a transfer closer to her new home.

Moving to the East

Donna was transferred to Success Government Primary School in 1989 and remained there until 2013. Donna described the physical conditions of her new school as being like those of her primary school days.

If you just look at the classrooms...the classes and so on...small class rooms, over-crowded classrooms...no proper furniture...the whole infrastructure was bad...

Nevertheless, she said that when she got to the school she was welcomed by a principal who made her feel welcome.

Mrs. Sutherland was motherly. She welcomed me. She took me around and she carried me and showed me my classroom

However, she confessed that she struggled to fit into the culture of the school. She found it to be quite different from her previous school.

Success did things differently... Success was not how I knew ... was not what I knew at Windy...the teaching method ... their everything... How they did things was different (long pause) and when you came to Success... Well when you come to think of it... it depends on the personality... You conform because this is the way we do it here... Even if I knew it different at Windy, this is the way they did it here and you followed suit like that... Change was difficult at Success...

Over the years, at this school, she worked under several principals and had varying experiences. Donna felt that some of those principals did nothing to earn her respect. One of them she believes “didn’t think you had a mind to contribute... He was just stuck in his ways.” However, she believes that she continued to give her best to her charges or “my children” as she called them. Apart from the academics, she recalled that she would care for her children in ways that are not described in the job specifications.

Once my children had an accident I had no problems ... get my uniform; get my soap; get my towel and I am carrying my children... Today I don't think that there are many teachers who do that... I just think that... that was part of the course.

I hug all my children- male or female. I'd give you [them] a big hug. There's that- hugging and comforting ... just hugging when they happy; when they sad; even when they angry with you. I'd say eyy, eyy, eyy, don't try that with me... Even with combing hair. You know there are times when they come you'd have to comb their hair...

Donna felt that she had needed to develop herself professionally so that she could improve the life of her pupils. She stated that:

Anytime there was any workshop that I felt that I would be interested in... and especially when I realised that I wanted to teach Early Childhood ... well that is how they now refer to it... at that time we used to say Infants. I realised that I liked that level, anytime they had anything like that I would apply. I can't remember over the years how many but I attended... it meant giving up your [my] Saturday...

She stated that she also attended the curriculum workshops that were offered by the Ministry of Education; even the ones dealing with the administration of the school. However, it was not just government run courses and workshops in which Donna participated. There were several that were initiated by her and funded with her own capital. She did her ACP; Guidance and Counselling; and the Teaching of Reading at the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies (now UWI Open University). She also acquired a Masters of Education with the University of Sheffield.

Donna said that it was hard that she was not given a voice at the school where she had worked the longest in her career. She revealed that it was this frustration, together with government education policies and ill health that caused her to resign

before reaching the compulsory retirement age. Noting that government education policies are not helping the education system, she insisted that:

Government good at sitting down and importing things they read about; things that working good in England and it working in Canada and it working in wherever and think it may be good here. They not looking at our situation, our circumstance, our culture or anything like that. It worked over there. And they might import a few professionals; people who are related to certain areas and they make up a few policy papers and they say, "Ok, let's do this." But together with what's on paper you have to have practical parts to go with it. And when I say practical parts; it not only equipment and classroom and whatever, you still have to deal with our situation; how our children relate to things; how our parents relate to things. Can that work even here in this community? Something may work at Barrackpore but that does not mean that it would work in Arima. Something would work in Mayaro but that does not necessarily mean it would work at Success or Windy.

She also expressed the opinion that not enough space is given to teachers at policy making discussions; especially in the light of the fact that they are supposed to be the implementers of those policies.

You have to come and get teachers' input... You have to know how it's going to work from day to day...Is it practical? And changes must be made... and I know that I am speaking in the general here. I want to say something specific... classroom numbers and classroom sizes. They expect in that classroom you'd have maths centre, reading centre, social studies centre and you want to have them... Sometimes just getting the children out of the book and into the practical action go a long way but you don't have room for that; ...not only because the desks and tables taking up too much space but because there are too many children... too many mix up children (*Laughs*). I don't want to label children... and expecting it to work and you have to work it. Then they coming down on you; and breathing down on you; and at the end of

the term, they like data, data, data, data, data (*We laugh*) and this child didn't reach this reading level and that child didn't reach that reading level.

Donna not only felt that teachers were not given a chance to contribute, she spoke about constant curriculum changes and the feeling that one continuously had overseers.

...I am not saying that from time to time you don't need to go back and go through; renew, refresh... but every year, it's a whole set of change of things, a whole set of things that you have to teach...

It had a time when we would get booklet in this; booklet in that; do this; do that; do this; do that. You couldn't catch yourself. It was a whole lot. And ... you not getting any kind of apparatus; you not getting any kind of help and they want to see a whole set of things done. And it had a time when we had a whole set of coordinators coming; reading, maths, science... and it's only to watchman...

There was two maths facilitators who would come and listen and they would share but most of them would come to make it look (*lost for words*) and there you are trying and trying and doing and doing and it was never good enough... You used to be on pins and needles because they coming. It was too much. Every time you turn, the Maths curriculum change; Social Studies change... oooh! You going giddy.

Donna believes that those external problems caused internal ones and that they were also compounded by the new managerial practices in schools.

I think that they are not putting people in schools that have a heart for schools or children or educating children; bringing them from one level to a next. I remember the time when they brought in the notion that education should be run as a business. I have no problem with that... I should not say I have no problem. Teaching is a different organisation. I shouldn't say that I have no problem. Some things that would function fine in a business organisation cannot in no way fit in the teaching environment. And now those people that they are placing in schools, I don't know if they are doing some business course together with

teaching and that is all they are doing. They are not interested in disseminating education for this child so that the weakest child could make some movements. Them just about giving orders (*laughs*) delegating- do this administration.

She observed that given her years of experience and what she had contributed to the system and the school, she should have been allowed to share her thoughts and ideas in a more significant manner.

Internally... they not respecting you ... They not taking you on... They not listening to you and I mean seriously listening. You would voice your opinion. You would share things ... at staff meetings I mean ... the times when I would voice my opinions, you [I] would share things, and you [I] would speak and even when we started having smaller meetings, they would listen but not implement anything...

In the end she felt that she had taken enough of that kind of treatment.

I wasn't prepared to take anymore crap... being treated as if I didn't have a brain... I didn't know what I was doing... that I wasn't a teacher for so many years...successfully so... So I said I'm going... I am going home... That's why I left early... It was rotten... It was no good at all... They didn't treat you with respect. They wanted to make demand... demands, demands. They would not defend you or stand up for you... They throw you to the dogs especially with regard to parents... and they never defended you when parents come in with their complaints... They would say one thing in your face but it's another thing when it has to be resolved. They know "the rules say this and the Ministry says that". I had enough of that ... I know what I did and I did well and I didn't have to take anymore, so I left. I knew that if I stayed there it would have been worse... because twice before I was sick and had to be hospitalised and having to go through all that and by that time I wasn't prepared to take any more of the principal and vice-principal.

She was also disappointed that her salary over the years had remained small when compared to other jobs. This is how she stated it:

I just felt that for all the years that I have taught... and people would say that self-praise is no praise... and I don't say that I didn't have shortcomings. I thought that I would leave school with much more money. No seriously, I feel that teaching is the most underpaid job in the world. People would think ... I didn't do it for the money; but when I think that today some... you understand ... I just felt that we ought to be remunerated a whole lot better for what we have done... when you compare it with what we put out in that regard.

She said that she left the service at a very low point. She expressed those feelings thus:

I came away disappointed, unappreciated, very saddened (*struggles for words to express just how she feels*). What can I say? I know that I am responsible for my own health but teaching, stress wise, contributed to my ill health. I could say that.

