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# Transforming Our Societies through Collaboration and Action

## Special Issue

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CJED
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## About the Journal

The *Caribbean Journal of Education and Development (CJED)* is a peer reviewed, refereed journal which provides a forum for original contributions highlighting both empirical and conceptual research on theory and practices, policies, processes, relevant to the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora. We welcome papers that engender critical debate about issues of social, economic, cultural and political development within the education sector in the Caribbean region and beyond, including:

- Examinations of controversial issues from a sociocultural, historical, or philosophical perspective
- Reports of research, employing a variety of research methods
- Papers that focus on learning in both school and non-school settings
- Critical analyses of education and schooling
- Case histories of students, teachers, and administrators
- Case studies of institutions
- Analyses of good practice
- Critical inquiry into all aspects of education and schooling
- Discussions of the experiences of Caribbean teachers, teacher educators, students, and parents in the diaspora
- Literature reviews
- Integration of technology

The CJED is disseminated to an international audience active in education policy and practice as well as those who are participants in the education development process in the Caribbean. These include educational researchers, policy makers, teachers, teacher educators, the commercial and industrial world, and scholars with research interests in all levels of the education system both formal and informal.

The journal operates on a rolling publication model from September to June each year. A standout feature of this model is that once an article is accepted, copyedited, and approved by the author, it is promptly published online. This allows authors to cite their work immediately and ensures that it is accessible via platforms such as Google Scholar and CrossRef.

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# 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.

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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 is 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 **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, and **e**quity, and **s**ocial 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 fromdifficulties. Michele used the Ungar Ecological Model of Resilience to discuss

anexpanded definition. Small Bartley wrote that the Ungar model purports resilience as,"a process and a positive outcome achieved from the dynamic interaction between theinternal 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) andtheir 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-Anderon'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 reculturization 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***

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# Increasing Transformative Impact by Design in Education in the Caribbean

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## Abstract

Educational researchers in the Caribbean have an opportunity to be part of the solutions to grand challenges, such as climate change, violence, and disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes. The transformative approach to research provides a framework that focuses on issues of inequities and power differences in a conscious effort to increase social, economic, and environmental justice. Examples of studies from different parts of the world are used to illustrate the application of this framework with the goal of increasing the research impact. The strategies used in the transformative approach, such as building culturally responsive relationships, integrating social activist strategies, developing coalitions, and addressing power inequities, can be applied in ways that are responsive to the culture and context of the Caribbean.

*Keywords*: transformation, social justice, coalitions

## Introduction

Educators face challenges that are exacerbated by the global epidemic, the climate crisis, the increasing gap between rich and poor, and persistent inequities in educational access and outcomes. Some researchers accept the responsibility to contribute to positive transformative changes in light of these challenges. Researchers as a community can contribute to transformative changes by deliberately designing their studies using the principles of the transformative approach (Mertens, 2018; Mertens, 2024; Mertens & Wilson, 2019). This requires a shift in thinking regarding the role of the researcher to incorporate strategies for increasing social, economic, and environmental justice into their studies. A transformative approach to research provides researchers with the opportunity to design their studies so that they increase the probability of addressing issues of inequity.

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## The Transformative Approach to Research

The transformative approach to research is informed by an ethical stance that calls upon researchers to make visible the structural causes of inequality and discrimination thus enabling the unmasking of versions of reality that support an oppressive status quo and reveals those that can lead to transformative changes (Mertens, 2024). The ethical assumption associated with the use of a transformative lens for research leads researchers to design their studies to explicitly address change in the form of increased social, economic, and environmental justice. To this end, researchers need to include a phase of building relationships with the full range of people impacted by the research (stakeholders), including those who are most marginalized and vulnerable, in ways that address differences in access to power. The formation of coalitions, collaborations, or partnerships provide a mechanism to inform the development of the research study and to sustain the needed changes. Transformative research generally uses mixed methods of systematic collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data to facilitate inclusive relationship building, contextual analysis, and testing interventions.

Traditionally, researchers have occupied positions of power in their ability to determine the research questions and design, implement studies, and disseminate results through academic publication. However, a transformative approach asks researchers to reconsider how they engage in these activities by being inclusive of the voices of the full range of stakeholders, including those who are most marginalized (Mertens, 2024). This opens possibilities to address issues of importance to members of communities that are often ignored, even as they face increasing challenges such as the climate crisis and sustainable development. The importance of addressing environmental justice is critically important, especially for communities in island countries, such as the Caribbean, who are most vulnerable to land, economic, and cultural losses (Mertens, 2020). McDougal (2021) provides an example of a transformative approach to environmental issues in her research in a Jamaican school that focused on environmental education and sustainable development. This study exemplifies the benefits of meaningfully engaging stakeholders, in this case students, as co-researchers. Building capacity of the stakeholders as they engage in the research process illustrates the type of reciprocity that is integral to a transformative approach. Capacity building is another part of the transformative approach. In McDougal's study, the students developed leadership skills that included increased self-confidence, commitment to action, and teambuilding. They also conducted cross-curricular research on place-based environmental improvement- a transformative change that is needed especially in island countries.

## Structuring Research to Support Transformative Change

The key components to include in research that consciously seeks to support transformative change include: building culturally responsive relationships, adopting strategies of social activists and change agents, capacity building and reciprocity, developing coalitions for informing the process and sustainability of the research, and addressing power inequities (Mertens, 2020a). Cultural responsiveness includes a focus on increased equity, inclusion of a historical perspective on culture and context, and partnership ownership (Hood et al., 2015). The adoption of strategies used by social activists and change agents might appear to be controversial and in conflict with the role of researcher; however, if we seek transformative change, perhaps we can learn something from those whose focus has been on that issue. Coalition development as a part of the research process is relatively new, but some funding agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health, are

requiring coalitions for the projects they support (Wolfe et al., 2020). These coalitions need to be built with a critical eye towards equitable power sharing to protect those who are most vulnerable as well as to improve the likelihood that interventions will be culturally responsive and sustainable. Several studies are described in the next section that illustrate strategies for building culturally responsive relationships, integrating social activist strategies, developing coalitions, and addressing power inequities.

## Addressing Educational Disparities

Schools have diverse populations; some students enjoy the privilege of attending schools that are supportive and responsive to their cultural backgrounds. However, other students attend schools in which they have more negative experiences than positive ones, resulting in disparities in their academic achievement, and, as a consequence, their life chances are less optimistic. A team of researchers in the United States used a transformative mixed methods approach to understand the experience of students who were marginalized and vulnerable, and to develop strategies to improve their educational experiences (Garnett et al., 2019). Traditionally, school reform comes from the "top", however, this model of decision making is questionable given the historical disparities that persist in terms of academic achievement, school attendance and participation, and access to behavioral support services. Historical and contextual analysis reveals that the dimensions of diversity that manifest disparities include: race/ethnicity, ability, gender sexual identity, language, immigrant/refugee status, and economic status. Garnett et al. started with the assumption that they needed to consciously "flatten systematized power hierarchies" (p. 3) to support transformative change.

The school in which Garnett et al.'s (2019) research took place was in a rural area; however, due to a recent increase in the number of refugee families, many of the students were English language learners. Using a transformative lens led the researchers to explicitly surface the history of White supremacy and an ableist legacy that resulted in greater educational disparities for Black and Brown students and for those with disabilities. The school system adopted a zero-tolerance exclusionary discipline policy that disproportionately affected the marginalized and vulnerable students and resulted in a higher suspension rate for this group of students. The higher suspension rate also correlated with higher involvement with the juvenile justice system, thus feeding the school-to-prison pipeline. This disciplinary policy and its consequences for those most marginalized is a manifestation of the historical legacy of White supremacy. At the request of the school district, the school and a team of university researchers formed a partnership that specified the use of transformative mixed methods action research and incorporated strategies from Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approaches. The key question that challenged the researchers was how to build trusting relationships with students, given the traditional power and privilege enjoyed by researchers.

Meeting the challenge of building trusting relationships between researchers and marginalized and vulnerable students was not a smooth process (Garnett et al., 2019). However, the researchers said they were committed to ensuring that the students' voices would influence the development of the research topic, questions, and methods used in the study. The relationship building began by using a variety of experiential activities such as vocabulary exercises and storytelling in an effort to bring forward the students' perceptions and concerns in a safe space. The researchers had conducted a preliminary survey about perceived discrimination based on gender, religion, and race. The students began debating the validity of the results of the survey; they communicated their concerns about how the research was framed and implemented to the university research team. The flattening of the power structure was evident when one Black female student challenged the adult facilitators

on the development of the research questions. The adults then acknowledged that they had not acted in accordance with the YPAR principles and modified the questions in response to these concerns. In addition, the students critiqued the survey items, and the survey was then modified to focus more explicitly on accounting for injustices experienced by marginalized students and discrimination in school. The collection of quantitative data on school disparities and the effect of the discipline policy were integrated with qualitative data collected from the students about their experiences. These results were then used to modify the curriculum intervention that had been planned (by the school district) to reflect the students' concerns. Trust was enhanced when the students saw that the researchers were serious about sharing power, they were listened to, and the research study and intervention were modified to be responsive to their concerns.

## Building Safe Spaces for Youth to Reduce Violence

Violence in and around schools is a problem around the globe. Knights (2014) documented the difficulties in trying to reduce violence and crime in Trinidad and Tobago because of issues in the wider community related to the illegal drug trade and an increase in access to guns. This same problem exists in communities in the United States, especially in high poverty areas. Dhaliwal et al. (2020) decided to integrate strategies used by social activists in their research on the reduction of violence and creation of safe spaces for youth in California. The researchers consciously chose a liberatory stance, informed by strategies used by change agents to move toward increased equity. Instead of starting the research by formulating research questions and testing the effectiveness of an intervention, the research team engaged in a phase of relationship building with the program founders, partners, and staff of a youth center. A youth-led data collection effort, in the form of a survey to assess the needs of the youth to identify what they needed to have a safe space to call their own, had been conducted prior to engagement with the researchers. Results of this survey were used to frame the research plan, data collection tools, and use of the findings. Once the research plan was developed, the researchers conducted a member survey that quantitatively assessed the young people's experiences in the youth center. Rather than thinking they had finished with their needs assessment with one survey, the youth center staff adopted a model of continuous learning that included a quantitative annual survey. The qualitative portion of the research design took the form of a Listening Campaign in which staff asked the young people about their needs and priorities and what was needed to address their challenges. They integrated the results of the two methods using media, the arts, cultural programming, youth-led capacity building exercises in the form of youth participatory action research.

The results of the data collection and the interactions with the team and youth increased the understandings of the adversity that the youth faced and their coping strategies, and formed the basis for discussions at regular retreats where they made their plans for the next year (Dhaliwal, et al., 2020). A chat lounge was established and staffed by the high school community health interns. This provided a safe space for the youth to discuss the problems they faced with violence, as well as to examine the dynamics of the school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionality affects youth of color. The early relationship building with continuous attention to issues of power and engagement resulted in an empathic community that branched out from the youth center to include school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. This transformative, liberatory process yielded an intervention that is continuously examined to ensure that the community it is intended to serve sees it as valuable and usable.

Shier (2015) expands on ideas for doing research in which children are co-researchers based on her work in Nicaragua. Strategies to engage with children that equal the playing field include:

- First, the children need to see that they are recognized as holders of legitimate knowledge and given the opportunity to determine the problems that they see as most pressing.
- Second, the children may need technical support and resources so that they can meaningfully engage in the planning and implementing the research, as well as how to disseminate the research findings in ways that contribute to transformative change.
- Third, adults can be recruited to provide the necessary training in research methods, teamwork, data analysis, and report preparation.

The strategies that Shier recommends provide guidance for researchers who wish to do transformative work with children as co-researchers. To support taking action, to support transformative change based on the research, organizations (e.g., schools, community centers) need to make a commitment to sustained support for the children and facilitate implementing the recommendations that come from the research findings.

## Social Activist Strategies to Incorporate into Transformative Research

Three strategies that social activists use have potential to increase the transformative impact of research are advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing (McBride et al., 2020). Advocacy means that researchers incorporate strategies in their designs to motivate decision makers to act toward increasing the common good. McBride et al. demonstrated advocacy as a part of their design to study how a social services group that served a high-poverty area in Chicago could advocate for increased resources when their government funding was cut. Mobilizing is a more expansive concept than advocacy and involves including not only leaders, but also the people, programs and community organizations that have a mission to increase equity. McBride et al. used mobilizing in a study of how arts-based interventions could effect change in the criminal justice system. The research team built the capacity of the people, programs, and community organizations to create change at all levels. Community organizing goes a step further as a strategy to work directly with vulnerable and marginalized communities to support needed changes. McBride and associates used community organizing with groups of parents who wanted a community center for their children and access to affordable housing. By building the parents' skills in how to organize and conduct surveys to document their needs, the community was able to bring about the changes that they valued.

While community-based organizing is a familiar concept in the Caribbean, it is still challenging to use this strategy. Knights (2014) examined the history of community-based organizing in Trinidad and Tobago in the form of village councils that were established in the early 1940s to support welfare reform. She used a transformative mixed methods design that began with a literature review and a contextual analysis of the historical and socioeconomic context in Trinidad. She used extant data on drug offenses, violent crimes, and contract awards as quantitative indicators of the challenges faced in this context. The historical qualitative data revealed that the village councils changed their roles and responsibilities over the years, but they were seen as a model for the establishment of Community Action Councils as part of a six-year government intervention to reduce violence and improve economic conditions. However, the intended role of the Community Action Councils was compromised by corruption and the lack of supervision (Mertens, 2020). Knights integrated qualitative and quantitative data to document that the criminal gangs were the beneficiaries of large amounts of the resources intended to support infrastructure improvements. However, the money was used by the gangs to purchase more guns. Gang members even killed each other over the awarding of contracts to rival gangs. The collection of this historical and contextual data reveals the importance of understanding the challenges experienced by communities when attempting to use social activist strategies.

The second phase of Knights' transformative mixed methods research involved building relationships with the village council and leaders. In consultation with these community members, she continued her study by using quantitative data from the Crime Victimization Survey and qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups. She integrated these two sources of data to formulate recommendations for community-based activism in the interest of reducing violence and increasing community capacities.

## Gender-based Violence in Universities

Another example of the use of a transformative approach in an educational setting is provided by Puigvert et al. (2017) who examined how gender-based violence could be reduced in universities in Spain. In this study, resistance to change was rooted in a misogynistic structure in the universities that allowed sexual harassment to be accepted as normal. The researchers also faced personal challenges when they were threatened and falsely accused of using sexual favors for advancement at the university that were spread through social media. To provide a safe space for the people who shared their gender-based violence experiences with them, the researchers promised anonymity to their key informants. They used a mixed methods approach that included quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews, and storytelling sessions where participants could share their daily life experiences. The researchers integrated the quantitative and qualitative data to provide a picture of the pervasiveness of gender-based violence, and the lack of the universities' ability or willingness to respond to these issues. Using social change agent strategies, the researchers engaged in dialogues with many different stakeholder groups and made presentations at academic conferences and government agencies, as well as publishing the results in public media. This brought pressure on the universities to develop gender equality offices and protocols for preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

## Implications for Educational Research in the Caribbean

The sample studies that illustrate a transformative approach cited in this article may seem foreign when thinking about research in the Caribbean because they were conducted in a variety of countries, including the United States, Spain, and Nicaragua. However, the issues that were addressed in the studies are highly relevant in this region of the world. Climate change, educational disparities, reduction of violence, and prevention of gender-based violence all are of concern in schools. The strategies used in the transformative approach that are key to applying this method include building culturally responsive relationships, integrating social activist strategies, developing coalitions, and addressing power inequities. These need to be applied in ways that are responsive to the culture and context of the Caribbean (Mertens, 2020).

Wilson, et al. (2019) noted that much research in this region has not exemplified a transformative, culturally responsive approach. They recommend that researchers consider incorporating naturally occurring forms of socialization such as conversations that occur in town squares, 'liming' and 'ole' talk be incorporated into research methods to make use of relationships that already exist. "Liming takes place in a number of countries within the Caribbean, though different terminologies are used depending on the country to describe this type of engagement (e.g., *bemberria* in Dominican Republic, *jangueo* in Puerto Rico, par or lyme in Jamaica). Ole talk has been recognized by many scholars and writers as a uniquely Caribbean way of engaging with each other in small or large groups." (Wilson, et al., 10) It is most important to acknowledge the colonial past that these islands share, the heterogeneity in languages, traditional power structures, and the ability to collaborate for social change.

