

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted lives and livelihoods worldwide, resulting in governmental and non-governmental measures such as social safety nets for low-income households, children, young people, women, low-skilled workers, part-time workers, and the self-employed. These challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic forced individuals to become more inward looking. To facilitate a process of reflection and stimulate and re-energize research within the research community, the guest editors of this special issue planned and implemented an online conference. This Conference served as a platform for researchers from various parts of the world can share initiatives that have enabled or challenged community transformation. It also provided an opportunity for researchers to connect with financial agencies, recognizing that funding is critical during both the research and implementation phases of any recommendations.

The team (Prof. Loraine D. Cook, Dr Lyn R. Keith & Dr Ingrid E. Hunt-Anderson) of us representing the School of Education, UWI, collaborated with Operation Save Jamaica (OSJ) (A Non-Profit organization) represented by Pastor Bruce Fletcher (Chair and Founder of the OSJ) to organize and execute this two-day online conference, March 25-26, 2021 to advance the sharing of research that has facilitated or challenged community transformation in various countries. The conference was multidisciplinary and included different sectors of societies (education, crime, business, governance, and health). In addition, this conference targeted local, regional, and international communities. The conference's theme was, Moving research beyond academics: Transforming our societies through collaboration and action. The following objectives of the conference were:

- Identify the issues, challenges, and solutions required for the transformation of communities.
- To utilize research as a mechanism to drive societal change.
- To bring together researchers, policymakers, public and private sectors, funding agencies, church leaders, and NGOs who have an interest in community transformation and nation-building.
- To establish a global strategic network which facilitates collaboration and solution-oriented actions to create a better future for our people.

However, this issue focused primarily on the second objective, our theme for this CJE Special Issue is, *Bridging the Gap: From academic insights to societal impact*.

One the first day of the conference, the panel discussion titled *Building Resilience Among Marginalized Groups*, highlighted how disadvantaged people living in poverty could develop resilience through their experiences, overcome social exclusion and rejection, and gain some degree of stability. It also brought to the audience's attention broader issues which include the topic of social justice and the need to address this collectively, bearing in mind our Caribbean history of slavery and colonization. The second day featured a panel discussion titled, *Agents of Change and Transformation, which brought* researchers, church leaders, public sector members, and NGOs interested in community transformation and nation-building. To assist us in achieving the conference's goals, papers for parallel presentations were organized into three categories Business, Education and Social Welfare.

The conference featured three keynote speakers and one guest speaker, including two international experts in mixed methods research: Professor Donna Mertens (Professor Emeritus at Gallaudet University with a specialization in research and evaluation methodologies designed to support social transformation, and Professor Tony Onwuegbuzie, a British-American educational psychologist who is a senior research associate at the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre), both international experts in mixed methods research. The two Jamaicans were Mr. Courtney Campbell (President and Chief Executive Officer of Victoria Mutual (VM), a leading Jamaican Financial Group with operations that extend to major financial districts in North America and the United Kingdom) and The Hon. Earl Jarrett (Chief Executive Officer and Deputy Chairman at The Jamaica National Group) was the guest speaker.

We are very privileged that we secured two articles submitted by keynote speakers and eleven articles submitted by researchers who presented at the conference, along with two articles concerning organizations that target transformation in marginalized communities for this special issue, *Transforming our societies through collaboration and action*. In total, this publication features 16 articles for this publication that examines transformation from two perspectives. The first is the transformative paradigmatic perspective as presented in Donna Mertens article, while the second perspective focuses on the everyday use of transformation to effect change in a situation or the human participants through an intervention, for example, the article by Sharline Cole and Loraine D. Cook. Additionally, Mr Courtney Campbell's keynote speech was featured in a national newspaper, The Observer, on April 2, 2021 (see for full article).