Nevertheless, Donna did not appear altogether bitter. She believes that there were many things that brought her satisfaction. She noted that:

I don't think that I wanted to do anything else because it was since I was small I wanted to be a teacher. And people would say "why you don't go ahead and teach secondary" but I enjoyed teaching at primary level and I enjoyed teaching early childhood level. Seeing children learn and seeing how their faces would light up when they get it; and just being with your children and afterwards hearing from them and knowing that they excel in this field and that field. I contributed handsomely... I gave dedicated... how do they put it on the plaque? Dedicated service? I gave that and more and I am not saying it. Ask people. Yesterday, I got a call from Ana (*one of her past pupils*) and she said, "Miss my mind just ran on you and I said let me just give you a call." I said, "Ana, I appreciate this."

And that is not all, Donna said that if she had to do it again she would:

Anytime. I don't care if doctors does make more money. I think that by that time, give me the money of an engineer but I will do it anytime. I just like

them to progress. Take Alfredo. When Alfredo get that one thing right and after that he only coming up (*to her table*). That is something.

A Reflection

I would, if I could, do it all over again

Though my final days brought me much pain

This time though, I want to speak

I do not want to be seen as meek.

Give me a chance to make decisions

That will resound in better conditions,

Allow me space to contribute

When I do, pay me tribute.

My remuneration should increase you see

Not as if my labour should be free

And above all, I want to be

TREATED AS IF I HAVE A FUNCTIONING BRAIN!

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Chapter Eight -Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis and discussion of the stories that were related by the participants. The stories are examined using the basic elements of a narrative. The characters are seen through the lenses of feminist theory, while the plot and settings are seen through the lenses of postcolonialism.

Female Teachers- The Main Characters

Childhood female influences. Writing in 1995/1996, Susan Acker theorised that, “it is difficult to tell the life story of a woman teacher without noticing the impact of her sex” (1995/1996: 111). As the researcher, I have already spoken about the mostly female influences that have made me what I am today. Savickas (2012: 14) argues that the development of identity is an ongoing process and reacts to context. Like I, the participating teachers all spoke about how their lives were affected by the women who either nurtured or taught them. For example, Emma spoke about her grandmother who supplied the needs that her mother was unable to provide since she was a live-in domestic and also because of ill-health. She re-counted:

She [my mother] used to be a domestic [house help]... a live-in domestic and she used to live in places like Bayshore and St. Ann’s. So we would be with our grandmother.

Similarly, Ayesha revealed that her grandmother was her caregiver and also acted as her pre-school teacher.

All of these teachers said that they were chiefly taught by women and that this left an effect on them. For Emma and Donna, it was the motivator that propelled them into a teaching career. For Ayesha, it was the stimulus that gave the confidence that she needed to achieve. However, it probably coloured Marcia’s attitude towards male teachers. She recalled:

...I only had female teachers and then when I did experience male teachers it was a terrible, terrible thing.

She said that she felt that male teachers were “characters” who affected her negatively. She recounted incidents like the following:

We had another Mathematics teacher... He used to ask you questions on the spot and if you did not have the correct answer, he would have some kind of snide remark and everybody would laugh. So when we had him we were tense; everybody sitting down very tense and praying that he did not call you on that particular day.

Female teachers’ models. Even though there were instances of positive male influences, (*see for e.g. Donna’s first principal*) the teachers’ stories reveal that their identities as female teachers were formed or influenced by what they had observed from female teachers’ practice. They related first experiences that highlighted behaviours that are attributed to women. Speaking about a first day at a new school, Donna recalled one principal thus:

Mrs. Sutherland was motherly. She welcomed me ... She took me around and she carried me and showed me my classroom.

Marcia speaks about a similar first-time experience as an OJT:

The first mentor I had was an infant female teacher. She was real nice. The first day I entered was hugs and welcome.

These women incorporated those female influences into their teaching practices and philosophies. They see it as part of what it means to be a teacher. For example, Marcia included care-giving in what she does on a daily basis. This encompassed taking care of cuts and bruises; giving hugs and kisses; and cleaning and changing them when they “have accidents in the toilets.” Similarly, Donna said:

Once my children had an accident, I had no problems ... get my uniform; get my soap; get my towel and I am carrying my children...

I hug all my children- male or female. I’d give you [them] a big hug. There’s that- hugging and comforting ... just hugging when they happy; when they sad; even when they angry with you...

The loving aspects were also part of Ayesha's and Emma's practice. Ayesha confessed:

It's an emotional thing... When they leave, you cry. You feel as if you are losing your own... even though you know that they are just going to a next class... but it has been emotional...

Emma recounted incidents when she jumped into the mother role. She believes that this kind of caring came from the nurturing that she had done in her own family.

I was always there nurturing and that came out in my teaching... so that if a child did not have breakfast ... I remember a child who went home for lunch in Montero... It must have been a mile inside and she came back and [while] we were doing nursery rhymes, she just got up as if something pushed her and she came and said "Miss I aint eat anything". I just left the class and I took her across the road by the parlour and fed her...

The mummy aspects of teaching can sometimes be incorporated into official school tasks such as in the times when pupils were fed milk and biscuits to supplement their diets. I remember that as a young teacher, that was sometimes part of my duties. Emma also spoke about having to mix milk with other female teachers.

When I went to Eastern Government, it took a while for me to fit in but I remember Mrs. Gill in particular... We would mix milk together ...

And speaking of her pupils, Ayesha declared:

They see you as Mummy; and they are inquisitive. They want to know not just about school ...but about what makes you -you.

As discussed in *Chapter 2*, the feminisation of education systems, especially in early childhood education centres and primary schools, has been the subject of many discourses in educational circles (for e.g. Piburn, 2010; MEN, 2011; Joseph & Jackman, 2014). From the narratives, we realise that this phenomenon should not be simply seen as the number of female teachers following this career path. It also

manifests in the reproduction of school practices that are considered to be feminine. Teachers in primary schools, both men and women, function in a feminised environment with mothering being a chief feature. This appears to be accepted as the norm by some teachers and pupils. Certainly, Donna posited that it was “part of the course”. In speaking about invisible pedagogies, Arnot (2002: 590) cites Bernstein (2000) who submitted that female teachers can be perceived as reproducers of class socialisation with child-rearing being the “official pedagogy of state primary schools”. Indeed, I remember a new teacher, at a school where I taught at the infant level, wondering aloud why there were so many teachers in that department who were not biological mothers. It appeared to me that she felt that physical caring for the pupils was more important than pedagogy. This type of thinking has proven to be detrimental especially to the attraction and retention of men in the system (Haase, 2008).

Teaching can now be categorized as women’s work just as during the past, medicine and other sciences were solely the domain of men. However, if pupils are only taught by women; isn’t there is a likelihood that they will believe that teaching is a female profession? Actually, children in most societies do see teaching in the early stages as mainly female oriented (MEN, 2011: 64). Such stereotyping can lead to reduced educational choices and career opportunities for both male and female (MEN, *ibid*). Piburn (2010: 46) cites a UN Division report on the advancement for women which suggests that exposing children to both male and female teachers during the early years would help to negate the aforementioned negatives outcomes. Additionally, de-feminising the roles that teachers play and allowing them to function as learning facilitators would help to correct the imbalance in the teaching profession. My call is not for fewer female teachers but for the pedagogical aspect of teaching to supersede the caring aspects. Answering this call would mean the acquisition of support staff to do the caring tasks that some female teachers feel they are compelled to perform because of nature and nurture.

Convergence of Home and School Roles. Emma’s story especially shows how the roles as wife, mother, and care-giver to other family members intersected with the life of a female teacher. She recalled how her sleep pattern changed when her first daughter was born. She reflected that her decision on the spacing of her pregnancies

and the number of children she produced may have been influenced by the challenges she faced managing the multiple roles. Following are several examples of how she managed the multi-faceted roles and how they affected her.

There was a family friend and she said, “Bring the child.” She was living up by the hospital and Valley Green Government was in the other direction... Sometimes when I reach up, there was no car... You have to take another taxi, go up by the hospital and drop off the baby and then come back down and then walk to school because the taxi aint going all the way up there.

... Jenny was about a year when we move down here... and I was still working in Valley Green; so I would wake up 3 o'clock and sometimes 4 o'clock ...