Researchers in the Caribbean who choose to use a transformative mixed methods approach can adapt the key strategies, building culturally responsive relationships, integrating social

activist strategies, developing coalitions, and addressing power inequities, to the culture and context of the Caribbean. Incorporation of these strategies would provide one way to increase Indigenous cultural responsiveness in research based on the experiences of those who still suffer from the consequences of colonization. Adaptation of these strategies to local conditions provides a potential pathway to increase the impact of research in pursuit of social, economic, and environmental justice. Challenges exist in a shift to the role of researcher to incorporate social activism; however, the research community and the communities they serve could benefit from examining how this could be done in contexts of adversity.

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# IMAGINE Research of Transformational Assessment

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## Abstract

In the context of studying human beings, at the macro level, assessment is the process of documenting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical data to provide evidence regarding an observable entity concerning humans that emerges cognitively, affectively, physically, metaphysically, and/or spiritually, and which is internal or external to the person or group being observed. In this article, we argue that assessment does not belong exclusively to either the qualitative or quantitative research tradition; rather, it is central to both traditions, as well as to mixed methods research. Moreover, in every research study—whether representing the qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research tradition—some form of assessment is used. Further, assessment not only represents a social constructionist and/or a social constructivist act, but also, and even more importantly, it represents a political act. This article features a discussion about the systemic, historically disempowering nature of assessment that privileges an artificial and racist norm, and silences and punishes participants who become othered by traditional research and assessment paradigms. Thus, we invite researchers—regardless of their methodological experiences and orientations—to embrace an **I**ntegrative **M**ixed **M**ethods **A**ntiracist **G**roundwork for **I**nvestigating and **N**urturing **E**quity (IMAGINE; S. S. Abrams et al., 2021, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-b), a research and evaluation meta-framework that we use here to transform assessment to support more equitable and empowering research. Utilizing critical dialectical pluralism (Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013), which underscores the inclusion of participants and their voices at every stage of the research process—from conceptualization, to dissemination, to utilization—we focus on research that honors participants as co-researchers, co-ideators, and co-decision makers, who, through their involvement in the research, become activists striving to identify problems and to effect change that they envision in local and/or global contexts.

*Keywords*: mixed methods research, critical dialectical pluralism, antiracist research framework, assessment in education, culturally responsive assessment, critical assessment practices approach, equity-oriented assessment

## Introduction

According to the Collins English Dictionary (2021), *assessment* (circa 1530–1540; Middle English) firstly is defined as "a consideration of someone or something and a judgment about them" (1). Similarly, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) firstly defines assessment as "the action or an instance of making a judgment about something: the act of assessing something: APPRAISAL" [emphasis in original] (¶1). However, the Cambridge Dictionary (2021a) likely provides the most comprehensive definition, by defining assessment as "the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made" (¶1). Therefore, assessment is a term that transcends research, in general, and research approaches and paradigms, in particular. Moreover, assessment does not belong

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to either the qualitative research tradition or the quantitative research tradition; rather, it is a central element of both traditions, as well as of mixed methods research. In fact, we argue that in *every* single research study—whether representing the qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research tradition—some form of assessment takes place.

Furthermore, given that assessment includes judgment and value-based decisions, assessment can be—and historically has been—a hotbed for discriminatory and hierarchical practices that perpetuate "scientific racism" (Saini, 2019, p. 29). Looking to dismantle and to flatten such hierarchies and to reframe and to reform research and evaluation, we propose a meta-framework to support more equitable and empowering research. After situating assessment historically, we introduce the IMAGINE movement—an Integrative Mixed methods Antiracist Groundwork for Investigating and Nurturing Equity—its methodological framing and its practical applications vis-à-vis a Critical Assessment Practices approach (CAPS; Forzani, Dobbs, et al., 2024).

## Brief History of Western-Based Educational Assessment

Unfortunately, assessment in both quantitative research and qualitative research—and thus, mixed methods research—has a sordid past. With respect to qualitative research, for example, the first half of the 20th century was characterized by colonial forms of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Erickson, 2018; Patel, 2016; Vidich & Lyman, 1994, 2000). These research studies took place in foreign settings, where White Western researchers (e.g., Lone Ethnographers; Rosaldo, 1989) conducted fieldwork that involved *so-called* "objective," "imperialist," "monumentalist," and "timeless" assessments of the culture, customs, habits, and religions of the "Other"—which predominantly involved those from what now is referred to as the Global South (i.e., lower-income countries) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Vidisch & Lyman, 2000). Findings and, even more importantly, interpretations, stemming from many of these research studies, were extremely harmful (see, for e.g., Malinowski's [1967] observations of his field experiences in New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands from 1914-1915 and 1917-1918) because they were driven by what can be called *White racial framing*. This framing represents a formal and informal racial hierarchal structure comprising White people at the top and Black (e.g., African American) people at the bottom (e.g., adopting a Eurocentric framework). Such a framing generally consists of socially constructed characteristics (e.g., negative racial stereotypes) that are designed to create and to sustain both White superiority and the inferiority of other groups (Feagin & Cobas, 2008; Taylor, 2006).

With regard to quantitative research, the turn of the 20th century witnessed the onset of the era of standardized testing. This era began with the development of the first standardized admissions test in 1901 by a group of U.S. colleges—namely, the College Entrance Examination Board—that assessed how well students were prepared for college-level coursework. Soon thereafter, in 1905, Alfred Binet introduced the first modern standardized test of intelligence, which directly assessed students in order to identify who needed educational assistance (Brink, 2011). Two years later in 1907, Karl Pearson first used a 7-point scale in research on intelligence (circa March 27, 1857–April 27, 1936) (McReynolds & Ludwig, 1987). Pearson, an English mathematician and biostatistician who is credited with establishing the discipline of mathematical statistics, founded the first university statistics department at University College, London in 1911. Unfortunately, Pearson also was a vocal proponent of *social Darwinism* (i.e., applying biological concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest to social science fields [e.g., sociology]; Williams, 2000), *eugenics* (i.e., beliefs and practices that exclude people and groups who are judged to be inferior and promote those judged to be superior; Galton, 1904), and *scientific racism* (i.e., the pseudoscientific belief that empirical evidence exists to justify racism, racial superiority, and racial inferiority; Saini, 2019). These and other quantitative assessments developed in this era reflected a top-down (i.e., hierarchical),

elitist, highly context-specific, culture-specific, normative-based, product-based, independent, competitive, punitive, inauthentic, and inequitable approach to assessment development—wherein the most important partners—the participants (or, in this case, the subjects)—were omitted from the development process. Consequently, these measures were ethnocentric and gender centric, yielding extremely flawed and systemically racist assessments that were, and continue to be, used across the social and behavioral sciences—including education—and the health sciences. For example, flawed assessments have led repeatedly to the conclusion that there are racial differences in intelligence that are substantially genetic in origin (Daley & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, 2020; Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 2001). As concluded by Daley and Onwuegbuzie (2020),

> in this post-truth era, with respect to intelligence research, what we have is a strong relationship between two weak phenomena (i.e., race and intelligence), one of which — intelligence — is reported to be measurable with IQ tests that happen to correlate with socioeconomic status and that represent a narrowly defined set of cognitive skills which, not surprisingly, predict similarly defined academic skills and, therefore, occupational success and wealth, which, in turn, predict intelligence as represented by an IQ score. Flawed constructs, flawed instruments, and flawed relationships yield flawed inferences and flawed educational and social policies. (p. 395)

Figure 1 presents an overview of the history of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research from the 20th century onwards, alongside a history of educational assessments associated with these three research traditions for the same time period. This figure was adapted from "Onwuegbuzie, Forzani, and Abrams (2022). The last column of this figure reveals that, in general, qualitative assessments, quantitative assessments, and combinations thereof have not kept pace with the evolution of these three traditions, with quantitative assessments remaining the dominant form of assessment.

Moreover, throughout its history, assessment development practices have led to assessments with questionable reliability, internal validity, external validity, internal credibility, external credibility, objectivity, trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and/or authenticity, which, in turn, have exacerbated obfuscation in meaning making, thereby promoting maleficence instead of beneficence. These practices have led to dire educational outcomes for a significant proportion of students representing primary, secondary, and tertiary education—especially for those from Global South countries and territories (including regions within the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, Oceania, Pacific Islands, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the developing countries in Asia)—as well as minority and indigenous populations (i.e., people of color) from Global North countries and territories (i.e., Europe, North America, Australia, Canada, Russia, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan). Unfortunately, these dire educational outcomes prevail today (see, for e.g., Daley & Onwuegbuzie, 2020) as the result of a lack of several major areas of validity/legitimation evidence—most notably, the following three major areas of validity/legitimation evidence that form part of Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (2009) meta-validation model, which, in turn, stem from Messick's (1989, 1995) conceptualization of validity: *substantive validity* (i.e., "Assesses evidence regarding the theoretical and empirical analysis of the knowledge, skills, and processes hypothesized to underlie respondents' [responses]" [p. 202]), *generalizability* (i.e., "the extent that meaning and use associated with a set of …[responses] can be generalized [or transferred] to other populations" [p. 202]), and *outcome validity* (i.e., "the meaning of…[responses] and the intended and unintended consequences of using the instrument" [p. 202])—or what some authors refer to as *consequential validity* (e.g., Brewer et al., 2014; Hitchcock et al., 2015). Therefore, the time is ripe—nay, overdue—for the development of assessment systems that simultaneously maximize these areas of validity/legitimation evidence. We contend that such assessment would be beneficial to those being assessed in both the Global South (e.g., the Caribbean) and the Global North.

## Figure 1

*History of Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods Research, and Western-Based Educational Assessment: Twentieth Century to Present Day*

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1900–1929 | *Formal emergence of the social and behavioral sciences:*<br><br>Classical positivism: introduced by Auguste Comte (French Philosopher)<br><br>Logical positivism (circa 1920s): originated in the Vienna Circle, a group of European Scholars<br><br>Birth of hypothetico-deductive model<br><br>Development of basic statistical and anthropological methods | *Moment 1: Traditional:*<br><br>Many researchers who rejected (logical) positivism embraced the qualitative research paradigm. | *Formal emergence of the social and behavioral sciences* | *Qualitative: Era of Colonial forms of qualitative research:*<br><br>Qualitative research studies in foreign settings wherein White researchers (e.g., *Lone Ethnographers*) conducted fieldwork that involved so-called "objective," "imperialist," "monumentalist," and "timeless," assessments of the culture, customs, habits, and religions of the "Other".<br><br>The Chicago school established the assessment of human group life.<br><br>*Quantitative: Era of standardized testing*:<br><br>A team of U.S. colleges—namely, the College Entrance Examination Board—developed the first standardized admissions test to assess whether students were prepared for college-level course work (1901).<br><br>First course in educational assessment that was taught by Thorndike at Columbia in 1902 (Meyer, 1965)<br><br>Alfred Binet introduced the first modern standardized test of intelligence, which directly assessed students in order to identify students who needed educational assistance (1905).<br><br>Karl Pearson is deemed to be the first investigator to employ ratings—namely, a 7-point scale—in research on intelligence (1907).<br><br>First definition of true score in 1910 (Brown, 1910).<br><br>National Council of Education published a major report on standards and tests for assessing school efficiency (1913) (cf. Strayer, 1913).<br><br>By World War I, standardized testing was standard practice: aptitude quizzes called Army Mental Tests were conducted to assign U.S. servicemen jobs during the war effort.<br><br>World War I yielded a surge in psychological testing as thousands of U.S. recruits are screened for intellectual and emotional functioning (1914).<br><br>The multiple-choice test was invented to combat the rise in student population in the United States (1915).<br><br>Stanford-Binet IQ test was created (1916).<br><br>Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach published his famous monograph, *Psychodiagnostics*, which led to the development of the Rorschach Inkblot Test to examine a person's personality characteristics and emotional functioning (1921). This test subsequently was used to assess students in school settings (e.g., mental tests, childhood and adolescence, educational psychology vocational guidance; cf. Hertz, 1934).<br><br>Rugg published a four-part paper on rating scale methodology (1921-1922).<br><br>*Journal of Educational Measurement* devoted several issues in 1921 to a symposium on scientific assessment of intelligence.<br><br>The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was developed in 1926 by the College Board, which assessed knowledge of vocabulary and basic mathematics.<br><br>Carl Spearman published a two-factor theory of intelligence in which he postulated the existence of a general intellectual ability factor and specific components of that general ability (1927).<br><br>Louis Leon Thurstone, a U.S. pioneer in the fields of psychometrics and psychophysics, developed the Thurstone Scale to assess attitudes towards religion (1928), which was subsequently used in educational constructs. |

## Figure 1 continued

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1930-1949 | *Traditional period*:<br><br>Discrediting of logical positivism<br><br>Early forms of postpositivism<br><br>Further extensions to the hypothetico-deductive model | *Moment 1: Traditional* | *Traditional period*:<br><br>Uncontroversial but limited use of mixed methods research | *Qualitative: Era of Chicago school:*<br><br>The Chicago school continued promoting the assessment of human group life.<br><br>*Quantitative: Era of standardized testing and study of eye movement*:<br><br>Miles Tinker and his collaborators began using photographic techniques to study eye movement of readers (1930).<br><br>G. T. Buswell created the first non-contact device registering eye movements to assess the reading and watching of images (1935).<br><br>Rensis Likert, psychologist, developed the Likert-format scale to assess people's attitudes, opinions, and perceptions (1932).<br><br>The first automatic test scanner was developed (January 1, 1936).<br><br>Kuder and Richardson (1937) published a seminal article on test reliability.<br><br>By 1938, more than 4,000 psychological tests were in print.<br><br>SAT is normalized to make test scores as fair as possible (1941).<br><br>Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory was published to assess personality (1943).<br><br>Government-funded schools began using written examinations that were introduced first in Boston (1945).<br><br>Cronbach (1947) introduced several different kinds of reliability coefficients.<br><br>The first version of the Wechsler Intelligence Tests for children was published (1949). |
| 1950-1959 | *Postpositivist era*: | *Moment 2: Modernist or golden age*<br><br>Attempt to make qualitative research (e.g., grounded theory) as rigorous as quantitative research; causal narratives were central; many texts attempted to formalize qualitative research; new interpretive theories emerged (e.g., ethnomethodology, critical theory, feminism, phenomenology). | *Postpositivist era*<br><br>Campbell and Fiske (1959) formalized the practice of using multiple research methods by introducing the concept of triangulation. | *Qualitative: Era of the modernist ethnographer and sociological participant observers*:<br><br>"Rigorous" qualitative assessments were taken of social processes. Postpositivism was the paradigm that greatly influenced qualitative assessment practices via new interpretive frameworks (e.g., phenomenological, ethnomethodology, critical theory, feminism). In particular, these qualitative researchers applied Campbell and Stanley's (1963) conception of internal validity and external validity to constructionist and interactionist notions of assessment in an attempt to make qualitative research as rigorous as quantitative research. These qualitative research studies often were characterized by assessments that were based on a combination of open-ended and quasi-structured interviewing schedules, as well as by participant observations.<br><br>*Quantitative: Era of standardized testing* and attribute assessment:<br><br>Louis Guttman developed the Guttman scale, which is a single (unidimensional) ordinal scale for the assessment of the attribute (1950).<br><br>Publication of the first standards for educational and psychological assessment (American Psychological Association [APA], 1954).<br><br>The first version of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Tests was published (1955).<br><br>The term Artificial Intelligence (AI) was coined by John McCarthy, an American computer scientist and cognitive scientist (1956).<br><br>American College Testing (ACT) was developed as a competitor to the SAT (1959). |