Mr Campbell, in addition to the points mentioned earlier, also emphasized that in the post-COVID-19 pandemic, Caribbean countries need to "recover and rebuild" their economies as they emerge from the crisis caused by the pandemic. He expanded by saying that we should not "rebuild using the same flagging structures

with which we have struggled for so long. Let us instead build some new, sturdy houses that reflect more sustainable, inclusive economic systems and harmonious societies". While acknowledging that Jamaica has many positive features, Mr Campbell expressed concern for the high crime rate on the island. He identified factors influencing this crime crisis by suggesting that "the income and gender inequality, the dysfunctional families, lack of law enforcement, corruption and weak institutions". Campbell proposed several strategies for the prevention of violence:

- Developing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers
- Developing life skills in children and adolescents
- Reducing access to guns, knives, and poisons
- Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women
- Changing cultural and social norms that support violence
- Implementing victim identification, care, and support programmes

In addition to his comments on rebuilding Caribbean economies, Mr. Campbell also highlighted issues with the Jamaican economy noting that it has suffered from "low rates of productivity and high-income inequality. **One reason for low productivity is the declining availability of some of the skills required to be globally competitive in this era**". He continues, "COVID-19 has accelerated technology adoption in all sectors, so these talent-related challenges have become even more pronounced. If your company or country cannot claim a ready pool of these digital skills, you will be left behind". Campbell emphasized the need for Jamaica to "ensure that our people **develop critical digital skills** that allow them to thrive, not only in a digital workspace but also in the new digital world". He also stressed the importance of transformation in education. Mr. Campbell commented **that our education system demands transformation because of the gross inequality in our education system**. Based on outcomes, only 25% of our

just over 160 high schools are performing at the level required to properly prepare our young people for a prosperous future. In the other 75% of schools, only two of every 10 students pass at least five CSEC subjects including English and Mathematics. As a result, only 19 per cent of Jamaicans aged 19-24 are currently enrolled in tertiary education, and only 15 per cent of the workforce has benefited from tertiary education. **We are leaving behind too many of our talented young Jamaicans.** These are the potential data-scientists, actuaries, engineers, and bankers of the future". Campbell left his audience to reflect on the following questions: Should we be teaching character education and placing greater emphasis on life skills? How can we train our boys to respect women? How do we teach our people to value human life? Parenting is a privileged but demanding job, so could we teach our young people some foundational parenting skills so that all Jamaican 18-year-olds would be aligned around a few parenting 'must-dos'? How could academia, business, community and policymakers forge a unique partnership to research and shape national culture transformation, perhaps starting with some communities?

The summaries below represent the 12 research articles which were peer reviewed:

Donna Mertens discussed how the transformative research approach provides a framework to examine inequities and power differences to increase social, economic, and environmental justice. Mertens used several studies from various parts of the world (the United States of America, Spain, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago etc.) to illustrate how framing one's investigation with the transformative framework can result in "building culturally responsive relationships, integrating social activist strategies, developing coalitions, and addressing power inequities".

Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Elena Forzani and Sandra Schamroth Abrams present a discussion of how assessments systems in research can be reformed via a movement called IMAGINE. IMAGINE is an acronym devised to represent a communal movement of **mixed**

methods researchers dedicated to enacting the "Integrative Mixed methods Anti-racist Groundwork for Investigating and Nurturing Equity (Abrams, Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2021; Onwuegbuzie, Abrams, et al., 2021)." The authors argue that some form of assessment takes place "in every single research study". They have built on the macro-definition of Assessment and developed a micro-definition that states that, "In the context of studying human beings, *assessment* is the process of documenting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical data to provide evidence regarding an observable human entity that emerges cognitively, affectively, physically, metaphysically, and/or spiritually, and which is internal or external to the person or group being observed." (p. 49). The authors further posit that traditional approaches to research and assessment (whether quantitative or qualitative) have maintained an "ivory tower of academia" subjugated by historical white supremacy, systemic racism, racial hierarchies and "othering" that lead to power imbalances and inequitable research processes and findings. Guided by Critical Dialectical Pluralism (CDP) philosophy that underlies the "pursuit of social justice, inclusion, diversity, and equity, and social responsibility (SIDES), Onwuegbuzie, et al. consequently call "on researchers to engage in *culturally progressive* (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, 2016), *culturally responsive*, and *culturally engaged* (Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-b) research that strives towards developing cultural awareness and understanding of different stakeholders involved in the research process". Further, researchers should re-IMAGINE mixed methods approaches that are inclusive while honoring and empowering participants' voices and participation as "co-researchers, co-ideators, and co-decision makers," and "activists" in dismantling hierarchies and reforming assessment systems towards positive change.