I do remember stopping a taxi in the rain with Jenny. She was on my shoulder, the umbrella, the baby bag, my handbag and the taxi coming; rain falling and I want the taxi. I remember sticking out my foot to stop the taxi.

Emma's multi-faceted roles also caused her to put a hold on her own professional advancement. She shared how she always wanted to obtain tertiary education but was prevented by the complexities of her life and her philosophy of what was good motherhood.

I always wanted to do a B.Ed. I remember when my children were younger, it was not an option because I did not want my children to be latchkey kids. I thought I would get a degree after I retired for my self-fulfilment. When my husband spent most of the last years of his working life in and out of hospital, there was urgency for me to get that degree as soon as possible. I'm glad that I managed to fulfil that wish.

According to Emma, converging roles also played a part in her not achieving her dream of becoming principal or vice-principal. For example, she had to be away from school looking after her ill husband's welfare. She believes that the MOE does not understand that taking care of an ailing loved one can affect school attendance.

I remember that I had applied for principal or vice-principal and they look at your last five years of leave taking. I went to the supervisor, and she asked, "What happen... you were sick?" and I said, "no, but my husband was sick." That is one of the problems that I have with the Ministry ...you don't get support from the Ministry. They don't value that people will have problems... He was a patient. If I want to get sick leave for him, I have to go down in the hospital at 6 o'clock [a.m.] and wait until the doctors passing so that I make sure that I get that sick leave to send it so that his pay will not stop and he would have some kind of security.

As a married woman, but without children, Emma's story in part reverberates with mine. Here, I quote.

I had been married three years earlier and had moved to the east of the island. I commuted for a while but the twenty- two and a half kilometre distance from home to school became too much for me. If I were to reach to school on time, I had to leave home in the dark. I did not own a car and had to depend on public transport. ... This was also a period when my husband was unemployed and I was carrying the burden of maintaining our home. Juggling the traditional roles of wife and bringing home work from school was interfering with my relationship with my spouse. I was usually tired and crabby especially when I had my monthly periods. In addition, I was dealing with infertility issues, which added to my distress.

Emma's and my experiences are no doubt similar to those of many other women who have not been given the opportunity to share their stories. Chawla & Sondhi (2011: 342) posit that there is the struggle arising out of the professional having to manipulate multiple roles. This is particularly true of the female professional on whom fall the majority of the caregiving functions of the family. The effects of the multiple burden are portrayed in the preceding examples. There is a lot that needs to be done when it comes to support systems for assisting women who work. Administrators should understand and take measures that support their employees' multi-faceted roles (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011: 350). Chawla & Sondhi (*ibid*) suggest that supportive

programmes, such as child-care assistance, can greatly assist in helping women to effectively manage home and work roles. For example, a woman coming off maternity leave is left with the onerous task of finding someone to look after the baby. Not everyone is fortunate enough to have available relatives or friends to assist them. Even if they did, as Emma reminisced, the help is sometimes at inconvenient locations. Women need proper, licensed, supervised day-care facilities where they can leave their children and then feel comfortable, while on their jobs, knowing that their children are in good care.

Within recent times, many ECCE centres have been constructed by the GOTT but these cater for children from age three to five (Seetahal-Maraj, 2012/2013). However, there is still need for government funded or subsidised nurseries to care for younger children. Concurrently, there should be programmes in place to assist with the care of elderly or ailing loved ones. Moreover, women need to have the support of their partners. Currently, in Trinidad and Tobago, there is no mandatory paternity leave for men. Some unions have negotiated with organisations for this to be part of their workers' terms and conditions. For example, male teachers are granted four days paternity leave (Anderson, 2014). However, paternity leave should not be a favour to a few. Social justice demands that it should become a right so that men can have early responsibility in the care and nurturing of their children. The educational system of Trinidad and Tobago should be re-structured to take these gender issues into account. This should be done with the input of teachers who function in the schools and know what daily realities they face. Decisions that are born out of dialogue with teachers would go a long way in easing the burdens that female teachers, like Emma, face on a daily basis.

The Physical and Cultural Settings

The Schools/Training Colleges and Universities. In *Chapter one*, I partially described the colonial and post-colonial education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The teachers' narratives reveal that many schools have remained the same as those in colonial and early post-colonial days. They spoke of "substandard" physical conditions. Following are some of those comments.

Emma (*of her primary school*): we had a concert ... and my cousin fell through the flooring... it was wood and just blinds to divide the classrooms. Sometimes it just used to be so noisy. And we still have some schools like that.

Donna (*some thirty years later*): If you just look at the classrooms...small class rooms, over-crowded classrooms...no proper furniture...the whole infrastructure was bad...

Marcia, in particular, recounted how these poor physical conditions interfered with the teaching/ learning experiences at schools:

Twenty-five children in the same room with another teacher with twenty-five plus children was not a nice experience. I couldn't hear myself tell them anything and I could not hear what they were telling me... all the time.

They up close under one another so they always fussing and fighting. You had more to do with discipline than with teaching...

In *chapter one*, I wrote Campbell (1997) informed that schools before 1956 were badly in need of repairs. Likewise, as also reported in *chapter one*, Burnham (2008:234) cited a 1964 UNESCO account which listed the lack of amenities in primary schools. In these narratives, not only was the physical structure bad, there was a lack of educational resources to meet the needs of both teachers and pupils. This lack affected the teachers' home environment, their relationships and their social lives. Marcia shared this experience:

Well, obviously I had to make things too. So on Saturday evenings, before you [I] go out to lime (*socialise*) or whatever, you [I] making charts. You had to make everything from scratch because that is what you were told you had to do... to take trash to make treasures. So I had my house full. And buy everything with your own money. So I bought everything and Saturday evening, I making charts...

In fact, all the teachers spoke of having to construct teaching aids and as I pointed out in my story, the materials for constructing them “were taking up space in my house and were a nesting place for mice and cockroaches”. The narratives affirm school efficiency and effectiveness literature which have stated that the physical conditions of schools can either hamper or enhance a teaching/learning environment (Ayeni & Adelabu, 2012; Meador, 2014). However, it would appear that primary schools are still seen as the underdogs of the education system. They have been put in the back regions of education for far too long. It is time to move them from the shadows and give them an equal place with other sectors of the system.

Silence. The cultural setting in the schools and other educational spaces can also be analysed using a framework that points to our colonial past: a past in which the silence of the masses was appreciated and encouraged. These women describe spaces where their voices are/were not heard and where as a result they felt hopeless. These are places where they were /are expected to implement policies without having been given the chance to participate in decision making. Donna posited:

...they not taking you on... they not listening to you and I mean seriously listening. You would voice your opinion, you would share things ... at staff meetings... they would listen but not implement anything.

Marcia spoke of similar experiences at both her training college and university. For example, speaking about university, she said:

I thought that university was a place where you could have challenged certain things. By then, I had my own ideas about how certain things were supposed to be; how they were supposed to look... Nobody wanted to listen.

Ayesha also spoke of the imposed silence during her university days.

UTT treated you as if you were primary school children. I felt as if I went back to infants; back to “do as you are told or else”.

Emma shared this feeling:

The last three years of my teaching career were the absolute worst. The Ministry of Education managed to make me feel so useless and as if I didn't matter and as if what I had done was of no consequence.

It is this type of setting, where teachers' voices are ignored, that can lead to stress, burnout, a high attrition rate, and unpunctuality and irregularity. This is emphasised by the following statements in the narratives.

Marcia: I have gotten to a point where coming to school is a stress... It's a chore because what you are coming to meet is a fight. At this point when I get to school, I just want to survive the day. I don't even think that I have the energy to try anything new because I don't feel like anything new could help...

Ayesha: I dread getting up in the morning to go to work. It started being I would be at school by six and I would leave at six in the evening... now huh... bell rings and I am out of there... Lunch time I no longer sit and talk to the children or try and get work done in between or take in the children. Now I would leave and take my lunch. And I have come to just lock myself away into my classroom...