**Figure 1 continued**

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1960-1969 | Publication of Thomas Kuhn's (1962) book | *Moment 2: Modernist or golden age*<br><br>Publication of Thomas Kuhn's (1962) book. | *Postpositivist era*:<br><br>Emergence of multimethod designs<br><br>Webb et al. (1966) conceptualized the use of multiple methods (i.e., multiple operationalism).<br><br>Promotion of the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in social research. | *Qualitative: Era of the cultural romantics*:<br><br>Qualitative researchers, as cultural romantics, conducted qualitative assessments via an ironic and tragic view of society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).<br><br>Farrah et al. (1968) developed the Self-Concept and Motivation Inventory (SCAMIN). Although it has been subsequently used as a quantitative assessment (Davis et al., 1988), it was originally developed as a qualitative assessment, serving as a graphic method for use with children (Farrah et al., 1968). This graphic method involves children being shown different drawings of faces, comprising one face with a happy smile, a second face with a straight line for a mouth, and a final face with a mouth turned downward to depict sadness. Children are asked to select which face best characterizes their feelings about certain experiences, such as how they feel about school. For example, children can be asked to report which face belongs to each of their classmates, which would yield a SCAMIN drawing.<br><br>*Quantitative: Era of personality assessment*<br><br>Crespi developed the Stapel Scale (1961).<br><br>Meyers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was published (1962).<br><br>Warren T. Norman published his first article on the Big Five Personality Factors (1962).<br><br>Criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests were coined by Robert Glaser, a U.S. educational psychologist (1963).<br><br>The American Psychological Association (APA), American Educational Research Association (AERA), and National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) jointly revised the standards for educational and psychological assessment (APA, AERA, & NCME, 1966).<br><br>Fee waivers to take the SAT started to be offered to all eligible students who could not afford the registration fee (1969). Automated facial recognition was pioneered (1960s). |
| 1970-1979 | Emergence of the causal model of explanation | *Moment 3: Blurred genres*<br><br>Qualitative researchers had a full arsenal of paradigms, methods, and strategies; computers came to the fore to aid qualitative analyses; new approaches surfaced (e.g., poststructuralism, neopositivism); several qualitative journals emerged; naturalistic, postpositivist, and constructionist paradigms gained power. | *Diversification of and advances in methodologies in the human sciences*:<br><br>Denzin (1978) outlined how to triangulate methods. | *Qualitative: Era of blurred genres in qualitative assessment:*<br><br>Qualitative assessment reflected blurring of boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities, with semiotics and hermeneutics playing an important role.<br><br>Ecological maps or, more simply, ecomaps (i.e., eco-maps; also known as ecograms), developed in 1975 by Hartman (cf. Hartman, 1978, 1995), are graphical representations that illustrate all of the systems involved in an individual's life. Although eco-maps were developed to be used in individual and family counseling within the social work and nursing professions, they can be used to study the field of education, for example, to record information of learning experiences and to show how these interactions support or hinder a student (Bennett & Grant, 2016). Information about important interactions in a student's life can help teachers and administrators to understand students in ways that might not be revealed via educational interactions (Bennett & Grant, 2016). This first-hand knowledge of a student's strengths or weaknesses can help teachers and administrators learn how to individualize student development, and can be an important part of students' performance, as well as their personal and professional growth (Bennett & Grant, 2016).<br><br>Formalization of the ethnographic interview by Spradley (1979), wherein the assessor is "more collaborative and informal" with the assessed and "does not try to maintain an 'objective' or formal distance" from the assessed (Franklin & Jordan, 1995, p. 283). |

## Figure 1 continued

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Quantitative: Era of criticism of standardized assessment*<br><br>APA, AERA, and NCME jointly published the second revision of the standards for educational and psychological assessment (APA, AERA, & NCME, 1974). This edition included standards for employment and college admissions testing and addressed test development, test use, and reporting, expanding the focus beyond only test development and documentation.<br><br>The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, an American-/Canadian-based Standards Developer Organization, was formed in 1975, to develop evaluation standards and to improve the quality of standardized assessment.<br><br>An increased skepticism prevailed about the efficacy and usefulness of student achievement and intelligence tests for schools, as well as perceived testing monopolies. These criticisms yielded some important legislative changes concerning the testing industry—particularly, the Truth-in-Testing law that was passed by New York in 1979, which required sponsors and manufacturers of college admissions examinations to offer test takers the right, at the time scores are reported, to obtain copies of the test along with their answer sheet and a key to the correct responses.<br><br>American psychologist, Charles Egerton Osgood, developed the semantic differential scale to assess the *connotative meaning* of emotional attitude towards various matters (1979). |
| 1980-1989 | *Paradigm wars* | *Moment 3: Blurred genres*<br><br>*Moment 4: Crisis of representation*:<br><br>Research and writing became more reflexive and led to questions about issues of gender, race, and class; new models of truth, representation, and method were sought; issues such as validity, reliability, and objectivity re-emerged as being problematic; triple crises of representation (i.e. qualitative researchers can no longer directly capture lived experience), legitimation (i.e., makes problematic the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research), and praxis (i.e., involves asking whether it is possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text).<br><br>Emergence of newer paradigms such as constructivism that led to *paradigm wars.* | *Paradigm wars*<br><br>Continued development of rationale for the use of mixed research. | *Qualitative: Era of crisis of assessment*:<br><br>Qualitative assessment became more reflexive. Conflicts emerged between assessment and reporting.<br><br>Formalization of the participant observation by Spradley (1980), which "vary along a continuum that encompasses two dimensions—observation and participation" (Franklin & Jordan, 1995, p. 289), wherein assessments can be obtained via many modes, such as descriptive observations, focused observations, and selective observations.<br><br>PIE graphic assessment method developed (cf. Cowan, 1988) qualitatively to assess "individuals' and family members' psychological commitment to the different roles in their lives" (Franklin & Jordan, 1995, p. 288). This qualitative assessment method may be extended to the context of education.<br><br>The first use of the phrase *culturally responsive assessment* by Cuellar et al. (1983).<br><br>*Quantitative: Era of standards for quantitative assessment:*<br><br>APA, AERA, and NCME jointly published the third revision of the standards for educational and psychological assessment, which represented a shift toward a unitary concept in validity theory (APA, AERA, & NCME, 1985).<br><br>The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation published the Personnel Evaluation Standards in 1988, which included a total of 21 standards. |

**Figure 1 continued**

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
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| 1990-1999 | | *Moment 5: Post-modern period of experimental ethnographic writing:*<br><br>Struggle to make sense of triple crises; new ways of composing ethnography emerged (e.g., auto-ethnography); concept of passive observer discarded; more action-, participatory-, and activist-oriented research emerged.<br><br>*Moment 6: Post experimental Inquiry*:<br><br>Writings connected to the needs of a free democratic society; experimental forms of qualitative writing published that blurred the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities. | *Institution-alization of mixed methods as a distinct methodological orientation*:<br><br>Beginning of conversations between quantitative and qualitative researchers.<br><br>Publication of seminal works promoting mixed methods research as a separate research movement.<br><br>Widespread publication of mixed meth-ods research studies throughout the human sciences.<br><br>Conceptualiza-tion that much research is inherently mixed. | *Era of experimental ethnographic ways of assessment reporting*:<br><br>Emergence of action-, participatory-, and activist-oriented assessment.<br><br>The social network map developed in 1990 for qualitatively assessing social support by taking into account both the structure and function of the individual's personal social network (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990). This social network mapping approach may be extended to the field of education to assess educational support.<br><br>Repertory grids used "as a qualitative assessment tool for constructing personal meanings or constructs" (Franklin & Jordan, 1995, p. 286) and, therefore, are applicable to the field of education (see also Neimeyer, 1993). With respect to the field of education, repertory grids elicit a students' construction of some domain of experience by asking them to compare and to contrast representatives from that domain (e.g., classmates, teachers, administrators, family members) and then systematically to describe each of these representatives on their own repertory of dimensions of assessment, or personal constructs. The repertory grid can be administered formally orally (i.e., interview) or in writing—either offline or online (Neimeyer, 1993).<br><br>Development of Stories/Narrative Assessment Procedure (SNAP), which is an innovative assessment procedure using stories, which records the development of the narrative (i.e., language and communication) skills of young deaf children (Starczewski & Lloyd, 1999; Strong et al., 1998).<br><br>*Era of post experimental inquiry*:<br><br>The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation published the second edition of the Program Evaluation Standards in 1994.<br><br>APA, AERA, and NCME jointly published the fourth revision of the standards for educational and psychological assessment, which emphasized that validity and reliability were functions of the interpretations of test scores for their intended uses and not of the test itself (APA, AERA, & NCME, 1999).<br><br>New forms of assessment reporting blurred the boundaries between social sciences and humanities. |
| 2000-2009 | | *Moment 7: Methodologically contested present:*<br><br>Period of conflict, great tension, and retrenchment; growing body of literature on paradigms, approaches, and methods.<br><br>*Moment 8: Un-named*<br><br>Period of confronting the methodological ramifications of the evidence-based social movement. | *Institutionaliza-tion of mixed methods as a distinct methodological orientation*:<br><br>*Handbook of Mixed Methods Research* published (2003).<br><br>*Journal of Mixed Methods Research* launched (2007)<br><br>*International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* launched (2007) | *Qualitative: Era of diversity of assessment methods*:<br><br>Different assessment methods were pitted against each other (e.g., unimodality vs. multimodalities).<br><br>Qualitative assessment occurred during the evidence-based social movement.<br><br>Shift to explore multimodalities (Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), which created openings for assessments that include the examination of various modalities and multimodal analyses.<br><br>The Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument (ENNI), developed in 2005, is an assessment tool for collecting language information from children aged 4–9 through storytelling. Pictures that portray a story are presented to a child, who then tells the story to the examiner (Schneider et al., 2005).<br><br>*Quantitative*: *Era of diversity of assessment methods*:<br><br>No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education reform led to the expansion of state-mandated standardized testing as a means of assessing school performance, wherein most students are tested each year of grade school (2001).<br><br>Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) was developed, which is perhaps the most common topic model tool (i.e., a text-mining tool for discovery of hidden semantic structures in a body of text) (2002). |

## Figure 1 continued

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
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| | | *Moment 9: Fractured future*:<br>Methodologists form two opposing camps (i.e., "gold standard" of scientific research vs. socially, culturally, ethnically, and racially responsive, communitarian, justice-oriented research). | Special interest groups formed (e.g., American Educational Research Association).<br>Emergence of dialectical pragmatism introduced as a metaparadigm (2009). | The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation published the Student Evaluation Standards in 2003.<br>Changes to the SAT to assess what students are learning in school (2005).<br>Online Research and Comprehension Assessments (ORCA), which are performance-based measures of students' ability to conduct online research and to write a short report of their results, were used with content stability issues, wherein target websites were subject to change during data collection (e.g., Henry, 2007). Therefore, "an assessment used at one time was not always comparable to the same assessment used at another time" (Leu et al., 2015, p. 42).<br>The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation published the second edition of the Personnel Evaluation Standards in 2008, which is based on knowledge about personnel evaluation gained from the professional literature and research/development since 1988. A total of 6 new standards were added to the original 21 standards of the first edition. |
| 2010-2014 | | *Moment 10: Methodological Innovation*<br>Utilization of innovative approaches to reflexivity and latest technology and computer-mediated communication. | *Emergence of mixed methods research into young adulthood*<br>Second edition of *Handbook of Mixed Methods Research* published (2010).<br>Mixed Methods International Research Association.<br>Mixed Methods Research conferences held in multiple countries and continents.<br>Webinars held.<br>Dialectical pragmatism changed to dialectical pluralism (2011).<br>Emergence of critical dialectical pluralism (2013). | *Qualitative: Era of technological innovation in assessment:*<br>Use of the Narrative Assessment Protocol, which provides a direct assessment of children's language abilities within a narrative context via assessing the following five aspects of language: sentence structure, phrase structure, modifiers, nouns, and verbs. It involves a real-time online scoring procedure (Justice et al., 2010).<br>Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN) developed by the Working Group for Narrative and Discourse as a tool for the evaluation of the narrative abilities of bilingual children across a variety of languages and language combinations. The design of the MAIN allows for the elicitation of narratives in three modes: (1) story generation (telling), (2) retelling, and (3) telling after listening to a model story (Gagarina et al., 2012).<br>Ladson-Billings's (2014, 2017) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, Paris and Alim's (2014) extension of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) into culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), and Randall et al.'s (2022) work in justice-oriented antiracist assessment creates space for discussions of issues with assessments that marginalize people of color.<br>Qualitative assessment of wiki-based learning processes emerged (Balderas et al., 2012).<br>Quantitative: Era of *technological innovation in assessment* (Mislevy, 2016, 2019)*:*<br>APA, AERA, and NCME jointly published the fifth revision of the standards for educational and psychological assessment (APA, AERA, & NCME, 2014).<br>Continued development of ORCA (Leu et al., 2015). |
| 2015-Present<br>*Globalization of Social Movements* | *Emergence of Equity Movements:*<br>**I**nstitute in **C**ritical **Q**uantitative, **C**omputational, & **M**ixed Methodologies (ICQCM) (2020). | *Moment 10: Methodological Innovation*<br>Publication of Sage textbook entitled "Conducting qualitative research of learning in online spaces" (Gerber et al., 2017). | *Mixed Methods Research 2.0: Emergence of Integration*<br>*Oxford Handbook of Multi method and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry* (2015) | *Qualitative: Technological innovation in assessment, continued:*<br>Culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017) and culturally relevant pedagogical assessment.<br>*Quantitative*: *Technological innovation in assessment, continued (Mislevy, 2016, 2019):*<br>Continued development of ORCA (Leu et al., 2015). |

**Figure 1 continued**

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The *Me Too* (or #MeToo) (founded in 2006) movement began to spread virally as a hashtag on social media (2017).<br>The Extinction Rebellion (XR) global environmental movement (2018).<br><br>The Black Lives Matter movement (founded 2013) gained further international attention during the global George Floyd protests (2020). | | | The Comprehensive Literature Review Process framed as a Mixed Methodology (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016).<br><br>*Emphasis on two forms of integration instead of mixing:*<br><br>(1) Emergence of "1 + 1 = 3" integration formula in 2015 (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015).<br><br>(2) Emergence of "1 + 1 = 1" integration formula in 2017 (Onwuegbuzie, 2017; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019a).<br><br>Integration of multiple methods research and mixed methods research (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019b).<br><br>*The Routledge Reviewer's Guide to Mixed Methods Analysis* (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2021).<br><br>*The Routledge Handbook for Advancing Integration in Mixed Methods Research* (Hitchcock & Onwuegbuzie, 2022). | Ofqual (i.e., Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation)—which regulates qualifications, examinations, and assessments in England—created an algorithm to grade/mark GCSE (i.e., General Certificate of Secondary Education) and A-level (i.e., Advanced Level) examinations for determining university places in the United Kingdom because of students' inability to take face-to-face examinations as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns (2020). The algorithm, based on four distinct terms, factored in the school's performances in each subject over the previous 3 years. The algorithm was abandoned soon after (August 13, 2020) when it was determined that, in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, nearly 40% of the grades computed by the algorithm were lower than teachers' assessments.<br><br>In the United Kingdom, GCSE, AS, and A level examinations did not take place in 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the students' grades were assessed by teachers based only on what they had been taught, and not what they had missed.<br><br>The National Council of Teachers of English published position statements, such as Expanding Formative Assessment for Equity and Agency (Beck et al., 2020); the Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age (Witte et al., 2019) that acknowledged that "today's literacy demands have implication for how teachers plan, model, support, and assess student learning" (¶ 3); and Literacy Assessment: Definitions, Principles, and Practices (Yancey et al., 2018), which acknowledged that "literacy assessment is a social process not a technical activity…literacy assessment includes more than cognitive activities; it also includes a range of practices and perceptions, including beliefs about literacy, dispositions toward literacy, and self-efficacy regarding literacy" (¶ 10). |

## Figure 1 continued

| Period | Quantitative Research[a] | Qualitative Research[b] | Mixed Methods Research[c] | Qualitative Educational Assessments and Quantitative Educational Assessments in the Western World |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Emergence of Equity Movements:*<br><br>**I**nstitute in **C**ritical **Q**uantitative, **C**omputational, & **M**ixed Methodologies (ICQCM) (2020).<br><br>**I**ntegrative **M**ixed meth-ods **A**ntiracist **G**roundwork for **I**nvestigating and **N**urturing **E**quity (IMAGINE) movement (2021) (Abrams et al., 2021, 2022). | |

*Notes*

[a] Johnson and Gray (2010); Teddlie and Johnson (2009).