Michele Small Bartley conducted a literature review surveying different reference sources relevant to the relationship between school climate and students' resilience. Resilience is the capacity of an individual to endure and recover quickly from difficulties. Michele used the Ungar Ecological Model of Resilience to discuss

an expanded definition. Small Bartley wrote that the Ungar model purports resilience as, “a process and a positive outcome achieved from the dynamic interaction between the internal capacity of the adolescents and the promotive or protective factors within the social context, with attention on the developmental stage and cognitive process occurring within the interactive social domain”. School Climate addresses, “the quality and character of school life”. So a positive environment that has an “engaging, nurturing school climate that fosters children’s development is imperative to developing resilience”. In discussing the school climate and resilience in the Jamaican schools, Michele noted that there are two different school climates in Jamaica, and that “students’ resilience should consider distinctive types of secondary schools in Jamaica (traditional and upgraded secondary schools) and the social structure of the society as contributing factors to how schools operate within the country”; and building students’ resilience can only happen when there is a transformation of school climate at the secondary level.

Sharline Cole and Loraine D. Cook present the latter phase of a qualitative research intervention study carried out in two schools - infant and primary - in Jamaica. The local intervention received full accreditation from the Ministry of Education and was instigated based on the tenets of the *INSIGHTS into Children’s Temperament* program. This program was originally developed by chief investigator, Sandee McClowry, in under-resourced public schools in New York; and was designed to enhance the socio-emotional development and learning of young children while also enhancing adult caregivers’ competencies (teachers and parents) in recognizing, appreciating and managing children’s varied temperaments. The researchers’ aimed to ascertain the usefulness of the INSIGHTS program, in its latter phase, as a tool for “enhancing teachers’ behavioural management competence” through data collected from two focus group discussions organized with teachers, principals and others; and underlined by ‘goodness of fit’ and ‘social learning’ theories. The findings showed that

the “programme contributes to a reduction in behavioural problems” among students, and improves “behaviour management strategies by teachers who are more thoughtful in their use of disciplinary practices.” It was concluded that it is “imperative that teachers are continuously trained and participate in professional development to increase their capacity and skills in classroom management strategies.”

Debbie Devonish and Sadpha Bennett discussed an intervention by the Jamaican Ministry of The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information to engage students in grades 1-6 during COVID-19. The intervention involved preparing Home Learning Kits (HLK) for the students. HLK “was designed to help students connect with structured learning and promote community collaboration and awareness of the importance of continued learning even in the face of the pandemic”. For this intervention to be successful, there had to be a collaboration between the production and distribution teams. Therefore, the kits had to be “delivered promptly to students, and for the schools to work out systems to collect student work from the kits and return feedback to students”. Therefore, there had to be a collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the schools and communities. Hence churches, parents and community organizations had to be involved “in promoting student engagement through the use of the Home Learning Kit”. Devonish and Bennett used an explanatory mixed methods research design to assess the “effectiveness of distribution and utilization of the HLK for children at the primary level, aged six to twelve on the arrival of COVID”.

Roshnie Doon used secondary data from the Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP) for the period 1991-2015 to examine “the wage returns and the gender wage gap of Trinidad and Tobago’s minority groups in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. For the data analysis, Doon used, “the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) version of the Mincerian wage equation. The findings “revealed that regardless of ethnic class, more men are trained in STEM than those women.” Further, while the average earnings of female minority workers in STEM are

higher than that of male minority workers, the earnings of male majority workers are higher than that of female majority workers”.

Glenford Duffus used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to explore the relationship between academic achievement and poverty. In the first phase, the academic achievements of twenty-five schools were determined using their EQAO results (Education, Quality and Assessment Office) standardized tests in reading, writing, and mathematics) and their placement on the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI). The results from these measures were used to select five schools for further examination using a qualitative research approach.

According to Duffus, “the purposive strategy allowed the researcher to select the most outstanding successes related to poverty and academic achievement”. The qualitative phase of the study aimed to explore “transformative leadership, instructional practices and professional learning communities (PLCs) as possibilities of changing the trajectory of underachieving to achieving for economically disadvantaged students”. The author concluded, that “High academic achievement is dependent on a synergy of school factors (leadership, professional learning communities, PLCs) and the instructional practices developed and implemented through professional development”.