Donna: I wasn't prepared to take anymore crap... being treated as if I didn't have a brain... I didn't know what I was doing... that I wasn't a teacher for so many years... successfully so... so I said I'm going... I am going home... That's why I left early... It was rotten... It was no good...

The reviewed literature confirmed that 'voicelessness' is a general complaint of teachers in other countries. Goodson (2011: 2) affirms that teachers have not been given the power or chance to influence education, schooling or curriculum. However, silence is particularly noticeable in post-colonial and other Third World nations where there exists the culture of silence that Freire (1985) speaks about and which I mentioned in *chapter two*. It is the kind of silence that is inspired by external and internal power brokers and scriptural strictures that encourage citizens to be reticent in the face of all ills. Educational institutions are places where the culture is reproduced

and have become places where most citizens are nurtured or is the correct word 'neutered' to accept without question values that would allow a national to become:

A person readily accepting the existing order, rather than a person who would try to advocate or implement any radical changes in society (London, 2002: 157).

In other words, we accept our status and we are silent in that acceptance. It would appear that a teacher's place is to receive, follow instructions and reproduce in her pupils the same characteristics that have been produced in her. Nonetheless, these teachers said or implied that they wanted a chance to make more meaningful contributions into what is/was expected of them as they implemented curriculum changes. In schools, if teachers are not given the chance to speak or are not allowed to participate in the decision making and planning processes they can be said to be alienated from their work. Instead of being part owners, they may justifiably feel that they are just there to serve the system. Those in charge of overseeing educational reform ought to be reminded that:

Significant educational reform hinges on the creation and attainment of a shared vision and a trust, collaboration, and consultation between policy makers and teachers (Brand, 2009: 88).

Foreign Frames of Reference. Three teachers also spoke of the educational spaces as places where the state borrowed or bought into plans and policies that were foreign to the contexts in which they are to be implemented. This mimicry, they felt, made it difficult for them to practise to the best of their abilities and left them feeling stressed and dis-heartened. Speaking about her university experience, Marcia expressed:

All they wanted you to do was to take the same idea from the book and put it your practice... write it down and then practise it... You not cutting it and putting it to your circumstance... and our circumstance is not the same as any other country. All the literature dealt with [those] who had space; [those] who had assistant teachers; [those] who had things that I didn't have. They had a lot

of resources that was given to them. When you go in the classroom, it's you teaching the children and you don't have space to set up that kind of scenario where children could learn on their own or discover or be the centre of attention. They just wanted the magic to work.

Donna was particularly insightful, postulating:

Government good at sitting down and importing things they read about; things that working good in England and it working in Canada and it working in wherever and think it may be good here. They not looking at our situation, our circumstance, our culture or anything like that.

Ayesha also commented:

I know that they buy books from away and it is based on an American System... but we are supposed to be working under a British system. But when is the day coming when teacher training will be based on reality in our context, in a Trinidadian or Caribbean context? I would really like to see that happen.

Nearly fifty years ago, the authors of the Draft Plan for Educational Development 1967-1983 in Trinidad and Tobago, had lamented that foreign frames of references, with their false values, are so well embedded in our education system that they are difficult to remove (reported in *chapter two*). Schrouder (2008: 274) also reminds us that even after independence, the education system of Trinbago, like those of other Anglophone Caribbean nation states, continued to be dominated by the British Education system. However, Schrouder (*ibid*: 278) points out that present curricula founded by the prior colonial powers may not be relevant in some contexts. Crossley and Tikly (2004: 149) note that they:

... lack relevance to local realities and are often at variance with indigenous knowledge systems, values and beliefs.

The penchant for the use of foreign paradigms permeates all levels of the TT educational system. At the level of teacher training, it remains a bugbear with teachers who claim that they are/were forced to regurgitate material that does not fit their

contexts. It has also been claimed that the material does not balance teachers' knowledge with genuine professional training (Campbell, 1997; Lavia, 2004). Three of the teachers here stated that there was no nexus between what the theory advocated and their experiences in the classrooms. In its review of teacher preparation, the Professional Unit of the MOE (2005: 10 in Rohlehr, 2012: 26) states that there did not seem to be any coherent policies with regard to the development of teachers. It insisted that:

There exists a fragmented, uncoordinated assortment of diversified programme offerings, policies and schedules, each of these functioning independently of each other... (*ibid*).

Those fragmented, uncoordinated assortments mentioned in this report may well have been bits and pieces of various tried out and very often failed programmes of foreign educational systems. This type of borrowing ties in with the notion of mimicry, which is, as explained in *chapter two*, one of the legacies of our colonial past. We are encouraged to believe that foreign is better. We attempt to speak a language; we are steeped in the literature; and all in all we have been socialised to accept that the values and customs of the English are the ones that are most worthy to emulate. We have now extended that mimicry to other first world countries. However, trying to work with foreign material that did not fit the contexts and their realities made life difficult for the teachers and has stirred up feelings of anger and frustration.

In addition to the incongruity of philosophical and pedagogical frames with contexts, there were also the frequencies of policy change. These frequencies of change are consistent with Bhabha's thinking that, "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence..." (Bhabha, 1984: 126). The uncertainty about whether programmes are working effectively leads to continual changes of educational policies but not of the desire to attain a system resembling a foreign one. However, constant changes bring on stress. As reported in the literature review:

...teachers' work and lives are affected by the maddening whirl of change characterized by development of everything touted as new - new curriculum, new instruction, new technology, and new assurance and monitoring of

education quality, and new shifts toward school-based management (Brand, 2009: 87 *abstract*).

Donna confirmed that this was true in her case. She reminisced:

It had a time when we would get booklet in this, booklet in that; do this; do that, do this, do that. You couldn't catch yourself. It was a whole lot. It was too much... Every time you turn, the Maths curriculum change; Social Studies change... oooh! You going giddy.

It occurs to me that mimicry stifles new creative ideas. Such “blind imitation is fatal to the growth of the individual and the nation as a whole” (Gupta, 2013: 1). Cutting and pasting foreign policies without careful thought cannot achieve stated educational objectives which aspire to:

develop future citizens who possess job market preparation, and the capacity for creativity, problem-solving abilities, flexibility, initiative, and lifelong learning (Brand, 2009: 90).

Nevertheless, according to these teachers, instead of cutting out, we are cutting and pasting in our educational spaces. Nations' education policy makers and planners should contend for projects that fit into their contexts because they are the ones who best understand and know their citizens. Teachers should be allowed to do the same in their educational spaces.

Plot - Actions, Conflicts and Resolutions

The teachers' narratives reveal actions such as corporal punishment; inordinate respect for authority; following rules without asking questions or thinking critically; and the high handed behaviour of those up the higher end of the hierarchy with its cascading effect on those below. They also portray some aspects of resistance and rebellion.

Corporal Punishment. The administration of corporal punishment within schools is a practice that is part of our colonial heritage (*see chapter two*). Indeed, corporal punishment was the norm in my primary school and it became part of my early practice. The narratives showed that corporal punishment began when the

teachers themselves were in primary school and followed them into their own classrooms. We became beaters because we learnt that to beat was to teach or vice versa. Donna recalled:

The thing is I didn't get licks but it is what you saw around you...not to say I never got licks... but not for school work. You [pupils] used to get licks for everything...when the bell ring if you stay too long by the pipe...

Marcia spoke about one of her primary school principal:

Anything you do, she cutting your tail... she putting it on you one time... no questions ... no nothing. She dealt with her students. She had no problem with discipline.

Donna observed and sanctioned it as a young teacher.

I remember this day when I just could not take it anymore, I just marched downstairs and I went to the principal's office and I let her know that I had enough of these girls... She came upstairs and they got some good straps.

Even teachers who are kind and caring practise it as part of the cultural heritage in bringing up and disciplining children. Emma recounted:

I remember Gillian. I taught her... and one particular day... and I can't remember what she had done...but I had beaten her just before lunch...