[b] Denzin and Lincoln (2011); Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010, 2011).

[c] Johnson and Gray (2010); Johnson et al. (2007); Teddlie and Johnson (2009).

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## Purpose of this Article

For the remainder of this article, we invite researchers—regardless of their methodological experiences and orientations—to embrace a new research and evaluation meta-framework for transforming assessment to support more equitable and empowering research. This framework is driven by a research philosophy called *critical dialectical pluralism* (CDP; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013), which underscores the inclusion of participants and their voices at every stage of the research process, from conceptualization to dissemination to utilization. Adoption of CDP promotes research that honors participants as co-researchers, co-ideators, and co-decision makers, who, through their involvement in the research, become activists striving to identify problems and to effect change that they envision in local and/or global contexts. Both this new research and evaluation meta-framework and its philosophical underpinning (i.e., CDP), in turn, have at their core a movement that embraces an **I**ntegrative **M**ixed methods **A**ntiracist **G**roundwork for **I**nvestigating and **N**urturing **E**quity. It is to this movement, namely, IMAGINE (S. S. Abrams et al., 2021, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-b)—which is devoted to re-imagining research to be more equitable—to which we now turn.

## The IMAGINE Movement

Here, we embrace the first definition from the Cambridge Dictionary (2021b, ¶ 1) of the word, *imagine*—"to form or have a mental picture or idea of something"—as we envision what the future of (mixed methods) research could look like and how it could shift systems of power. After all, the ivory tower of academia and of related research is as ivory suggests: It is White, it is privileged, it is durable, and, historically, it has come at the cost of marginalizing others. Conventional research traditions support hierarchical knowledge (e.g., the researcher vs. the participant) and perpetuate "scientific racism" (Saini, 2019, p. 29), which dehumanizes people (typically people of color) and which, as Saini, quoting her discussion with Professor Jonathan Marks, explained, "emerged 'in the context of colonial political ideologies, of oppression and exploitation. It was a need to classify people, make them as homogeneous as possible.' Grouping people made it easier to control them" (p. 29). Such grouping, exploitation, and othering has been part of experimentation-in-the-name-of-science throughout history—or what we call *assessment-in-the-name-of-science*. Furthermore, the human experimentation of the Holocaust and the resulting Nuremberg trials of 1945–1946 created an impetus and a policy (i.e., the Nuremberg Code) to ensure ethical research that, first and foremost, protects the rights of all research participants.

Although the Nuremberg Code and ethical research approaches exist at the forefront of contemporary investigations, there remains an underlying (and sometimes overt) othering, with particular respect to race, as noted previously (see also Figure 1). Furthermore, in a day-and-age when there is greater awareness of systemic racism, it is not enough to acknowledge that racism is embedded within these systems, including within research. Indeed, as declared by Onwuegbuzie (2021) in a recent Black Lives Matter special issue published in the *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, "non-racism ≠ anti-racism, with the former representing a passive, and even perhaps a passive-aggressive, stance" (p. 106). (See also C. Abrams & S. S. Abrams, 2021.) The systemic racism that is perpetuated via research needs to be addressed immediately—not in the future, but *now*! There is a longstanding need for research, in general, and education research, in particular, to be re-imagined. And there is no more important way to address the systemic racism that is inherent in research than by *reforming assessment systems* that make questionable numerous past and present findings conducted on participants of color.

An immediate way that the reform of assessment systems in research can take place is via the IMAGINE movement. Developed in 2021, this movement, which represents the mixed methods research community, is dedicated to creating pathways for conducting research that

are integrative, and, even more importantly—by adopting an antiracist stance—that promote research that facilitates the cultivation of equity (S. S. Abrams et al., 2021, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-b). This movement is dedicated to the reimagining of (mixed methods) research by dismantling hierarchies that create unnecessary and exclusionary dichotomies that privilege certain voices—specifically, voices belonging to the dominant majority group. The IMAGINE movement is built on the premise that the current status of research methods *must* shift to include antiracist methodological approaches that offer an equitable way to design, to conduct, to analyze, to interpret, and to disseminate research. Although these approaches should dismantle systems, the IMAGINE movement focuses less on destruction and more on reformation and reconstruction. One way to achieve such a focus on rebuilding is through the integration of culturally responsive assessment (cf. Cuellar et al., 1983; Logli, 2020) and antiracist assessment (Randall, 2022). Such equity-oriented assessment is holistic in nature and "calls for student involvement throughout the entire assessment process including the development of learning outcome statements, assessment tool selection/development process, data collection and interpretation, and use of results" (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, p. 10). In this way, culturally responsive assessment has an ethos similar to CDP: The traditional figure of authority—be it the adult, White researcher, or, in the classroom, the teacher—is not a central or a privileged figure. Assessment is designed and applied—and the power it garners is distributed—in meaningful and responsive ways.

Furthermore, culturally responsive assessment is embedded within the IMAGINE movement, which seeks to develop, to nurture, and to sustain research by future Methodologists of Color, including those from the Caribbean and other Global South countries and territories, within and across colleges and universities, K-12 classrooms, and home environments. After building on generative feedback received from mixed methods researchers representing the Caribbean (S. S. Abrams et al., 2022), Onwuegbuzie et al. (in press-b) have outlined how these under-represented populations can be nurtured in their development as methodologists from primary school through tertiary education and beyond, with the goal of promoting equity within the (mixed methods) research community.

## Critical Dialectical Pluralism

The IMAGINE movement is rooted in CDP and its pursuit of **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, **e**quity, and **s**ocial responsibility (*SIDES* of CDP; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a). Broadly speaking, originally developed by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2013), CDP 1.0 (circa 2013) is a mixed methods research-based philosophy that builds on dialectic pluralism (DP; circa 2009), which, in turn, has its roots in dialectical pragmatism (circa 2009) (cf. Figure 1). DP involves a belief in incorporating multiple epistemological perspectives within the same inquiry (Johnson, 2012, 2017; Johnson et al., 2014; Tucker et al., 2020). Like DP, CDP 1.0 represents both a process philosophy and a communication theory promoting both universalistic theoretical knowledge and local practical knowledge. Although one of the goals of DP researchers is to "'give voice' to those with the least power" (Johnson, 2012, p. 753) and to "reduce inequality" (Johnson, 2017, p. 165), this is not the major goal associated with this research philosophy—as evidenced by the lack of articulation, to date, as to how DP researchers give voice to those with the least power. In contrast, CDP 1.0 emphasizes procedural, process, and philosophical justice. CDP 2.0—hereafter referred to as CDP—builds on CDP 1.0, introduced by the authors of this present article (i.e., Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a). This version of CDP has, what we refer to as, *the many SIDES of CDP* (i.e., **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, **e**quity, and **s**ocial responsibility; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a), which represent five core elements that facilitate global justice (Al-Rodhan, 2009).

Most notably, CDP differs from critical-based, participatory-based, and transformative-emancipatory research philosophies. With respect to critical-based research philosophies, whereas CDP emphasizes mixed methods research approaches, critical-based research philosophies tend to promote mono-method research

studies—specifically, *quantitative research studies* (e.g., critical quantitative research [Baez, 2007; Teranishi, 2007]; quantitative criticalism [Stage, 2007]) and *qualitative research studies* (e.g., critical theory [Morrow & Brown, 1994]; critical race theory [Delgado & Stefancic, 2012]). Similarly, participatory-based research studies are predominantly qualitative in nature (cf. Hall et al., 2021), and do not consistently or fully honor the voices of participants and, relatedly, sometimes sustain hierarchical structures and stymie the participatory nature of participatory research (S. S. Abrams & Schaefer, 2022); thus, CDP has been a more apt frame for supporting participation at every stage of the inquiry and, as noted by Mertens (2007), "Methodologically, mixed methods are preferred for working toward increased social justice because they allow for the qualitative dialogue needed throughout the research cycle, as well as the collection of quantitative data as appropriate" (p. 224). Contrastingly, the transformative-emancipatory philosophy involves the utilization of mixed methods research approaches that focus directly on the lives and experiences of underserved, under-represented, and marginalized individuals or groups, including, but not limited to, women; ethnic/racial/cultural minorities; certain religious groups, individuals with disabilities/exceptionalities; and members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT+) communities—yielding research that is participatory, antidiscriminatory, and emancipatory (e.g., Mertens, 2003, 2007, 2010; Mertens et al., 2010). However, although the goal of transformative-emancipatory studies is to capture the voices of these individuals or groups, their voices are filtered through the voice of the researcher(s) (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). That is, studies emanating from this transformative-emancipatory research philosophy—as well as from critical- and participatory-based research philosophies—privilege researchers over participants wherein the researcher(s) has ultimate power over the participant(s) in terms of decisions made at every stage of the research process. These decisions include the research questions that should be addressed, the positionality of the researcher(s) and each of the participants, the aspects of each participant's voice that are included and excluded, and the veracity with which each participant's story is (re-)told (Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-a; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). That is, from the perspective of proponents of CDP researchers,

> there are at least some occasions when using this paradigm does not go far enough in terms of giving voice to people who have been traditionally excluded, namely, those who represent disenfranchised and the least advantaged groups in society and who have the least power. (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 13)

In contrast to researchers representing these aforementioned philosophies, and echoing the tenets of the IMAGINE movement, CDP researchers also emphasize the inclusion of participants and their voices at every stage of the research process as researchers work with participants as co-ideators, co-investigators, and, most importantly, co-decision makers. It is this attention to the many SIDES of CDP that led to the birth of Onwuegbuzie's (2017) 1 + 1 = 1 integration formula (see also Hitchcock & Onwuegbuzie, 2022; Natesan et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2015; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019a, 2019b, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2021). With this formula, the researchers adopt an integrative, integrated, and integral way of thinking at all phases of the research process that promotes the full(er) integration of the following seven broad elements identified by Onwuegbuzie and Hitchcock (2022): (a) quantitative and qualitative research approaches, (b) mixed methods research and multimethod research approaches (i.e., meta-methods research study), (c) disciplines/fields (e.g., interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary), (d) arts and sciences, (e) Global North and Global South researchers, (f) online and offline spaces, and, most importantly, (g) researchers and participants.

Although CDP is a relatively recent research philosophy—being in existence for 11 years at the time of writing—methodologists who adopt a CDP stance have conceptualized and implemented methods that attempt to reduce procedural and process injustice, including: (a) the development of sampling designs that are **t**ransparent, **r**igorous, **e**quitable, and **e**thical—what Corrigan and Onwuegbuzie (2023) refer to as being more *TREEful*—especially when sampling among/between phases/components; (b) the development of a meta-framework for optimal matching—wherein matching refers to the process of forming groups to make them as similar as possible in terms of extraneous or confounding factors (e.g., demographic variables [e.g., gender, race/ethnicity]; personality variables [e.g., resilience]; affective variables [e.g., motivation]) (Onwuegbuzie & Corrigan, 2021); (c) the development of focus group discussions that are designed and conducted by the research participants themselves, what the authors refer to as *critical dialectical pluralist focus group discussions* (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2015); (d) the development of an integrated mixed methods (IMM) approach for conducting design-based research (DBR)—what the authors refer to as *critical dialectical pluralist integrated mixed methods design-based research* (i.e., CDP-driven IMM-DBR; Onwuegbuzie, Forzani, et al., 2023); (e) the development of a meta-framework for conducting impact evaluations that facilitate the adoption of an integrative, integrated, and integral way of thinking—thereby facilitating the addressing of more complicated and complex evaluation problems—what the authors refer to as *critical dialectical pluralistic mixed methods-based impact evaluations* (Onwuegbuzie, Forzani, Hitchcock, et al., 2022); (f) the development of a method of collecting qualitative data via what is known as paired depth interviewing (also known as paired interviewing), which is defined as one researcher interviewing two people together for the purposes of obtaining information regarding how the pair perceives the same event, experience, or phenomenon (Wilson et al., 2016); (g) the development of a method to transform bibliometric studies to *mixed methods bibliometric studies* that involve the integration of bibliometric studies—which help researchers to determine the degree of development of various disciplines—and CDP-based qualitative research approaches (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2018); and (h) the development of a qualitative research process that ended in one or more of the participants (co-) presenting the findings at professional meetings (S. S. Abrams et al., 2017; Gerber et al., 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2018).

## Assessment Systems Re-IMAGINEd

The first step in re-IMAGINE-ing is to revise and to expand the definition of assessment from the macro-definition (i.e., general definition) of "the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a, ¶ 1) to a micro-definition (i.e., specific definition)—inspired by Onwuegbuzie and S. S. Abrams (2021, in press)—that has been established by IMAGINE, and that is displayed in Figure 2. Adopting this definition allows us to envision and to create assessments that promote social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility (i.e., SIDES), such as using a Critical Assessment Practices, or CAPS (Forzani, Dobbs et al., 2024) approach in research, which we will introduce in the next section.

Additionally, with research, in general, and when re-IMAGINE-ing assessment, in particular, acknowledging positionality is crucial, especially in light of culturally responsive and antiracist approaches. Each of us has a background in education—in the classroom as a K-12 educator and as a university professor—and each of us has had experience researching teaching and learning in various capacities. We all share a similar desire to see greater equity in research and in practice. We also abhor traditional assessment practices that continue to denigrate people of color and to undermine culturally responsive and antiracist research and teaching practices.

**Figure 2**

*A Micro-Definition of Assessment*

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. In its original form, the entity being assessed represents multimodal information that resides in nondigital spaces and/or digital spaces (e.g., spaces that are online and virtual and that exist via a wired or wireless connection) that are represented cognitively, affectively, physically, metaphysically, or spiritually. Once observed, this information is socially constructed, co-constructed, and co-produced by both the assessor(s) and those being assessed as representing qualitative data, quantitative data, or multidata (e.g., data that are neither exclusively qualitative nor quantitative; e.g., spirituality) that are generated continuously or discretely; consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously; internally or externally; verbally or nonverbally; deliberately or accidentally; once or multiple times; individually, competitively, cooperatively, and/or collaboratively; and reflecting some level of learned or innate characteristic behavior. Further, via one or more of the human senses (e.g., vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch, intuition, proprioception [i.e., the perception of body position], temporal perception [i.e., the sense of the passage of time], interoception [i.e., sensations coming from within organs], nociception [i.e., physiological pain], thermoception [i.e., ability to feel hot and cold], equilibrioception [i.e., perception of balance or acceleration], radiation senses [e.g., sense of color, sense of moods associated with color, sense of temperature], feeling senses [e.g., sensitivity to gravity, air and wind pressure, and motion], chemical senses [e.g., hormonal sense, such as pheromones, hunger for food, water or air], mental senses [e.g., pain, external and internal, mental or spiritual distress, sense of self, including friendship, companionship and power, psychic capacity]), the assessment is undertaken on one or more persons or groups. This assessment can occur objectively, subjectively, and/or intersubjectively; formally or informally; systematically or unsystematically; while lying somewhere on the structured—unstructured continuum. These methods represent approaches that are *intradisciplinary* (i.e., involving a single discipline), *cross-disciplinary* (i.e., involving one or more disciplines/fields that are viewed from the perspective of another discipline/field), *multidisciplinary* (i.e., involving assessors that represent different disciplines/fields, with each assessor drawing on their disciplinary knowledge), *interdisciplinary* (i.e., involving the integration of methods of assessment from different disciplines), or *transdisciplinary* (i.e., involving a unity of assessment frameworks that are created in a way that is beyond the disciplinary perspectives). The resulting assessment is non-static and non-immutable (i.e., changing with the person[s] being assessed and time), situated in its use, and reliant on the purpose for the assessment and its intended consequences in the very process of providing information (i.e., data) in general and evidence in particular. The final communicative assessment product either can stand alone or can be combined or integrated with other assessment products in order to (a) repeat the evidence (i.e., provide the exact repetition of an assessment, using the same assessment process, and under the same conditions; *repetition*), (b) replicate the evidence (i.e., recreate the same assessment tool and use it to undertake exactly the same assessment; *replication*), (c) reproduce the evidence (i.e., implement the same general assessment, in a similar setting, with a newly created appropriate assessment tool; *reproducibility*), (d) corroborate the evidence (i.e., provide evidence in support of a hypothesis, hunch, or a result, but using a different assessment approach from the one used originally; *corroboration*), (e) compare the evidence (i.e., *triangulation*); (f) capture the underlying evidence (i.e., *complementarity*; cf. Greene et al., 1989, p. 258); (g) accentuate the underlying evidence (i.e., *accentuation*); (h) substitute the underlying evidence (i.e., *substitution*); (i) expose inconsistencies and contradictions with the underlying evidence (i.e., *initiation*; Greene et al., 1989, p. 260); (j) broaden the scope of the evidence (i.e., *expansion*; Greene et al., 1989, p. 260); (k) moderate the underlying evidence (i.e., *moderation* or *regulation*); (l) mediate the underlying evidence (i.e., *mediation*; e.g., filter); and/or (m) create new directions based on additional evidence (i.e., *development*; Greene et al., 1989, p. 260).