Marlene Hines reported on a study conducted in 2014 in Drewsland, a community in Kingston, Jamaica. The study investigated how the Asset-Based Community Development and Appreciative Inquiry approaches could be used to identify the assets of the community, empower its residents, and guide the community transformation process through collaboration and partnerships. The study found that community transformation is possible through collaboration among a community and leadership network including the school, community-based organizations, government entities, the church, and the business community. The study emphasized that educational transformation is a subset of community transformation and highlights the importance of collaboration to

achieve community transformation in Drewsland.

Vimala Judy Kamalodeen, in this reflective paper, Kamalodeen shares insights of how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, ICT virtual workshops offered by teachers and teacher educators in ITTPN Global, Trinidad and Tobago, helped to support and meet the charge for upskilling the ICT development and pedagogy of teachers who needed to make an unanticipated shift from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. Kamalodeen quite appropriately signifies that this form of digital pedagogy is *Pandemic Pedagogy* which involves teaching and learning during Covid-19. The name of the virtual workshop series was “*Bridging the Digital Divide-ICT tools for the 21st Century Educator*”. The workshops emphasized content-focused activities; learning eco-systems (which is the cross-pollination of ideas across several nodes such as facilitator-facilitator, facilitator-participant and participant-participant); collaborative networks that will build trusting relationships and enhance competencies; a culturally responsive programme that engenders social justice and equality; the use of local experts as mentors and coaches; and evidence-driven research that underlie the professional development of teachers. 20 ICT skilled persons facilitated more than 400 teachers in these workshops. The outcomes were highly favourable, including learning how to use and apply varied ICT tools for different age groups of learners and the strengthening of teachers social ties beyond their own classrooms . As such, the author states that “it is critical for policy makers and educational stakeholders to support and sustain teacher professional learning networks for the promise of a more relevant and scalable solution to professional development”.

Corent J. McDonald and Clement Branche in this study uses a comparative multi-dimensional systems approach to examine the possibilities of transformational change within two Jamaican organizations (educational and financial) given the Caribbean’s embedded history of colonialism, socio-cultural structures; and, economic and social challenges. The author analyses their influences on established employees’ perceptions, behaviours and cognitive-emotional states as it relates to

implementing changes in the organization. The study showed that the status and power structures and “colonial mind-set” historically embedded in organisations are indeed hindrances to instigating and/or sustaining positive change especially in complex systems. The author stipulates that if these limitations are recognized and accepted, along with good leadership and communication, organizations will be better positioned towards “cognitive re-orientation and transformation/transcendence”.

Shareed Mohammed discusses how modern films and music videos that depict female rape and revenge can create a conflict between genders by endorsing misandry (hatred of men) and violent reprisals. The author used the movie “I Spit on Your Grave” and Rihanna’s music video “Man Down” to illustrate their point. They argued that these types of media can promote violent vigilante justice and misandry. The research methodology for this study utilized narrative analysis and is based on the theories of film scholars Claire Henry, Hillary Neroni, and Jean Baudrillard. The author proffered a shamanic view of gender could be a therapeutic way to combat the negative effects of this type of media.

Ingrid E. Hunt-Anderson draws on the findings and implications from a covert bullying study of adolescents attending diverse Jamaican high schools, to support the call for socio-cultural transformation within local school systems. Hunt-Anderson’s findings “showed that socio-cultural differences” among peers are “amplified within diverse school spaces” that “promote the bullying culture and practices” and issues related to inequity and social injustice. To that end, Hunt-Anderson builds on a tri-model theoretical platform (Critical Pedagogy of Space, Symbolic Interactionism and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model) to develop a “holistic, ecological” program of policies, prevention and intervention measures that take under consideration the sensitive, developing nature

of the adolescent student and the multi-level societal, socio-cultural symbols and norms that influence students’ behaviors and attitudes. The “holistic, ecological” program is therefore aimed at working synergistically in “mediating the bullying regimen” while simultaneously driving the quest towards “decolonization and reculturation of school curriculums and spaces”, thus promoting greater equity, social justice, and socio-cultural transformation in local high school communities.

Special Mention

We acknowledge the passing of one of our contributors, Dr Vimala J. Kamalodeen (UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago). Dr Kamalodeen made her transition on July 5, 2022. Dr Kamalodeen was an inspiration to her colleagues and students. She is forever engrafted in our hearts.

**—Loraine D. Cook, Lyn R. Keith &
Ingrid E. Hunt-Anderson with Bruce A. Fletcher**