Not only did corporal punishment follow teachers into their classrooms, for Donna, at least it might have served as a motivational factor in her decision to become a teacher. She reminisced:

There was nothing else like teaching... beating up my mother's furniture which is a bad thing because that is what you took away. ... Was it the power of being a teacher? ... Sometimes when I think about it; it is how I used to beat... I used to well put licks on them chairs... So in my eyes, I suppose I used to see that as some kind of power and control.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, once Commissioner and Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OAS supports the theory that corporal punishment is a legacy from the British. He states that:

...it is clear that during the colonial period corporal punishment was institutionalised in many countries including in the Caribbean region, in the context of slavery and military occupation, in developing school, care and penal systems for children and it was also promoted in some missionary teaching (Pinheiro, 2012: 3).

He (*ibid*) states that he has interfaced with many politicians and others who explain that corporal punishment as part of “their” culture makes it difficult for some in their societies to recognise it as a human rights violation. Certainly, Trinbagonian society is finding it challenging to eradicate, even though professionals from various related fields have spoken out about its ills. For example, Jean Zermatten, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2012, said that there is agreement among experts that physical punishment does not achieve much. He quoted Balestra (2008 *In the legal interdiction of corporal punishment in the family*, IDE, Bramois, 44-55) who posits that corporal punishment is “ineffective from a pedagogical stance, questionable from a moral stance, and bearing serious consequences from a medical and psychological stance”. It is part of the violence in schools where we inadvertently teach that if one is bigger, stronger and has the authority, it is alright to use brute force to conquer. Not only that, I have encountered pupils who react to a beating by beating up on weaker pupils. There are other children who are just mimicking the power they think is involved in corporal punishment and then that behaviour is given the name “bullying”.

Before I add some other thoughts on corporal punishment, let me state categorically that I am in no way advocating the retention of this abuse of children, neither am I finding excuses for those who would like to see its continuance. Rather, after being so long in the teaching environment, I am giving reasons why it might be still of importance to many teachers. Apart from its cultural roots, teachers find it difficult to abandon the practice of corporal punishment because they are not supported by staff trained in dealing with behavioural issues. Teachers see corporal punishment as an easy fix as they face the stress of having to deal with misconduct and sometimes deviant behaviour. Adequate support regarding behavioural issues is needed so that

teachers could attend to pedagogical issues which ultimately are what they are hired to do and for which they are held accountable.

Another reason why it has been difficult to eradicate may be the fact that some children, having been socialised to accept a flogging as punishment, snigger at other disciplinary measures. In Trinidad and Tobago, seventy-seven (77) percent of children get “licks” (UNICEF, 2010). Here, it is lawful to administer corporal punishment in the home and until quite recently, in schools and other places where children were schooled and socialised. Article 22 of the Children Act (1925) endorsed “the right of any parent, teacher, or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child or young person to administer reasonable punishment to such child or young person” (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Legal Affairs .*Chap. 46: 01 Supplemental 22 Children* :). However an amendment to the Children Act – Article 4 2012, which came into effect in May 2015, removed the rights from persons other than parents to administer corporal punishment (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2015:1). The report by this organisation points to the fact that beating children is still given as a right to parents (see subsections 6 and 7 of said Act).

Abolishing corporal punishment in the home has been one of the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. This suggestion was rejected by the GOTT in 2011. The position was that: “Corporal punishment [is] traditionally accepted in disciplining children” (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children; Caribbean Progress Report, 2012: 46). Thus, while I am applauding its purported removal from schools, I am also advising that this measure will not be effective if, as a nation, we do not go the entire kilometre. Corporal punishment must be removed from the psyche of citizens as the only or best way to deal with misconduct. We must educate parents and guardians about its harmful effects and also create the laws to stop it in the homes where it has its roots. This is one legacy of our colonial past that should be eradicated since, among all other reasons, it perpetuates violence against the youngest and weakest among us.

Respect/Dis-respect, Dis-regard and Pockets of Resistance. Concomitant with the practice of corporal punishment is the notion that respect should be shown to

those in authority in the form of addresses, greetings and prompt response to demands. Ayesha captured the essence of the idea by saying that when she was growing up:

You did not want to cross grownups. You would not put God out of your thoughts. You had a lot of respect. You just knew that that was Miss and you were straight as a pin. We didn't do anything to get the wrath of anybody, especially teachers. When teachers watch you, you just froze.

The examples below revealed that this type of behaviour is displayed in Trinbagonian educational institutions.

Marcia: I had to apologise in front of the school to a female teacher for not saying good morning, which I *did* say but she did not hear. I had to apologise in front of the whole school. I will never forget that. It was a traumatic experience...a very traumatic experience. I would never forget.

Ayesha: when you are teaching a class and you are all excited and you get them to a place where you want them. ... The principal would come and demand your attention and she would be angry that you did not jump immediately and come running. ... They expect that you would just answer when you are called... no matter what you are doing.

On the flip side, there is what the teachers considered to be disrespect and disregard for their feelings by some principals. Emma recounted an episode about a principal who felt that a room was solely for his purpose and as a result displaced pupils and teacher so that he could conduct a meeting that he could have held elsewhere. The end result of his actions was an acrimonious relationship between the two.

Donna also expressed her angst about such dis-respectful disregard for teachers. She observed:

They didn't treat you with respect; they wanted to make demands... They would not defend you or stand up for you... They throw you to the dogs especially with regard to parents... They never defended you when parents come in with their complaints... They would say one thing in your face but it's another thing when it has to be resolved. They know the rules say this and the Ministry says that.

According to some of the narratives, there was also the issue of disrespect, fighting among teachers and carrying news to the principal. The accounts are as follows:

Marcia: The principal was a serious man. He was a kind of tyrant. He used to fight with the teachers a lot. Apparently, he wanted his way and they wanted theirs. I used to hear the fights in the staff room and that kind of thing ...

Donna: They used to go in the office and you could hear them shouting, "Tell Miss so and so, this, that and the other". You used to get that. You used to have loud thing [confrontations]. It used to be adversarial; who aint talking to who and not only that. You knew that there was a lot of taking and going and underneath [carrying news to the principal] ... really literal you know.

Donna asserted the principal encouraged the news. She said:

She liked stories. Well ok let me...if you understand she liked stories, I supposed when you come with stories and she understand then she would know how to deal.

On the other hand, Ayesha reported that her principal valued the disunity saying "I don't want unity among my staff. Let them bicker".

There were also pockets of resistance and rebellion. One of Emma's principals, in the interest of the pupils, "used to get in trouble with the supervisors because he used to do his own thing". And Emma herself dared to anger a principal by dismissing her class before the scheduled time.

I took my class and I go outside; but by half past two, it started to rain... so I tell my class [to] go home.

Donna reported that at one school, teachers refused to be silent. She attests:

Staff meeting was like Parliament... That lady [the principal] not sitting there and saying anything and [not being challenged] that voice talking, that voice talking, that voice talking...

Donna pointed to the positive impact of their resistance.

I think that their voices used to make things happen, you know. Those teachers were a few years older than me but they had voice.

Added to those accounts of confrontations, Emma spoke about the deviousness of persons while she acted for a short time as principal. She mused:

The short stint that I had in the office revealed to me... how devious some individuals...it's frightening... how devious some individuals could be.

The behaviour towards staff members and the interpersonal relationships portrayed in these narratives can be seen in other organisations. Bolman & Deal (2000: *no page no.*) theorise that contemporary organisations “often resemble feudal hierarchies with monarchs, lords, and serfs”. At the topmost peak there is the monarch, who rules supreme. The serfs are situated at the lowest extremities. The lords are the middle managers. The analogy can be used to explain the structure and culture of Trinbagonian schools with its composition of principals, heads of departments and teachers.