Adapted from Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Forzani, E., & Abrams, S. S. (2022). *History of quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research, and educational assessment: A review*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England.

## Using a Critical Assessment Practices Approach in Research

Assessment used in research can include a wide range of approaches and types, from conducting surveys to evaluating programs, to developing assessment tools, to using informal assessment as part of design-based research (cf. Onwuegbuzie, Forzani, et al., 2023), to administering formal assessments to evaluate participants before, during, and after interventions. In other words, assessments often are used by researchers as tools to evaluate participants, groups, interventions, treatments, and programs. In this sense, assessment is done *to*, rather than *with*, participants. In research, then, assessors often focus on *outcomes* (i.e., assessment *results*) without focusing on the *process* of assessment and without considering how what they have learned from assessment informs their research.

Unfortunately, such traditional approaches to the use of assessment in research, therefore, often assume a power differential between assessor and assessed, which can result in negative effects on research participants. In particular, assessment historically has negatively affected people of color and other minoritized populations to a greater degree, compared to more majority populations (Lee, 2016). Further, as critical dialectical pluralists, we reject the existence of false dichotomies in research, such as objective versus subjective, emic versus etic, constructivism versus realism, human science versus natural science, universals versus particulars, relativism versus absolutism, quantitative research versus qualitative research, mixed methods research versus multiple methods research, and, most importantly, researcher(s) versus participant(s)—to name just a few false dichotomies. In the context of assessment, in particular, we reject the false dichotomy between assessor(s) and assessed. Rather, we maintain a synechist (i.e., anti-dualistic) stance by viewing assessment systems as situating a series of continua instead of dichotomies. For example, with regard to the distinctions between assessments in digital and nondigital spaces, we dismiss any ontological prioritization between those spaces; instead, akin to the porous and blurred boundaries of meaning making within and across digital and nondigital spaces (Burnett & Merchant, 2014), we contend that the border between digital assessment and nondigital assessment is porous and blurred. For instance, assessment of the competence of the pilot of a fighter jet drone (i.e., an unmanned combat aerial vehicle; a profession that takes place in a nondigital location) can occur in both a nondigital space (i.e., assessing the pilot's skills during an actual flight) and a digital space (i.e., via a simulator); similarly, assessment of the competence of a military pilot—a profession that takes place nondigitally (e.g., via fighter jets) and digitally (i.e., via drones, use of digital equipment)—can take place in both spaces. Extending to the classroom, we see assessment existing across digital and nondigital domains, including, but not limited to, how tests, scores, interaction, and feedback are generated, delivered, and communicated. Students who engage in a cooperative assessment (S. S. Abrams, 2017, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) might use digital tools (e.g., calculators, online sites) or they might enter their answers in a digital forum, but they also have the nondigital interaction, as well as any work completed on scrap paper. Add a videoconference platform to the mix (Abrams, 2021b), and the dichotomy between digital and nondigital becomes even more problematic and problematized. Thus, we think it is important, as researchers, critically to consider our approach to assessment in research and how such an approach, instead, might align with the principles of CDP and the ethos of the IMAGINE movement.

Therefore, here, we take up a view of assessment as research (Huot, 2002), or as an inquiry process in which information is collected to understand a particular question or a set of questions about students. Also, we apply CDP to assessment in research, or what Forzani, Dobbs, et al. (2024) developed and refer to as a Critical Assessment Practices (CAPS) approach. In this article, we focus specifically on those assessment processes that are taken up in educational research, as opposed to those that are taken up in classrooms. For a practice-based discussion of a CAPS approach in K-12 education, see Forzani, Dobbs, et al. (2024).

## Participants as Empowered Partners: Assessing *with* and *for* Participants to Inform Research

Drawing on CDP, a key feature of a CAPS approach is the equity-oriented collaboration between researcher(s) and participant(s), or between assessor(s) and assessed, when assessments are used in research. Whereas typical assessments, and especially those used by researchers when collecting data, assume a large power differential between assessor and assessed, a critical approach to assessment in research aims to break down this power differential as researchers and participants co-construct research and assessment goals, assessments, analyses, and interpretations together from the beginning to the end of the research process. Thus, in a CAPS approach, as in CDP, researchers, participants, and other partners and collaborators develop a reciprocal relationship wherein the goals of different partners are discussed and revisited throughout the research process.

In the remainder of this article, we extend the CAPS approach, recognizing that at the heart of a CAPS approach is the role of the *participant-as-assessor* and various reconfigurations of power structures so that assessment not only is developed or co-developed by the participants, but also the approach to assessment honors participants' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992), or "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills" (p. 133). This supports adults (in this case, participants and researchers) to "know the [participant] as a 'whole' person, taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the [participant] is enmeshed" (pp. 133-134).

When we assess *with* participants, as in a CAPS approach, participants' voices are central, as is their role as autonomous individuals who make decisions about assessment, determining what the assessment is for and how it can best serve them. This is in contrast to much current research, in which researchers determine the purpose of assessment and how it might serve *them*. Instead, in line with CDP, in a CAPS approach, participants make decisions at every stage of the assessment process, alongside researchers and other collaborators. This is more likely to result in assessment that is *with* and *for* participants because not only do participants have a voice in this process, but also their voice is centered (see Forzani et al., 2020). In the following section, we outline briefly four key practices in such a CAPS approach.

### 1. Relationships First: Participants and Researchers Develop Dynamic Understandings of Themselves and of One Another

CDP "assumes a communitarian view of power that is represented by reciprocity between researcher(s) and the participant(s)—a relationship not of domination, but of intimacy and vulnerability" (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 14). Because traditional assessment assumes a power imbalance between assessor and assessed, we argue here that the first thing researchers and participants need to do is to work actively to develop a reciprocal relationship whereby there is shared power. Without this, assessments will not be especially valid, credible, or productive. However, if researchers and participants work together to develop shared power in various degrees of partnership (e.g., S. S. Abrams et al., 2020b), then they can understand better one another's needs and work together towards shared goals.

Before engaging in building a reciprocal relationship, however, it is useful for each person to examine their own identities and positionalities to understand better the ways in which they might approach relationship building with others. In other words, before we actively can seek to break down power imbalances, we first need to be aware of such imbalances. Moreover, in order to build trust, intimacy, and vulnerability, participants and researchers need first to know and to understand themselves and one another and to build a relationship together. The approaches that follow outline three ways to begin understanding self and others.

## Reflexivity: Examining our Own Positionalities

CDP calls on researchers to engage in reflexivity by examining "their own biases…and those of their participants" (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 16) before and throughout research, in order to understand the ways in which our identities might impact our interpretation of findings. Applied to a CAPS approach, participants and researchers each explore their positionality, or their "perspective shaped by the researcher's unique mix of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, and other identities" (Mullings, 1999, p. 337). In doing this work, both participants and researchers might explore their "enduring social identities [that] confer a status that enables or limits the exercise of power" (Frost & Holt, 2014, p. 90). Such a practice of exploring our positionalities is important because it helps us to develop an awareness of how different aspects of our identities might influence our interpretations of different pieces of information garnered from assessments—including results—at different stages of the assessment process (Collins et al., 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). It also helps us to develop an awareness of how our own identities might influence the ways in which we interact with others; this means that engaging in reflexivity is an important practice prior to developing a relationship with others.

## Reflexivity: Learning to Self-Assess

Similar to Schön (1983), who advocated for teachers to engage in reflection-in-action while teaching, as well as in retrospect through reflection-on-action, we contend that an IMAGINE framework for mixed methods research involves reflexive activity throughout and after the research process. However, looking to the SIDES of CDP 2.0 (i.e., **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, **e**quity, and **s**ocial responsibility) to situate the research process and the reflexivity therein, we argue that the IMAGINE framework opens up the seemingly insulated and guarded realm of assessment. This is not to say that constructs of traditional assessments are hermetically sealed and solidified (even if they might feel that way); rather, we envision the SIDES of possibility—that is, the expansion of what assessment is and what it could be when participants engage in levels of partnership in the research, in general (e.g., S. S. Abrams et al., 2020a, 2020b; Schaefer et al., 2020, 2021), and in mixed methods research, in particular (Onwuegbuzie, 2020).

Reflexivity is an important part of exploring positionality and bias (see, for e.g., Collins et. al, 2013; Frost, 2016). For assessment that is driven by the participant-as-researcher, reflexivity is key for participants to develop and to hone their understandings of assessment and of self (see S. S. Abrams, 2016, 2018, 2021a). In the classroom, self- and peer-assessment can involve verbal and nonverbal communication (S. S. Abrams, 2017), and mixed methods research featuring such reflexivity can include verbal and nonverbal analyses (Onwuegbuzie & S. S. Abrams, 2021, in press). Furthermore, methods, such as video-elicited reflection (i.e., structured and unstructured cued retrospective reporting), similar to stimulated recall (S. S. Abrams, 2009, 2015, 2018; Lyle, 2003), can be useful for participants to view and to perceive retrospectively their engagement in a particular activity, thereby supporting the development of reflexivity. Likewise, participant-to-participant peer feedback vis-à-vis formal and informal cooperative activities, which can be generated in-action (i.e., while an activity is happening), is central to supporting participant-driven approaches that redefine the boundaries of assessment. Such boundary-pushing is evident in cooperative assessments (S. S. Abrams, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022), which reduce anxiety, support perseverance and problem solving, and honor participant agency, all of which work to redefine how assessments are formed and situated in the context of the educational experience. In other words, through cooperative assessments, as well as self- and peer-assessments, there are opportunities for participants—who otherwise are the subjects of scrutinizing assessments—to be the originators, the owners, and the developers of assessments that they deem as fair, as relevant, and as meaningful.

### Developing a Reciprocal Relationship

Examining our own positionalities allows us to be prepared better for listening to others because we gain some understanding of how our own identities affect our interpretations of others' beliefs and interpretations of the world. Understanding our own identities also allows us to understand what motivates us to engage in particular practices; such understanding also can be used to consider what motivates others. Such an understanding then can form the basis of a relationship of shared power because both participants and researchers understand that, although they might have different perspectives or even different purposes, they also might have some common ground. Identifying these areas of common ground then allows both participants and researchers to begin to develop shared goals, a process that we discuss in the next section. Such work involves deliberately making the time and space to engage in ongoing conversations to learn about one another.

## 2. Shared Goals Among All Partners

### Developing Shared Outcomes

Often, researchers, participants, and other partners have somewhat different goals for assessment. Discussing these goals and how the assessment process can serve the needs of different kinds of partners simultaneously can facilitate the co-construction of shared goals, assessment design and materials, interpretations, and application to future contexts. In particular, we argue for shared goals that promote greater equity both among partners and when applied to the broader communities that the research will affect. Given that conceptions of validity in any particular assessment represent the broader social values of the assessment developers (Messick, 1995)—and thus can represent the social values of a single, dominant group developing an assessment—considering the ways in which the constructs we are measuring represent participants' cultures and backgrounds can help ensure that we are measuring constructs valuable to the people using them (Randall et al., 2022). This means that if, for example, researchers and participants are using a reading comprehension assessment in their research, they might interrogate existing constructions of reading comprehension, considering what constructions count and for whom, and developing their own, more culturally valid construction appropriate to the context (see, for e.g., Forzani et al., 2024).

### Co-Constructing, as Equal Partners, Shared Ways of Knowing and Coming to Know

Assessment is a method of better understanding a person or group of people, including understanding people's characteristics, thoughts, beliefs, and emotions, or what they know and can do (Mislevy, 2019). Because the purpose of educational assessment is to understand people, it is important for anyone conducting and interpreting assessments to remember that people are unique and to consider (a) how different people, and different groups of people, approach the world, and (b) how they think about knowledge and coming to know.

CDP calls 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 partners involved in the research process. Here, we argue that the process of seeking such understanding should be reciprocal, with participants and researchers each working to understand one another's cultural beliefs and practices. However, we also think it is important that participants' voices, in particular, are honored and elevated given the inherent and historical power imbalance associated with assessment.

Developing cultural awareness and understanding is especially crucial for engaging in assessment processes, including developing assessment purposes and procedures, implementing assessments, and interpreting results. According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2013, 2016), culturally progressive research can include developing (a) cultural awareness of beliefs; (b) cultural knowledge; and (c) cultural skills. Because assessment measures people's abilities and understandings, test-

takers' cultural beliefs, knowledge, and skills will influence the ways in which participants engage in an assessment. Likewise, researchers' cultural beliefs, knowledge, and skills will influence the ways in which they interpret assessments. Different cultural beliefs also can lead two different people, or two different groups of people, to draw two different interpretations of assessment results. Thus, taking the time to understand one another's funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), cultural resources, and socially situated ways of being (e.g., beliefs, knowledge, and skills; Gee, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2011) is an important step for all partners to take prior to engaging in assessment practices, including interpretation. Moreover, all partners can debrief assessment processes together to understand better how processes, and their roles in different processes, might have affected outcomes. For example, after implementing assessment and before examining findings, participants and researchers deliberately can engage in structured debriefing sessions to inform their interpretations of findings (Collins et al., 2012; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008; Weinbaum & Onwuegbuzie, 2016). This makes it more likely that both researchers and participants will understand better how their own and others' interpretations are influenced by their own lenses and cultural resources and that all partners will come to more accurate and comprehensive shared understandings.

## 3. All Partners are Empowered to Participate as Equal Partners in Decision Making at Every Stage of the Research Process

Following a CDP lens, researchers adopt a "researcher-facilitator role that empowers participants to assume the role of participant-researchers" who collaborate throughout research, including by "perform[ing] or present[ing]...findings" (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 15). When assessors adopt a *facilitator* role, students are empowered to be partners in all aspects of assessment. As researchers and facilitators work alongside one another, they make decisions together at all stages of the assessment process, from planning and development, to implementation, to interpretation, to application, and to dissemination. This makes it more likely that assessment will be conducted and used in ways that serve participants, or that will work *with* and *for* participants. For example, after co-developing constructs for what will be assessed, participants and researchers can work together to develop assessments and assessment scoring criteria (e.g., rubrics), and to be equal partners in interpreting, disseminating, and deciding how to use findings.

## 4. Developing Dynamic Understandings of Participants

Traditionally in research, assessments have been conducted at few time points, using only one or two contexts, and using only a single method of data collection (Pearson et al., 2014). Such an approach assumes that learners have static identities that do not vary by time, situation, or context. However, research suggests that people's identities and abilities do vary by text, activity, and context (see, for e.g., RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Thus, when we use assessment in research, multiple assessment methods, mixed methods, and multiple timepoints are needed for developing comprehensive understandings of participants' practices and how such practices differ across contexts (Pearson et al., 2014). Rather than using measures that utilize only one method, participants and researchers can develop multi-method- (i.e., multiple methods-) and mixed methods-based assessments. Findings then can be integrated to form a more cohesive and nuanced understanding of a participant as a whole person across multiple methods, timepoints, and contexts. This means that rather than drawing conclusions about research data from a single assessment, or a single type of assessment, our conclusions can be more robust and comprehensive and, thus, more representative of those being assessed.

Findings also can be more robust and accurate because participants engage in the construction of assessment goals and tools, as well as in the interpretation of the findings. Rather than

researchers drawing conclusions about a student from assessment data, then, participants have a voice in how their assessments are interpreted. This both empowers participants and leads to more accurate interpretations of what participants know and can do, leading to more valid interpretations of the answers to our research questions.

## Summary and Conclusions

Indubitably, assessment is the most important component of *all* research studies—whether they represent quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research studies—because it is impossible to arrive at any finding without some form of assessment taking place. Unfortunately, as described earlier (see Figure 1), throughout history—especially since the turn of the 20th century—assessments often have been misused and abused as a result of application of a narrow view of assessment—a view that maintains or even widens the power differential between the assessor(s) and assessed, the researcher(s) and participant(s), and which exacerbates racial and ethnic bias in reporting and interpreting bias.

With this in mind, we would like to think that this article has made a contribution to the literature in the following four ways. First, we have identified a research philosophy, namely, CDP, that lends itself to redressing the power imbalance inherent in virtually all assessment systems. This stems from the fact that CDP (a) is committed to research that promotes and that sustains an egalitarian society, (b) adopts a participant-centered approach to assessment, (c) changes the role of (mixed methods) researchers/assessors to (mixed methods) research-facilitators/assessment-facilitators and changes the role of participant/assessed to participant-researcher/participant-(self-) assessor, (d) leads to the research-facilitator(s)/assessment-facilitator(s) serving as a "cultural broker" (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 15) between the participant-researchers/participant-(self-)assessors and the assessment system that has power over them, (e) leads to the research-facilitators/assessment-facilitators adopting a communitarian view of power and problematizes powerlessness, and (f) motivates the research-facilitator(s)/assessment-facilitator(s) to be committed to promoting social justice (i.e., equitably allocate power), distributive justice (i.e., equitably allocate resources), retributive justice (i.e., notion of merit), restorative justice (i.e., via conflict resolution), compensatory justice (i.e., for violations of rights), and, above all, global justice (i.e., comprising the following 8 minimum criteria: dialogue, effective and representative multilateral institutions, representative decision-making structures, fair treatment, empathy, accountability, transparency, and adherence to international law [Al-Rodhan, 2009]).

Second, we have applied a research movement that we have co-created recently, namely, the IMAGINE movement (S. S. Abrams et al., 2021; Onwuegbuzie et al., in press-b)—which is devoted to using CDP for the pursuit of **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, **e**quity, and **s**ocial responsibility—to assessment in research. Among numerous research elements (e.g., sampling designs used in mixed methods research; Corrigan & Onwuegbuzie, 2023; Onwuegbuzie & Corrigan, 2021), these five SIDES of CDP are all affected by past and present assessment systems. A major goal of this movement is to demonstrate how assessment systems can be re-IMAGINEd to promote an antiracist and equitable approach to the development and use of assessments in research. Simply put, the IMAGINE movement is committed to playing a role in positively changing the assessment culture for both researchers and practitioners (e.g., primary-, secondary-, and tertiary-level teachers; test developers).

Third, we significantly have expanded the narrow definition of assessments found in textbooks and dictionaries. Specifically, using the tenets of CDP, we provided what we refer to as a micro-definition. This micro-definition creates spaces for researchers, in general, and mixed methods researchers, in particular, to develop multi-method- and mixed methods-based assessments that facilitate a more cohesive and nuanced understanding of a participant as

a whole person across multiple timepoints and contexts.

Fourth, we have described how a Critical Assessment Practices (CAPS) approach (Forzani, Dobbs, et al., 2024) in research can help to re-IMAGINE assessment systems. Inherent in this approach is the collaboration between and/or among researcher(s) and participant(s), or between and/or among assessor(s) and assessed, when assessments are used in research, wherein a reciprocal relationship is nurtured between and/or among these groups. What comes to the fore is the importance of participation *in,* and ownership *of,* assessment (S. S. Abrams, 2017, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022), which underscores the re-envisioning of how and why assessments can be developed, adapted, and applied to understand better integrated participant meaning making. Further, this stance, combined with the CAPS approach, which helps to facilitate the role of the participant-as-assessor, should enable partners to use the assessment system to refine interpretations vis-à-vis methods, such as repetition, replication, reproducibility, corroboration, triangulation, complementarity, accentuation, substitution, initiation, expansion, moderation/regulation, mediation, and/or development.

We realize that our call for researchers to design and to implement assessment systems that are re-IMAGINEd adds a layer of complexity and complication to the research process—whether it be a quantitative research study, a qualitative research study, or a mixed methods research study. However, we believe that this is offset by the fact that such assessment systems facilitate a greater commitment to **s**ocial justice, **i**nclusion, **d**iversity, **e**quity, and **s**ocial responsibility—reflecting the *many SIDES of CDP*—than has been the case with previous assessment systems (see Figure 1). Therefore, we hope that this article represents an important step towards utilizing assessment systems in research studies that create a space for the empowerment of research participants—consistent with the principles of CDP and the ethos of the IMAGINE movement.

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# Examining the School Climate Influence on Jamaican Secondary School Students: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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## Abstract

The article synthesises the literature on the socioecological factors within the school climate - quality and character of school life (Cohen, 2009) influencing adolescents' resilience. The review focuses on social relationships and the mechanisms used for teaching and learning practices. Resilience is a positive development outcome resulting from a triadic interactive process between the adolescent, the internal capacity, and the socioecological factors within the environment (Ungar, 2008). Changes imposed by COVID-19 on teaching and learning practices assumedly altered the school climate and are known to impact adolescents' psychosocial well-being. Transforming the school climate at its minimum will require improving social relationships, communicating expectations, and creating a school environment where students will feel safe. Giving students autonomy through active and productive engagement in decisions that affect their developmental outcomes is critical for success. Expansion of this study requires applying a methodological approach that allows for students' perspectives of the school climate, careful measurement of their resilience levels and lived experiences of students and other school personnel.

*Keywords*: adolescent, school climate, resilience, COVID-19

## Introduction

Investing in human capital is crucial for society to thrive. Nations must support their citizens by addressing vulnerabilities and risks. For this reason, the United Nations encourages countries to develop strategies that empower individuals through education and health systems and social support to overcome and cope with environmental challenges (United Nations, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a recent and widespread impact on the global population. It has affected all sectors, including social, economic, health, and education. Schools and businesses worldwide had to close to prevent the spread of the virus, causing a halt in the teaching and learning process (Peng & Simpson-Bell, 2022). Education being a fundamental right for all children plays a crucial role in shaping their characters, attitudes, behaviours, and choices. Therefore, countries' education sectors launched digital learning platforms to continue the teaching and learning process (Parker et al., 2021). Jamaica was no exception; it resorted to remote teaching and learning practices through audiovisual and digital media (Jamaica Education Transformation, 2021).

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Despite efforts to ensure continuous teaching and learning, the United Nations (2022) has observed an increase in the number of children not attending school. This is particularly true for those from disadvantaged households who lack the necessary learning tools to advance their education. Generally children, particularly adolescents in the midst of changes, face social challenges and require additional support and appropriate resources to achieve positive outcomes. Therefore, adapting to changes within the school sometimes requires more than individual effort. As Goldstein and Brooks (2005) suggested, a supportive, engaging, and nurturing school environment is necessary to foster children's development and resilience.

The concept of resilience is often defined as an individual's ability to bounce back, adapt, or adjust to adversity, trauma, and crisis (Baron, 2002; Masten & Garmezy, 1985). However, Ungar (2008) expands the definition of resilience to include

> both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

In order to promote school transformation, it is important to consider the school climate from the perspectives of both students and teachers (Thapa, Cohen, & D'Alessandro, 2012). Cohen (2013) defines school climate as the overall quality and nature of school life (p. 413), encompassing everything from interpersonal relationships and norms to teaching, learning, leadership practices, values, goals, and school structure (Cohen, 2013, p. 413). By analysing the school climate and its impact on students' resilience, we can transform the school environment to more sustainably contribute to Jamaica's national goal of empowering its citizens to reach their full potential through human capital development (PIOJ, 2009, p. xv).

## Conceptual Framework

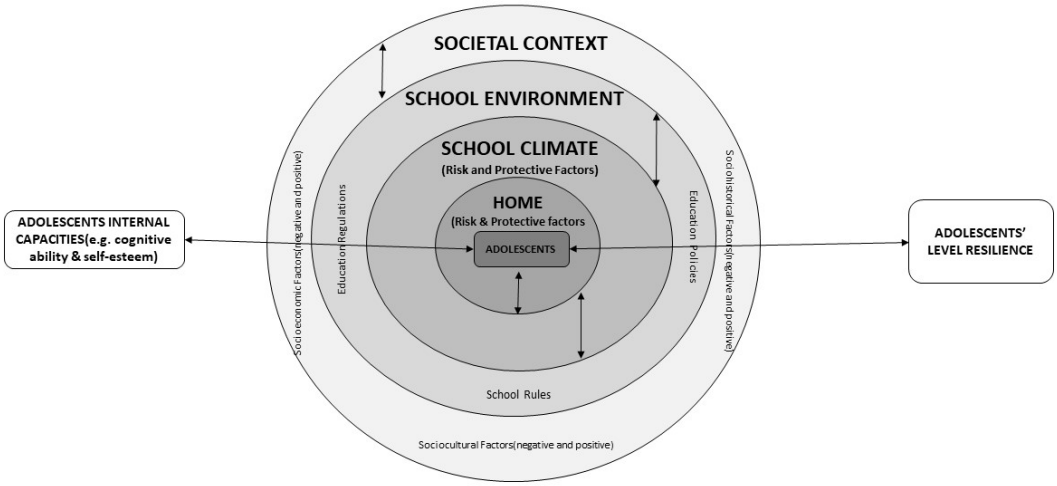
The basis of this framework is the Ungar Ecological Model of Resilience (Ungar, 2011), the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and tenets from the Positive Youth Development Model (Lerner et al., 2000). As the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model suggests, an individual's development is shaped by the complex interplay between their environment and various socio-ecological factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Therefore, the socioecological factors, such as, sociohistorical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic elements influence the adolescent well-being and development. These factors impact how adolescents interpret their interactions with others and how they view themselves. This interpretation is guided by their social cognition, self-competencies, beliefs, and the valence of environmental variables that create either protective or risk factors (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Bandura, 1997). The school climate also plays a critical role in shaping an adolescent's resilience, that is, their ability to navigate their present circumstantial conditions and negotiate the available resources (Ungar, 2008)—in short, thrive. This condition is likely when positive teacher and peer relationships, clear expectations, disciplinary practices, and protective mechanisms that create a sense of safety are provided. This, in turn, enables adolescents to function productively within their socioecological space (Ungar, 2012) (See Figure 1).

## School Transformation: Jamaica

Sustainable Development Goal #4 implores a shift of conventional education delivery with a greater focus on inclusion and equitable quality education contingent on the teaching and learning process. The emphasis on improving intellectual capacity too often distracts from the holistic approach that affords quality education which expands and bolsters the personality, inherent talents, and abilities that enable adequate human functioning. Holistically, education contributes

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework (adapted, Bronfenbrenner (1979)*




to more significant developmental attainments (Aldridge, McChesney, & Afari, 2019).

Over the past few decades, the agenda to transform the education system to embrace a positive developmental approach has been seen in some countries. For example, Finland and Ireland reformed their educational systems using an inclusive stakeholder approach to focus on well-being as part of the school curriculum (Leppäkari & Oy, 2013). Finland addressed children's well-being using teacher leadership to build children's resilience (Hargreaves et al., 2007), while Ireland applied mental health strategies within the school system to transform their young people by enabling the development of personal life skills (Power et al., 2008). Overall, these countries recognised the need for improving socioemotional competencies as an "impetus for cultural, social and economic development" (Knight et al., 2007, p. 8).

Countries within the Caribbean have initiated this process—Jamaica is an example of one of these countries. Jamaica's recognition of the relevance and importance of education in nation-building and human capital development has led the government to employ transformative efforts to revamp and align the education system to the National Vision: "Jamaica, the place of choice to live, work, raise families, and do business" (Education Task Force, 2004; PIOJ 2009, p. xv; Jamaica Education Transformation Commission, 2021).

Albeit the Jamaican education system has been influenced by colonial legacies, the government has taken measures to address inequality. At the secondary education level, upgrades were made to schools by rebranding them as high schools (Ministry of Education, 2021) and providing free access to education for all secondary school-age children (Tingling, 2015). However, despite these efforts, students' performance in upgraded schools remained relatively low (Knight et al., 2007). Traditional schools, which have a pre-existing supportive network, offer greater educational support and opportunities compared to upgraded or non-traditional schools (Jamaica Information Service, 2006).

According to the National Education Inspectorate (2015), there are concerns about the quality and effectiveness of education in the system due to persistent inequality at the primary and secondary levels. The COVID-19 pandemic has

worsened these inadequacies, inequity, and inequality, emphasising the need to address these issues urgently (Jamaica Education Transformation Commission, 2021).

In 2020, the Government recognised the challenges schools and students face due to the pandemic. Prompt action was taken using audiovisual (radio and television) and online platforms for teaching and learning (Jamaica Education Transformation, 2021).

However, due to socioeconomic disparities, some students did not have access to the necessary learning tools, impacting their educational progress (Blackman, 2021). This condition coupled with the lack of social interaction, has influenced their learning and the rate of their development. UNESCO (2020) highlighted the setback in achieving equality and access to education due to the issues associated with COVID-19. The social environment of schools plays a vital role in learning and development (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). Essentially, developing the whole child is crucial because children spend a significant amount of time at school learning and interacting with peers and teachers, which greatly influences their behaviour (Eccles et al., 2011). In essence, the quality of a student's experience at school affects their social, emotional, and physical well-being.

## Schools as Supportive Institutions

### School and School Climate

Education is a basic human right emphasised in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It promotes creating a tolerant, respectful, and appreciative atmosphere for human differences in schools (United Nations, 1990). Schools are critical in preparing children for society and adulthood by fostering their intellectual and social abilities through educational regulations, structured curricula, and socialisation (Education Reform, 2013; Eccles et al., 2011). According to Eccles et al. (2011), schooling links various ecological system levels, which affect human behaviour. Notably, educational policies and regulations are shaped by societal norms, practices, and culture, which further influence how schools operate, including social interactions, teaching and learning practices, and leadership.

Ungar (2012) argues that the education system allows students to adapt positively to challenges and become well-rounded citizens. Cohen (2009) stresses the significance of implementing measures to eliminate bullying and punitive disciplinary actions, ensuring healthy educational experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to develop age-appropriate programmes that recognise individual capacities and competencies, offering appropriate care, resources, and opportunities to promote positive adolescent development (Landgren, 2005; Lerner et al., 2011; Ungar, 2012; UNICEF, 2012, 2022).

Ensuring a high-quality experience for secondary school students is crucial for their social and emotional development. According to Durlak et al. (2011), fostering social and emotional competencies can lead to improved behaviour, such as increased prosocial actions and decreased conduct and internalising issues. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted school operations and impacted students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with pre-existing conditions. Parker et al. (2021) found that despite efforts to address educational needs during the pandemic, children in poor living conditions and those with disabilities in several Caribbean countries faced significant challenges. Additionally, students with limited internal resources struggled to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic.

A positive school environment with caring and supportive relationships can boost students' sense of belonging and promote self-esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy through interactions with peers and teachers (Evans, 2006; Meškauskienė, 2017; Pottinger & Stair, 2009). Meškauskienė (2017) discovered that teacher quality demonstrated through traits like respect, sincerity, trust, tolerance, and support

can positively impact students' self-esteem. Such a positive environment can motivate students to work harder and more diligently towards their academic goals, as they develop trust in their teachers and feel empowered to succeed (Benard, 2004; Martin & Dowson, 2009, as cited in Furrer et al., 2014).

A study by Gardner and Webb (2017) with 334 Jamaican adolescents found that high self-esteem, as well as support from peers and family, were protective factors against depression and anxiety among Jamaican adolescents. Conversely, low self-esteem was identified as a risk factor that increased the likelihood of poor decision-making and negative behaviours, which had an adverse impact on their well-being. Keddie (1992) elaborated on this symbiotic relationship, reporting that Jamaican adolescents with low self-esteem were more likely to experience teenage pregnancy. Additional studies have shown that adolescents experience greater self-doubt and anxiety when protective factors are limited and difficult situations are encountered (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013).