The insistence on actions that prove that you are respectful to those who are supposedly higher than you is a part of subordination. In *chapter one*, I made mention of the cultural demonstration of respect which includes greetings of “good morning, afternoon or evening”. Respect is also measured in actions such as responding promptly when someone in authority demands attention. This insistence on ‘respect on demand’ can cause frustration and anger in schools where teachers want to be seen as equals with those who are called leaders. To lead should not mean to dominate or subjugate. Furthermore, as Ayesha pointed out, the prompt attention demanded by principals can cause pupils to lose focus just at the moment when they may have caught on to a difficult concept. While nothing is wrong with showing respect for others; what is intolerable is the inordinate amount that one is expected to show to teachers when you are a child and to administrative staff when you are a teacher. It is also deplorable that our society seems to think that respect is something that can be coerced out of others instead of being earned.

The narratives exposed that there are strict adherences to hierarchical structures. In the schools, training colleges and university the teachers are expected to be subservient. This appears to be no different from the earliest schools in colonial

Trinidad and Tobago. Burnham (2008: 229) points out that these were plagued by the autocratic leadership of principals and educational boards. In constructing an understanding of teaching in Trinidad and Tobago, Bristol (2008) draws attention to the impact of colonial-slave legacies upon classroom practices. However, even though I see illustrations of this type of behaviour in the classroom, I see it exemplified to a greater extent in the managerial functions of schools. Here, I analogise some principals as former field slaves who now given the whip wield it with more vigorously than 'Massa' himself giving credence to Freire (1973: 3) who states:

It is a rare peasant who, once "promoted" to overseer, does not become more of a tyrant towards his [sic] former comrades than the owner himself. This is because the context of the peasants' situation, that is, oppression, remains unchanged. In this example, the overseer, in order to make sure of his[sic] job, must be as tough as the owner -- and more so.

It would appear that, in some instances, principals no longer see themselves as oppressed while on the other hand, teachers perceive them to be oppressors or "sub-oppressors". Their ultimate goal was to reach the top, to be "men [sic] but for them, to be men [sic] is to be oppressors" (Freire, *ibid*). On the other hand, teachers appear to make their lives bearable by removing the focus from themselves and putting it on others by actions such as tale bearing, so that the wrath of the master is re-directed. The intention could also be that they would find favour with the 'masters' and thus become future wielders of the whip. Relationships between administrative staff and teachers would improve if leaders would see themselves as co-partners with teachers and model collegial behaviours instead of what Donna referred to as a "just about giving orders; delegating, do this administration."

Becoming Aware and De-colonising the space. In their stories, the teachers spoke about their inner and outer conflicts and the way these affected their philosophies and their pedagogies. They also spoke of measures they had taken to make life and learning better and more interesting for the pupils. For example, Marcia spoke about her internal struggles with her reality and the conflict between her and one principal.

We clashed in terms of philosophies. I am not sure what his philosophy was. My philosophy was that you had to get the children to learn by any means necessary and try to get the discipline under control; that you had to think out of the box and be unconventional and try un-conventional things.

Donna said:

Anytime there was any workshop that I felt that I would be interested in... And especially when I realised that I wanted to teach Early Childhood ... anytime they had anything like that I would apply...

Emma fed children because she understood the link between poverty and learning as we can see from the following episode.

...she just got up as if something pushed her and she came and said “Miss I aint eat anything”... I just left the class and I took her across the road by the parlour and fed her because I couldn’t understand how she could walk bare-feet- no shoes on this hot pitch road and just come back...

And there is Ayesha with a sense of social justice that got her in trouble with administration and other staff members when she spoke out about alleged sexual harassment of girls. She recounted:

I went home for the weekend... and I could not sleep... It bothered me... I got sick... I could not go to school on the Monday because I was sick.

The two retirees explained how they brought closure to some of the dilemmas they faced in their journeys. While they remembered the bad times, they also reminisced on what they considered the rewarding aspects of their career. For Emma it was the pleasure of “teaching the weaker classes”. She held that it was “was more fulfilling when you met them here and you could take them one step further”. Donna expressed similar feelings. She said:

Seeing children learn and seeing how their faces would light up when they get it and just being with your children and afterwards hearing from them and knowing that they excel in this field and that field.

These latter remarks line up with Galman & Mallozzi’s (2012: 283) position that female teachers’ professional rewards are bound up “almost exclusively in relationships with the children” (*ibid*). However, while the in-service teachers spoke about that kind of relational satisfaction they also spoke about the changes that they

want to see or, in lieu of those changes, the option of leaving the system altogether. For example, Ayesha wants things to get better and questions the rationality of a school:

If we can't band together to bring up the standard ... to show students how to... to model the behaviour you want from them...

She feels that she may have to explore other options in her work life:

due to ... the things that are going on... whereas where I thought that it would have been a career path ... You know I have started to doubt... it doesn't seem as if I'm going to be happy... I don't want to break down before my time. I need to resolve myself because I don't really want to become a clone. I really do want to make a difference especially in the lives of the children I teach.

Marcia craves systemic change and is working at her level:

to give them a voice and to teach in a way to give children a choice ... to have a child who would question; who would talk out; who, when they get themselves in different areas of life, different places... who would change how things are going in the country...

In essence, these two teachers appear to have become aware that better ways are needed for Trinidad and Tobago, as a whole, to move forward as a nation and not as a former British colony. However, to do this would firstly mean becoming “conscientised” and then de-colonising spaces (*see Chapter 2*). Schools and teachers must play a leading role in these processes.

Conscientisation, for teachers, encompasses an awareness that they have the power to transform their own lives, and those of their pupils/students and ultimately to alter the psyche of the society. Such a transformation may take long but would bring about a new culture. However, to be truly transformers, teachers must first break their own silence. They would also need to sow seeds of resistance through their pedagogy. Lavia (2007: 296) describes this as having the courage “to transgress”. This may mean a teacher surreptitiously subverting the system under which she functions (Bristol, 2008). It may mean that two cultures within the school may have to clash; the new culture that teachers may aspire to introduce versus the old one into which they were socialised. Marcia certainly seems to be on this path. She is willing to educate herself

and practise subversive teaching. She manages to ‘spit in the food’; not a negative connotation here but one which speaks of somehow managing to introduce the germs of positive ideas into programmes into which she had no input but must implement. She strives to produce a new generation of citizens that does not perpetuate the voiceless-ness and subservience that our colonial masters imposed and which the power brokers both at national and international levels would prefer to stand.

Hence, to be transformers, teachers also need to understand colonial traditions and the roles that they played in the development of present educational policies and practices. They also need to understand how broader forces such as globalisation and other international interferences factor into the agencies that seek to keep them silent (see for e.g. Bhabha, 1984; Freire, 1985; London, 2003; Lavia, 2007 and Strongman: 2007). Such understandings will go a long way in nullifying the present reality that:

We hear much about development issues and how they affect education as a system, but not enough about post-colonial issues and how they affect the lives and learning of the students and teachers involved (Hickling-Hudson, 2006: 214).

It was a similar thinking to Hickling-Hudson (*ibid*) that led to my carefulness in providing the contexts in which to ground the narratives and also to use postcolonialism as one theory with which to analyse them. This type of theoretical, historical and contextual knowledge would provide teachers with the impetus to move beyond their stupefaction. They would at least understand the why of their situation and teachers, like Marcia, would not be forever questioning the reasons for the anomalies inherent in their environments. The next step would be reflection and action upon that new knowledge until it becomes praxis. Pantic & Florian (2015: 337) suggest that:

Agents engage purposefully in acts which they know, or believe, will have a particular quality or outcome, and use the knowledge of the act to achieve this quality or outcome.

Such actions may be pedagogical changes; a willingness to break with cultural practices such as corporal punishment; a refusal to be reticent in the face of

dominance; and renouncing disregard and disrespect for others as a means to get ahead. These are the kinds of actions that, would help to break the practice where:

School is used to produce agents with dispositions and values appropriate to the service of society, and as a consequence produces knowledge, forms, culture and norms that contribute to the ideological hegemony of the dominant groups (London, 2002: 54).