The school climate reflects the interpersonal relationships between peers and teachers, as well as the collective and individual feelings of safety (Bear et al., 2016). Devine and Cohen (2007) emphasise that school climate is the nexus between personal and group experience. Collectively, school climate—the quality and character of school life" (Cohen et al., 2009)—emanates from the school culture, in which artefacts, such as school regulations, policies and physical infrastructure, are enshrined into values, practices and behavioural norms (Schein, 2009).

For many students, the school is a primary source of socialisation and support (UNICEF, 2020; OECD, 2020). As Stewart (2013) notes, social interaction is an integral part of human existence, and the quality and quantity of interaction directly impact the strength of social and relational capabilities developed during these interactions.

The role of schools in promoting overall well-being through fostering positive relationships between students, and teachers, was impeded by the COVID-19 restrictions. Students were unable to interact with others as closely as before, leading to a negative impact on their mental health (Bourne et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2020; Parker et al., 2021). Studies have shown that students without access to digital devices, particularly the more disadvantaged, faced even greater challenges in terms of socialisation and learning, leaving them more vulnerable (Parker & Alfaro, 2021; UNICEF, 2020; OECD, 2020).

## Adolescence: Impressional Period

Adolescence is a crucial period in human development, as it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this time, individuals undergo physiological, psychological, and cognitive changes in preparation for the responsibilities of adulthood (UNICEF, 2012). The World Health Organization (2016) highlights that adolescence is a time for growth, self-discovery, identity formation, skill development, and exposure to various social influences and risks. This stage of life is significant, as it enables individuals to establish their sense of self, adopt behavioural norms, and embrace values necessary for adulthood (Smetana et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2016).

Typically, adolescents are characterised as high risk-takers, attributed to their fragile emotionality and heightened vulnerability (Hashmi, 2013). They are often seen as delinquent or provokers of law and order—presenting themselves as victims and or perpetrators of crime and violence (e.g., CCYD, 2010; Ministry of National Security, 2013; Smith & Green, 2007). With the varied risk factors within their environment, some experience poor school attendance or dropout, while some exhibit poor social conduct, resulting in an increased rate of adolescent pregnancy, suicide ideation, depression, and school violence (UNICEF, 2016, 2018).

Albeit these deviant behaviours are often attributed to adolescents or youth, Braithwaite (2009) argues that within high-risk environments where there is limited protective

factors, engaging in risky behaviours sometimes compensates for psychological conciliation to avoid emotional pains evoked by feelings of depression, confusion, fear, frustration, and low self-esteem (p. 5). The human compulsion for pleasure over pain lends to Braithwaite's explanation suggesting that some youth demonstrate these behaviours in exchange for a euphoric experience and, some, rebellion. Hofer et al. (2010) underscore this claim by inferring that the regulatory process occurring during adolescence contributes to the adolescents' behavioural response and adaption to stressors, inadvertently affecting the quality of their psychosocial functioning (p. 572).

The reasons behind risky behaviours during adolescence have piqued the interest of many researchers due to the increased vulnerability of this stage. According to Steinberg (2020), brain development during adolescence can contribute to such behaviours, but as the brain matures, cognitive control improves, and dependency on peers decreases. The ultimate result is establishing identity and purpose through life-changing experiences, which can increase vulnerability to external demands and expectations from family, schools, and intimate partners (Mezulis et al., 2010). To mitigate such risks, supportive environments are necessary to strengthen internal capacities and buffer developmental challenges (UNDP, 2014; Ungar et al., 2011; WHO, 2016).

In a longitudinal study, Lerner and Lerner (2011) emphasise the critical role of support in ensuring positive outcomes for adolescents. Family, school, and community resources were found to have a positive impact on youth development and civic engagement. Adolescents demonstrated more developmental assets when parents, teachers, and other supporting adults were involved.

Recent research on the behaviour of adolescents has unveiled some interesting insights into their level of dependence. While teenagers have traditionally been known to gradually distance themselves from their parents, longitudinal studies have confirmed a normative decrease in this relationship over time (Tsai et al., 2013). Adolescents find greater security and respect from their peers (Hashmi, 2013). This separation is often attributed to parents' need for control and autonomy and their perception of their child as rebellious (Branje, 2018). Moreover, studies have shown that authoritarian parenting practices can lead to poor behavioural conduct in boys and heightened depression, anger, and suicide rates among girls (Smith & Moore, 2013). However, when adolescents have an enabling environment and opportunities to express themselves without fear of victimisation, they can better regulate their self-esteem and resilience (UNICEF, 2012). Many teenagers now take a more active role in their development by creating a two-way communication process (Smetana et al., 2014).

## Socioecological Variables

While there are certain universal traits and behaviours that can be attributed to adolescents, the group is quite diverse due to varying cultural norms and values (Chen, 2001). Jamaican adolescents, in particular, are affected by colonial artefacts, norms, values, and practices. The socio-historical, economic, and cultural factors in their lives can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. Unfortunately, high levels of crime, violence, poverty, social inequality, and inequity (Harriot & Jones, 2016) can result in negative behavioural responses. Notably, urban children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are two to three times more likely to witness violent events (Samms-Vaughan et al., 2005). Those from higher socioeconomic groups tend to live in safer communities and have fewer experiences witnessing violence. Comparatively, children exposed to crime and violence are more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression (Small-Bartley, 2010).

The social reality among some Jamaicans reveals the ongoing thought of attractiveness being associated with lighter skin colour, causing some Jamaicans to bleach their skin to acquire beauty and attract partners (Charles et al., 2017).

Cultural practices and beliefs within society have influenced the sexual behaviours of adolescents, increasing sexual transmitted infections, sexual violence, and pregnancies (UNICEF, 2018). According to McFarlane et al. (2019), adolescent pregnancy is rooted in several cultural factors, such as, "intergenerational transmission of teenage pregnancy, the prevalence of absentee fathers and romantic partners, experiences of sexual abuse and the influence of media and popular culture" (p. 13). Wilson-Mitchell et al. (2014) conducted a study with adolescent girls 13-15 years and noted that many girls faced the existential reality of child abuse and sexual violence, with approximately 23% of the sample admitting to attempting suicide one or more times in the last 12 months due to sexual innuendos.

Despite ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, corporal punishment remains prevalent in the Caribbean and is used to discipline children (Bailey et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2021). A recent report by UNICEF indicates a need for a ban on corporal punishment due to its widespread use across the island (UNICEF, 2021). Unfortunately, children from poorer families are at a higher risk of experiencing severe physical punishment compared to their wealthier peers (UNICEF, 2011). Living in high-risk communities and homes also exposes adolescents to substance use, which can hinder their participation in age-appropriate activities and negatively impact their social relationships within the family and with positive friends (Connell et al., 2010; Segal & Stewart, 1996).

The interplay of various factors during adolescence plays a significant role in shaping one's ability to regulate oneself, make sound decisions, and tackle problems critically. However, some adolescents may be exposed to unfavourable circumstances, such as poverty, abuse, family and community violence, and other risk factors, which can hinder their development. Research posits that those exposed to such risks are more prone to emotional and psychological distress (Parker et al., 2021). As highlighted by WHO (2012), social class and socioeconomic factors are key determinants of adolescents' well-being and can either level the playing field for all youth or exacerbate the systemic advantages of privileged ones while minimising those of the less privileged.

Richter et al.'s (2009) study utilised multilevel logistic regression models to analyse "socioeconomic differences in self-rated health among adolescents and the contribution of health-related behaviours" (p. 396). The study revealed that adolescents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more inclined to make healthier choices than those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, the research found a link between self-rated health and family affluence across different countries, indicating that adolescents from higher SES backgrounds have an advantage in accessing necessary resources and opportunities, which translates into more social, health, and academic options.

A study conducted by Fox and Strachan (2007) on Jamaican adolescents highlights the importance of having protective factors at home and school. The study found that the absence of these factors can lead to alcohol and substance abuse, as well as other negative behaviours. The study revealed that one-third of the adolescents in the sample had experienced physical attacks, while 13% were perpetrators. To further emphasise the significance of a supportive environment, Ungar et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study with disadvantaged youth from five different countries. The study showcased the positive impact of youth contributing to their families and coping with chronic adversities. According to the researchers, youth who were given the opportunity to contribute to the adultification process in a culturally and developmentally appropriate manner were more likely to access relevant resources that promote well-being. The study also highlighted the dual contribution of both youth and their caregivers to the development of psychosocial well-being in the context of multiple risks.

Negative societal influences or risk factors can lead to various behavioural responses in youth, including increased crime and violence, victimisation, adolescent pregnancies, suicide and suicide ideation, and substance abuse (Bailey,

2011; Braithwaite, 2009; UNICEF, 2012, 2018). However, Telzer et al. (2018) argue that positive social impact can influence social adjustment and lead to positive outcomes in youth. They suggest that taking advantage of the social context of adolescents and their sensitivity to societal norms can be critical for positive adjustment.

## Resilience: A Dynamic Concept

Understanding resilience is not exclusive to studying the individual's innate traits to cope with trauma or crisis or, as commonly stated — being able to bounce back (Ungar, 2011). Studies over a few decades have revealed that an individual's innate capacity can be stymied or bolstered depending on the interacting variables and multiple systems within their socioecological space (Rutter, 1987; Ungar, 2008; Ungar et al., 2021). For this reason, studies have purported resilience as a dynamic socio-ecological process and a positive development outcome precipitated by cultural elements, environmental opportunities and resources made available along the developmental pathways, despite exposure to adverse conditions (Ungar, 2008; Ungar, 2012).

### Resilience Models

Over the years, the multiple approaches and varying resilience perspectives have led to three general resilience models (Crawford, 2006). The Challenge Model of Resilience highlights a curvilinear relationship between the risk and the outcome. The model suggests that exposure to severe adverse conditions (e.g., poverty, poor parenting style, violence) will, over time, reduce the individual coping capacity. However, mild exposure will likely build the ability to deal with future occurrences (O'Leary, 1998; Rutter, 1987).

The Compensatory Model of Resilience explicates the opposing nature of the risk factors and protective or compensatory factors. It suggests that if the protective factors are compelling (e.g., social support or high self-efficacy), they compensate for risk factors, increasing the likelihood of a positive outcome. Conversely, the model proposes that when risk factors are more powerful (e.g., no or limited social support, low socioeconomic status) and the compensatory factors weaken, the individual is most likely to elicit a negative response (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Ledesma, 2014).

The Protective Model of Resilience explains the important connection between protective or promotive factors and an individual's capacity. According to this model, providing developmentally appropriate services and opportunities to someone can strengthen their ability to adapt and succeed (O'Leary, 1998). To further develop on this model, Ungar (2015), proposes the Ungar's Ecological Model of Resilience, which considers the developmental path and sociocultural context of adolescents, recognising that resources and opportunities are crucial for navigating adversity and thriving.

### Building Resilience

The outcomes of students as functional, productive citizens have rested on the arms of academic achievements or performance, with little focus on the social and emotional competencies necessary to advance along their life trajectories. Some students fail to succeed during their developmental pathway, as sometimes their internal capacities are compromised or not supported by their environments. In essence, the home, school, community, and/or society may fail to provide the necessary resources and opportunities to facilitate success and reduce the barriers or risks they may experience (Ungar, 2008). Fundamentally, resilience is influenced by an individual's capacity, supportive relationships, and systems to cope with stressors and adversities.

Studies show the debilitating effects of the low internal capacity of adolescents to make effective decisions. Schwarzer and Warner (2013) acclaim that adolescents with low self-efficacy are likely to evade intimidating or difficult situations and may experience more significant self-doubt or anxiety that diminishes functionality. Supporting this claim, Vaughan-Johnston et al. (2020), in a study with adolescents, found that self-esteem may "provide a protective factor against engaging in physical violence to prevent bullying" (p.14). The

study also highlights that self-esteem importance is seen to be strongly associated with "directly and indirectly defending peers" (Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020, p. 14). Similarly, Gardner and Webb (2017) asserted that social support (family and peer) and self-esteem are protective factors in preventing depression and anxiety. Further, Weiland et al. (2012), using a sample of youth between the ages of 18 and 22 years from large communities, found that resilience in early adolescence is a protective factor against alcohol problems and drug use, showing the negative correlation between resilience and alcohol problems and illicit drug use.

In a learning institution, the teacher's appraisal and expectations, and the student's perception of their safety, along with other elements within the school climate, play an operative role in strengthening the resilience of adolescents. Schools are important institutions to provide protective factors to promote resilience. Meškauskienė (2017) underlines that when teachers demonstrated an acceptance of students as they are, they were more likely to feel respected and embrace a positive disposition.

On the contrary, Pottinger (2012) argues that children exposed to punitive disciplinary measures become disconnected and alienated. Accordingly, Pottinger and Stair (2009) conducted a study with 225 Jamaica students, in which they found an association between teachers' and peers' limited trust and unkind treatment towards students and school performance and resilience. Similarly, Evan (2006), from a case study conducted in urban Jamaica, highlighted the harmful effects of demoralisation of students. The study found that coercive and punitive measures to maintain classroom control resulted in an unfavourable reciprocal exchange between students and teachers, with students reporting feelings of resentment and shame. Smith and Moore (2013) purport that school punitive disciplinary practices were predictive of poor behavioural conduct and depressive symptoms, suicide ideation and anger.

Rutter (1987, 2000) elaborated on the imperative nature of opportunities and support for youth in adverse conditions to further emphasise the role of support and an enabling environment in strengthening resilience. The study highlights that risk factors account for less than 50% of a high-risk population and 50-80% of positive outcomes among high-risk youth was due to the provision of opportunities and support during adverse conditions. Typically, social support plays an integral role in the psychological well-being of adolescents, lending to resilience, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Dolan et al., 2006, as cited in Smyth et al., 2015; Berk, 2001; Cobb, 2001).

As adolescents evolve, they see themselves as receivers and contributors to their development. Given that the vast majority of their time is spent in school, schools should be one of the primary sites to provide the requisite support, resources, and opportunities to strengthen students' ability to adapt, become more self-aware, solve life problems, make constructive decisions, and effectively contribute to their development.

## Discussion

Fundamentally, the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model underscores and provides clarity on individual's development and how it is shaped by the complex interplay between their environment and various socio-ecological factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Further complimented by the Ungar Ecological Model of Resilience, Ungar (2011) emphasises the role of the socioecological variables and cultural elements as critical to adolescent development. According to evidence provided from the review, schools play a crucial role in shaping the resilience of students by creating a positive school climate. Seemingly, students—adolescents—are more vulnerable and require intentional efforts by schools to promote positive outcomes and resilience. The evidence suggests that the social and physical environment within which adolescents operate, including their homes, schools, and society, has a significant impact on their outcomes. The negative school environments have resulted in adverse effects influencing students' well-being, self-esteem, social skills, problem-solving abilities, and sense of purpose and identity (Benard, 2004; Fleischmann, 2018).

School climate, being the "quality and character of school life" experienced by students,

is influenced by the school culture (Schein, 2009), regulations, policies, and physical infrastructure (Eccles et al., 2011). Given the importance of developing students' resilience through the education system, it is critical to carefully consider the design and implementation of the elements that contribute to a positive school climate.

Evidently, in Jamaica, the use of corporal punishment and other punitive measures in schools have, in some cases, acted as risk factors which may have led to an increase in delinquent behaviour and drug use among students (Evan, 2006; Fox et al., 2007 ; Pottinger, 2012; Pottinger et al., 2009; UNICEF, 2021). Students exposed to high risk factors associated with COVID-19 coupled with other negative issues such as violence exposure are likely to experience higher vulnerability that may lead to poor school attendance, and poor social conduct (Parker et al., 2021; Rutter, 2000; UNICEF, 2016, 2018; Weiland et al., 2012;). Adolescents, particularly the most vulnerable and at-risk require added support for strengthening resilience (Rutter, 2000; Weiland et al., 2012).

On the contrary, students provided with positive educational experiences are more likely to foster healthy and productive behaviours (Cohen, 2009; Schwarzer et al., 2013; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020). While resilience is often thought of as an individual's ability to overcome their circumstances, it is also greatly influenced by the social and ecological agents present in their environment (Ungar, 2008; Ungar, 2011).