In other words, agency should not simply be reproductive; it should also strive to be transformative. Teachers, as agents, can become social actors who can change and transform the social and cultural settings in which teaching/ learning takes place (Apple, 2000: 231). Transformation should begin with a bottom- up rather than a top-down approach. It should be birthed at the earliest levels of the education process. This would mean allowing even the youngest pupil ‘a voice’ and allowing early childhood and primary school teachers a chance to make inputs at the planning stages of policies. It would mean as one teacher put it, “treating teachers as if they had a brain.” The generated poem that follows portrays female teachers within a feminist framework in post-colonial spaces.

Female Teachers

Women we are!

Identities formed by

Female predecessors

Mothers, grandmothers, teachers

Who nurtured and motivated

Re-creating themselves in us.

Now in educational spaces

Fraught with behaviours

Gleaned from colonial controllers

Respect, honour, obedience

Silence and Subservience,

Come feelings of Ambivalence,

And a yearning to be free

*From chains traditional
That bind us to a philosophy
Of reticence,
And 'Licks' as pedagogy
Where to beat is to teach
To teach is to beat-
We reproduce generations
Of female teachers
Steeped in traits maternal.*

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Conclusion

In 1992, Ivor Goodson stated that:

The fact remains that we still have an underdeveloped literature on the personal, biographical and historical aspects of teaching. Particularly underdeveloped is a literature which locates the teachers' lives within a wider contextual understanding (Goodson 1992:1).

Since, this is still quite true in a post-colonial, Caribbean context this work should contribute to correcting that anomaly as it adds to literature on teachers' lives within the aforementioned context. Teachers do want to be heard; they want their stories to be told. During my years as a primary school teacher, I had heard teachers express their feelings of frustrations and helplessness with the education system but mostly in the confines of the small groups where they assembled with their peers at various times. Their expressions were, as Freire (1973: 32) suggests, words without action making them "idle chatter", "verbalism", "alienated and alienating "blah" ". I posited that there was a silent scream inside of teachers that was waiting to be released. I postulate that the silence in which they function demonstrates marginalisation.

Consequently, this research was concerned with giving voice to the marginalised and focused away from positivist ideas of seeking knowledge. It, therefore, used methodologies that are concerned with the notion of "researching professional identities and in enabling voices that have traditionally been silenced or marginalised

to be heard” (Trahar, 2013:301). These approaches are particularly vital for persons functioning in post-colonial nation- states where a cultural silence persists (see Freire, 1973; 1985). The research projected a different way of knowing; advocating the need to know the ‘why’ instead of the ‘what’ which appears to be ‘the already known’. It focused on how knowledge (data) about people can be generated by listening to them tell how their lives are impacted when lived within certain contexts. The idea that researchers are omniscient and already know the answers and consequently the right questions to ask about persons’ lives are debunked. Thus, I moved away from the notion of ‘research questions’ and allowed the participants to narrate *their* perceptions of their daily realities. In this instance, four female teachers were able to explicate their gendered existence within a feminised environment which had been shaped by feminised pedagogies and philosophies and lived out in post-colonial settings.

The research speaks to the notion of collaborative research between researcher and participants and the building of relationships that can last long after the research appears to be completed. The work is highly significant and adds to emergent work in the field of educational and other social sciences. It built on narrative inquiry work done by other researchers (see for example. Richardson, 1990; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Park, 2011). It embraces poetry which is also a fairly recent development in social sciences and has the support of researchers such as Brady, 2009; Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Faulkner, 2012 and Davidson *et al.* 2012. It also lines up with work done by researchers such as Marshall & Pahl, (2015: *no pg. no*) who advocate for:

a widening of the scope of educational research to incorporate and take account of some of this new emergent work but also a recognition of what the arts and humanities has to offer education, not as a field within education but as an approach and a lens for educational research.

Many critiques have been made about the methodologies used in this research (see *methodology chapter*). These criticisms have also been answered in this and other spaces. One limitation could be that the notion of ‘giving voice’ in a research sets restrictions on the number of participants that a researcher can listen to in any one study. For example, one of my participants kept pointing me to others who had similar stories to be told. She commented several times, “You should listen to *Ann*’s story.” “You should listen to *Nelly*’s story” (*pseudonyms*). I wished that I could but

that would have taken away from the time spent on understanding and interpreting the other stories. Therefore, while the small sample may appear to be a limitation, it also means that there is a depth that is attained as we try to appreciate lives within the contexts in which they are lived.

Researchers need to ask themselves the questions that I asked myself; what is more important to the knowledge pool? Should we continue to research what is already known, or do we want to generate new knowledge? In the case of teachers we continue, for example, to get numbers on how many are absent; how many are late; and how many leave school to run businesses. Don't we want to know the reasons why there are these problems? The stories told here, though few in number, gave us an insight into the world of the teacher and have in a small way contributed to allowing readers a different perspective of teachers' lived experiences. I hope that the research will act as a stimulant for more researchers to develop an epistemological and a methodological passion for understanding lives in context because it is only when lives are understood could we begin to chart a way forward to finding solutions to the problems that are endemic in our social spaces.

Summary

In Chapter One you would find
 Study aim, thesis structure, and research design
 Cultural, historical, educational groundings;
 Research significance,
 Researcher positionality
 Including "*The Story of Me.*"

In Chapter Two,
 Is the literature review
 Highlighting policies of education
 That are part of the contribution
 To teacher stress, burnout, attrition;
 And Feminism and Postcolonialism,
 As theoretical foundations.

In Chapter Three,
I discuss methodology-
Autoethnography, life history,
Narratives and poetic inquiry.
Purposive sampling, data collecting, storing
Transcribing and re-presenting
The stories with characters, plots and setting.

The next four chapters,
Four, Five, Six, Seven
The women tell their stories
Of feminised practices from female influences,
Caring, loving, teaching, learning
Reflecting, questioning and rejecting.

In Chapter Eight,
There are analyses and reflections
On feminised philosophies and colonial policies
And pedagogies in post-colonial spaces.
Intermingled with sprinkles
Of literature reviewed suggestions
Of how to de-colonise educational places.

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Modified June 2016

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Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

EDUR29 – Ed. D Caribbean

Title of Project: *Straight From the Teacher’s Mouth: Career Stories from Four Trinidadian Female Primary-School Teachers*

Name of Researcher: BEULAH FORTEAU-JAIKARANSINGH

Participant Identification Number for this project: PT

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ...2014 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for my anonymised responses to be used in the dissertation.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

Appendix 2: Information Letter

Subject: Research Project

Title of Project: *Straight From the Teacher's Mouth: Career Stories from Four Trinidadian Female Primary Schoolteachers*

Dear Fellow Educator,

As you know, I am in the process of working for a Doctor of Education Degree with the University of Sheffield. As part fulfilment for completing the doctoral work, I am undertaking a research project on a subject which is dear to my heart and which I hope will give voice to teachers. I am inviting you to participate in this project for several reasons. Firstly, your input will be very helpful to me. However, I feel that you in particular, because of your love for education, will add many insights that will lend themselves to a better understanding of teachers' lives and work. Before you decide whether you are willing to participate, it is important for you to understand what this will involve. Read the following information carefully before you give me your answer.

This research project is expected to be completed within one to one and a half years. Its purpose is to allow four female Trinbagonian primary school teachers to ventilate on how their work life converges with the other aspects of their lives and vice versa. In particular, I am interested in how being female impacts on the work that is done in school. I am also interested in whether the interest and enthusiasm of teachers grow, wane or fade as they progress throughout their work life. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you can still withdraw your participation at any time without giving a reason.

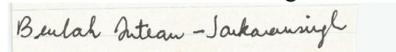
I will be using the life history/narrative research methodology which means that I would like to hear and record your career stories. During the research process, I would have to meet with you for interviews and discussions at times convenient to you. I expect that I may need to have two such sessions, each one, hopefully, not lasting for more than an hour. In addition, you may make notes on episodes that you may have forgotten during the recorded sessions. Your story will be transcribed and presented as part of my thesis. Transcriptions of the recorded data will be returned to you so that you can verify whether they reflect what you wanted to convey. Your story may also be presented in the form of a poem as this is another

way that I will be presenting data. Poems will also be shared with you and you may even write your own poems to reflect your feelings and thoughts.

As far as I can foresee, there are no disadvantages or risks involved in you taking part in this research. In fact, there may be some benefits to society as I hope that this work will add to a deeper understanding of the role of the female Trinbagonian primary school teacher and lead to policies that will improve our schools. All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept in strict confidence. However, you should be mindful of my legal obligation to report to the relevant authorities anything of a criminal nature that is revealed to me. Apart from that, I will make sure that you cannot be identified in any reports or publications unless that is your wish.

This project has to be ethically approved by the University of Sheffield ethics review committee. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University. Finally I want to thank you for your assistance. You will receive a copy of the ethics review form and a consent form.

Respectfully,
Beulah Forteau-Jaikaransingh



You may be able to reach my research supervisor for further comments and her contact details are given below:

Professor Patricia J. Sikes
University of Sheffield
School Of Education
Tel.: +44 (0) 114 222 8158
E-mail: p.j.sikes@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Final Decision from University of Sheffield Ethics Committee

I see that reviewers are in agreement that the research can go ahead as it stands here. However one reviewer writes that:

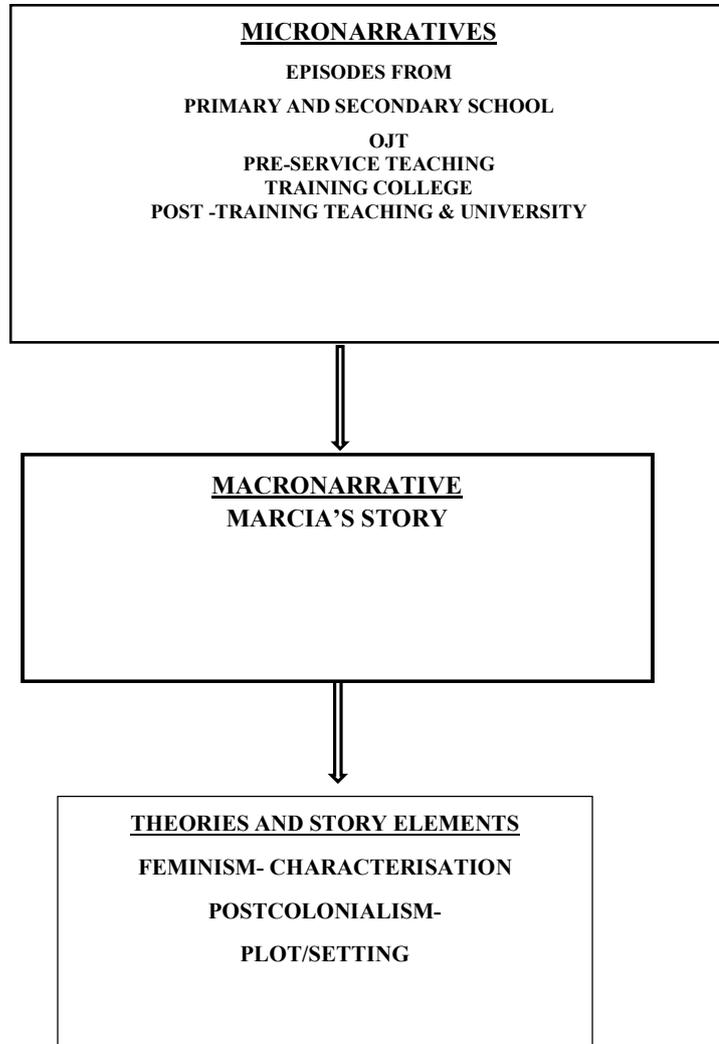
I was surprised to read this sentence in the information letter: "However, you should be mindful of my legal obligation to report to the relevant authorities anything of a criminal nature that is revealed to me." Is it really necessary? I am not recommending that it must be removed, just that the researcher might wish to consider it. Either way, I'm happy to approve this application.

I would agree the statement looks slightly off putting. Maybe if the researcher feels it is necessary it could be toned down a little. However I do understand that the clause protects both the researcher and the participants.

Good luck with this interesting project

Appendix 4: How the stories were created

Marcia's Story



Appendix 5

Data Issues

... our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study, are given to us under a promise ... (Denzin, 1989: 83).

The promises that we make to our participants are verbal, written or un-spoken. For example, some uttered promises are recorded in information letters and letters of consent (*see appendices one and two*). Un-spoken promises are ones that are based on our moral values and those of others who have written profusely on ethical considerations in research (*see chapter 3-ethical considerations*). I had to be reflectively aware of the promises that I had made to my participants as I went through the research process. I kept in touch with my participants on every step of the research process and was involved with them on a personal level. I was involved in events such as a wedding, birth of baby, and a funeral. This might not be possible for every researcher and in every research but it certainly helped me to strengthen my bonds with my participants and smooth the research pathway.

Research Process: Let me start with Cole's (2009:570) assertion that when interviews are employed the "researcher and researched are in a relationship from which (it is hoped) both parties will learn and change in the dynamic encounter." Since, I believe that the relationship should be one of mutual respect and one in which the researcher should avoid the tendency of colonising their participants, I simply asked my participants to share with me their life stories as related to their practice. I wanted their sharing to bring about an understanding of their thoughts, ideas, philosophies, and pedagogies. However, to achieve these objectives, I had to be very careful that in retelling their stories that I was not making them mine. Language was very important in this respect. In re-presenting the stories, I stuck as much as possible to the Trini vernacular; the use of which should not be questioned. While, it may seem strange to some that teachers used it, it is our first language, with the nuances of hybridism that characterise our heterogeneous society and incorporates some forms of the English as imposed by the British colonisers (*see chapter 1*). The stories would have lost their authenticity had I tried to translate them into some form of Standard English and would have had that colonising effect. Nevertheless, two participants said that they were troubled by their use of the vernacular but while one easily moved on by remarking "that is the way I does talk", the other agonized on how it would impact on her identity as a teacher and wondered how she would be

viewed by the English professors who would read her story. This was a perfect opportunity for sharing the concept of postcoloniality and its effects on the way we perceive ourselves, our values and our culture which includes our language.

I emailed the transcripts to three of my participants for review and approval and personally delivered a hard copy to the other as she indicated that, because of her other commitments, it would be easier to read it in this format. She took the opportunity to add other things that she wanted to be part of her narrative. After getting the assurance that the transcripts were true reflections of the personal interview interactions, I used them to represent as narratives using the basic forms of narratives to write them. (*See chapter 3- narratives in life history*) Additionally, at the end of each story, I included a poem. The poems were either a reflection on how I felt as I interpreted the data or a synopsis of what I felt the teacher was saying to us. The stories were then returned to the teachers for their approval and additional comments. It was at this stage, teachers mentioned the use of the vernacular. Other than that, they all were excited to see their stories and encouraged me to continue the work. Their response and enthusiasm proved to be motivating factors as the transcribing process had been tedious.

Later on, in the reporting stage, I faced some editing dilemmas. I had transcribed the interviews and written the stories with very little editing. However, in the writing process of the thesis, I had to edit out some parts of the teachers' stories because of word limitations. I was faced with a predicament. What should I leave in and what should I remove? This was heart-rending. It was like removing some parts of their lives. The stories revealed many more issues and experiences that the participants face/faced as pupils, teacher trainees and as practising teachers. I was reminded of Sikes' (2006) statement that the sort of questions researchers pose would rely on their own ontological and epistemological positioning. Now, I saw how this was true not just at the interview stage but also in making editing choices. I lined that up that perception with Fisher's (1991:23) who argues that participants should be in control of the data as it is they who have the "information and interpretations that are necessary for understanding their lives." Nevertheless, I chose to use the episodes which supported both the postcolonial and feminism theories. Thus, I am aware that these stories or narratives will have some resonance of my positionality as I have previously indicated.

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