As Jamaica seeks to fulfil its national development goal to "empower Jamaicans to achieve their fullest potential" (PIOJ, 2009, p. xv), transforming the school climate within secondary schools should be paramount on its agenda. Secondary school students are transitioning to higher education and joining the workforce, further assisting the country's social and economic development.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of harsh disciplinary measures like corporal punishment in Jamaican schools have resulted in negative school climates, leading to a rise in delinquent behaviour and drug use among students (Evan, 2006; Pottinger, 2012; Pottinger et al., 2009; UNICEF, 2021). To mitigate these risks, it is important to build resilience in adolescents, especially those who face higher risk factors such as exposure to violence and gangs (Weiland et al., 2012; Rutter, 2000). Schools that provide positive educational experiences are more likely to foster healthy and productive behaviours in students (Cohen, 2009; Schwarzer et al., 2013; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020).

Examining school climate and its influence on students' resilience requires a comprehensive view of the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environment. Inevitably considering the social psychological theories and principles is crucial in broadening the understanding of the school climate and students' resilience. While resilience is often thought of as an individual's ability to overcome their circumstances, it is also crucial to recognize that the development of adolescents is not solely determined by internal factors, but is deeply intertwined with the social and ecological agents present in their environment. (Ungar 2008; Ungar, 2011). This dynamic interaction shapes their experiences, choices, and ultimately, their path towards healthy development. Failure to address the challenges they face, often amplified by their environment, can have far-reaching consequences, not only for individuals but also for entire societies.

Concerning the likely disparity in school types at the secondary level, understanding the critical contextual variables to build resilience is relevance to students' outcomes. To establish positive school climates and promote students' resilience, it is proposed that more attention be given to the cultural and historical elements as well as the current new trends and norms occurring among adolescents. Further studies should examine the cultural nuance within the society and school norms and practices, considering students' perspectives, the environment, and available resources for students' development. Analyses of the school climate as a determinant of students' resilience should also take into account the distinctive types of secondary schools in Jamaica, both traditional and upgraded, and how they operate within the social structure of the country. The literature should be synthesized to further inform this discussion.

## Implications for Further Study

While the evidence suggests a connection between school climate and student outcomes, a deeper investigation is necessary. School climate is a multifaceted concept that can be viewed from different perspectives. To truly understand the school climate of secondary schools in Jamaica, it is essential to identify the key variables that accurately measure this construct in the Jamaican context. Additionally, a comprehensive methodology that captures students' perspectives and lived experiences should be utilized. The literature indicates that some schools may have a positive school climate while others have a negative one, resulting in positive or negative student outcomes. This highlights the importance of further investigation into the variations in school climate across different types of schools in Jamaica.

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# Listening to Teachers' Feedback on how INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament Transforms Classroom Management Approaches

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## Abstract

INSIGHTS is an evidence-based, comprehensive intervention that enhances the social-emotional development and academic learning of young children (aged 3–8 years) and their parents' and teachers' behaviour management skills. Children also learn problem-solving strategies to resolve dilemmas with parents, teachers, and peers. Qualitative interviews were conducted to explore teachers' views on how INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament transformed their classroom management approaches. The programme is underpinned by theoretical frameworks for temperament-based intervention: Goodness of Fit Model (2), which purports that the environment should be adjusted to align with the temperament of a child; and social learning theory. Both frameworks offer theoretical explanations on how the environment interacts with children's temperament.

Data were collected using two focus groups: one group consisted of six classroom teachers and the other group had five participants, including the principal. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed that teachers were more conscious of their students' temperament profile and the implications for embracing the goodness of fit as they reframed their perceptions about the children. Understanding and working with children based on their temperament was considered significant in classroom behaviour management. The INSIGHTS programme is transformative because it enhances relationships and the skills learned are sustainable and transferable.

*Keywords*: INSIGHTS, children's temperament, classroom management approaches

## Introduction

INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament (INSIGHTS) is a comprehensive intervention that includes teachers, parents, and classroom programmes. The intervention was developed in partnership with educators and parents in under-resourced urban public schools in New York City. Sandee McClowry developed the programme and was the principal investigator of the three clinical trials that tested its efficacy. With temperament (personality) theory as its foundation, *INSIGHTS* provides parents and teachers with a framework for appreciating the individual differences of children. Temperament is the consistent behavioural style that a child demonstrates across a variety of settings and circumstances. The INSIGHTS programme helps parents and teachers to replace negative patterns of interaction and harsh disciplinary

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practices with responsive ones that match a child's temperament. The programme enhances children's self-regulation by strengthening their empathy and problem-solving skills.

The content of the teacher and parent programme is delivered by a facilitator using a structured curriculum that includes didactic content, professionally produced vignettes, handouts, group activities, and individual assignments. In the classroom programme, the facilitator and the children's teachers use puppets to train the children to develop the skills needed to resolve daily dilemmas. The puppets exemplify different temperaments of school-age children, as illustrated in Figure 1: Coretta the Cautious (cautious/slow to warm), Gregory the Grumpy (high maintenance), Fredrico the Friendly (social/eager to try), and Hilary the Hard Worker (industrious).

**Figure 1**

*Puppets representing the temperaments of school-age children*


INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament is an evidence-based intervention with teacher, parent, and classroom programmes that work synchronously to support children's social-emotional development and academic learning. INSIGHTS' efficacy has been tested in three clinical trials funded by the United States' Institute of Education Sciences and the National Institutes of Health. Cappella et al. (2015) found that INSIGHTS, compared to a control condition, enhanced student engagement and teachers' practices in the classroom. In Jamaica, preliminary assessments of the programme have been carried out within varied contexts. In 2012, a 3-day workshop was conducted with Jamaican teacher–trainers, development officers, and persons in supervisory positions from the Early Childhood Commission (ECC). These participants were very positive toward the principles of the INSIGHTS intervention and they felt the content of the programme was relevant to the Jamaican context. Subsequently, presentations giving an overview of the programme were made to educators at the Ministry of Education. The INSIGHTS intervention received full support from Ministry of Education executives—the Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Elaine Foster Allen; and the Chief Education Officer, Mrs. Grace Mclean. In Semester 2 of the academic year 2013–2014, with the permission of the Ministry of Education and in collaboration with the Early Childhood Commission, the programme was implemented in three schools: Alpha Infant and Primary, Central Branch All Age, and John Mills All Age schools.

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) has been identified as one of the most influential theories in learning and development that explains the

development and modification of behaviours (Nabavi, 2012). According to (David, 2016 p. 44), "Social learning theories emphasize on changes in behaviour and learning through the observation and imitation of the actions and behaviours in the environment". The theory postulates that children learn appropriate/inappropriate social skills through observational and vicarious learning (Slavin, 2012). Bandura (1965, 1977) posits that reinforcement administered after observation of a particular behaviour tends to contribute to reinforced behaviour being used again. For Bandura, cognition plays a significant role in learning, which is a shift from traditional behaviourism. This suggests that observing behaviour and the consequences that follow the behaviour do not necessarily contribute to the reproduction or reduction of the behaviour. For learning to take place, the social learning theory is guided by four elements; attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1965). The theory proposes that children learn from observing others, then modeling the behaviour based on the attention paid to the behaviour being modeled. The attention focused on the model producing the behaviour, the level of internationalization of the behaviour, and the consequences observed will likely lead to the retention of the behaviour. The child is likely to reproduce the behaviour that has been learned when placed again in a similar situation. One is motivated to reproduce the behaviour based on how one internalizes the consequences; positive consequences are likely to see a child more motivated to reproduce the behaviour, while negative consequences are likely to reduce the motivation to reproduce the behaviour (Bandura, 1965; Bandura & Walters, 1977; Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). Attention is more likely to be focused on behaviours that are novel. In addition, certain characteristics of the person modeling the behaviour will attract the attention of the observer, for example when the person modeling the behaviour is attractive and is perceived positively. For retention to take place, the observer rehearses the behaviour and tries to replicate it. Additionally, one must be motivated to replicate the behaviour learned, but the behaviour may vary depending on the level of development and the consequences previously observed as a result of that same behaviour (Nabavi, 2012).

One key feature of the social learning theory is reciprocal determinism, which "emphasizes that behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors are all equal, interlocking determinants of each other" (Kelland, 2021, para. 14, lines 9-10). This explains that the combination of dispositions or traits, interaction with the environment, and the consequences of action all contribute to the behaviour exhibited. Socialization and social interaction play critical roles as children navigate their environments, learn to conform to societal norms, and learn behavioural restraint or self-regulation (Kelland, 2021). As a result of this interaction, children's self-efficacy develops, determining how they perform and behave in school. Children who have a low sense of self-efficacy (particularly social efficacy), may experience challenges in the classroom which could lead to aggression (Kelland, 2021).

Although the Social Learning Theory provides an understanding of human behaviour and how motivation can influence learning, it does not take into consideration the intrinsic motives for wanting to learn. Furthermore, aspects of maturation and changes over the lifespan are not regarded (Nabavi, 2012).

## Goodness of Fit

"Understanding temperament is a useful tool for early childhood teachers to promote goodness-of-fit which occurs when teaching or caregiving practices positively align with children's temperament and classroom interactions" (McCormick et al., 2018 in Sealy et al., 2021, p. 8). Kinkead-Clark (2020) and White et al. (2018) posit similar views that understanding the temperament of children at the early childhood level helps caregivers and teachers to embrace differences in children. According to Hipson and Séguin (2017) goodness of fit explains that an optimal outcome is possible when there is a matching of children's

temperament with environmental demands. For Ostergren (2004), Goodness of Fit is the matching of the demands and expectations of parents with the temperament of the child. Similarly, the Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Innovation and Improvement Project's Infant Toddler Temperament Tool ($IT^3$) (n. d.) reports that a Goodness of Fit happens when the expectations of the adults and their approaches to parenting/caregiving accommodate their children's personality traits and is supportive of their children's wellbeing.

Whenever there is mismatch or poor fit between children's temperament and the motivational support for learning offered by teachers' relationships and students' outcomes are negatively impacted (Roubinov et al., 2017). Thomas and Chess in Hipson and Séguin (2015) "characterized children whose temperament was consistent with the environment as exemplifying a good fit, whereas those whose temperament was dissonant with the environment had a poor fit" (p. 2). In addition, teacher student relationships are moderated by the temperament of the children (Hipson & Séguin, 2015). In their study with preschoolers, Hipson and Séguin (2015) sought to establish whether or not Goodness of Fit between children's temperament and the teacher-child relationship is likely to predict aggressive and prosocial behaviours. The results suggest that a child's prosocial behaviour is associated with the relationship between the child and teacher. Additionally, "temperament was found to significantly moderate the association between teacher–child relationship and prosocial behaviour" (Hipson & Séguin, 2015, p. 9), with optimal temperament (i.e., being resilient), having a stronger association with teacher-child relationship and prosocial behaviour (Hipson & Séguin, 2015). In their study, Roubinov et al. (2017) conclude that teacher-child relationship and classroom climate influence students' temperament and physiological stress regulation as they transition into kindergarten. Consequently, the quality of the environment and the interactions influence the temperamental traits of students.

## Literature Review

### Understanding Children's Temperament

Rothbart and Gars Tein (2008) in Kornienko (2016) define temperament as inherited traits that explain the differences in how individuals regulate their emotions, attention, and actions; expressed in behaviours related to their environmental situations. In addition, Duckworth and Allred (2012), state that temperament refers to

> "individual differences in behaving, feeling, and thinking that are relatively stable across time and situation and reflect the relatively enduring biological makeup of the organism, influenced over time by heredity, maturation, and experience" (p. 627).

There are three types of temperament: easy, difficult, and slow to warm up (Thomas & Chess, 1971 in Sealy et al., 2021). A child considered to be of an easy temperament is adaptable, tends not to get easily upset, and is of a happy disposition. The difficult (active or feisty) child tends to get easily upset, has intense reactions, is likely to be fearful of new people and situations, and is considered a fussy child. The child who is slow to warm up is likely to be less active and fussy and may withdraw from new situations. However, with repeated exposure, a child that is slow to warm up can develop positive reactions to meeting new people and being introduced to new situations (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2010).

The temperament of students impacts their educational outcomes. Sealy et al. (2021) identified different temperament profiles of school age children that influence classroom engagement: negative reactivity, task persistence, withdrawal, and activity—where children possess a mix of the different temperaments. Children can fall on a continuum from low to medium to high in the four dimensions of temperament profile (McClowry, 2014). Negative reactivity is the extent to which a child may have a negative

response to a situation, which may be communicated by body language (e.g., a facial expression denoting discontent). Task persistence indicates how likely it is that a child will stick to a task until it is done; withdrawal measures how a child responds to new people and situations; and activity refers to how frequently a child moves about (McClowry, 2014).

Children's temperament is based on culture, with some variations within each culture (Sealy et al., 2021). Sealy et al. (2021) found that children raised in one collectivist culture, i.e. the cultural values and norms of the community or group have presidence over individuals' values, were likely to have higher negative affectivity, while in another collectivist culture children were likely to exercise greater self-control. Children raised in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures tend to be more impulsive and engage in higher motor activity. Sealy et al. (2021) concluded that schools which engage in culturally relevant classrooms are able to accommodate the different temperaments of children. Kornienko's (2016) study evaluated the impact of children's temperament on the mother/child relationship, finding that the different temperament characteristics of children were more likely to predict the relationship mothers have with them. The findings suggest that attention span and persistence predict positive relationships and confidence that their children will behave appropriately, while adaptability predicts mildness in temperament. Mothers are likely to spend more time controlling their children when the children's threshold of responsiveness is high in distractibility. They concluded that "children's temperament is a dimension of mother's relation to child" (Kornienko, 2016, p. 346).

In a study by Middleton (2012) that examined the association among children's temperament, similarity between parent and child temperament, parenting behaviours, stress, and the behavioural problems of children ages 3-5, it was found that mothers' parenting stress was associated with their children's externalizing behavioural problems. The data suggest that children with high activity levels were less flexible in their behavioural styles and their mood was affected by parenting stress. In addition, mothers were likely to use negative/inconsistent punitive parenting when they experienced high levels of parenting stress. For children with easy temperament, mothers also had easy temperament and lower levels of parenting stress (Middleton, 2012).

The temperament of children is affected by environmental factors and teachers' commitment and how they respond to children (Isa et al., 2017). Roubinov et al. (2017) concluded that teacher-child relationship and classroom climate influence students' temperament and their physiological stress regulation as they transition into kindergarten. Consequently, the quality of the environment and the interactions influence the temperamental traits of students. According to Isa et al. (2017) children's temperament impacts their development of self-concept and how they adjust to positive behaviours in the classroom. Kinkead-Clark (2020) found that teachers, as a result of their limited understanding of the temperament of their students, tended to use harsh disciplinary methods. Isa et al. (2017) therefore suggested that, in ensuring appropriate accommodation of students with different temperaments, teachers should have the relevant knowledge and skills.

The accommodation of students' temperament will "create opportunities and space towards the well-being and success of children through commitment, support and positive response" (Isa et al., 2017, p. 180). Likewise, Roubinov et al. (2017) state that children with high negative affectivity and high effortful control are likely to experience increased stress when the classroom has little encouragement for students. Earlier research by Nelson et al. (1999) discovered that negative emotionality significantly predicted school performance and behaviour at the elementary level. The results showed that easily frustrated children were likely to be high in irritability.

Temperament can be observed and assessed at the early childhood level, and this can help teachers to understand children's temperament — thereby helping them to develop social–emotional

skills that will reduce their risk of developing behavioural problems. Having knowledge of children's temperament can help teachers to develop interventions to address negative behaviours and conflicts (Isa et al., 2017). As Duckworth and Allred (2012, p. 638) noted, "interventions that teach children metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting and planning, can also improve self-regulatory competence and, in turn, academic outcomes".

## INSIGHTS and Children's Temperament

Evidence from several studies revealed that engagement in INSIGHTS intervention programmes contributes to reductions in problem behaviours, greater responsiveness in disciplinary practices towards children from parents and teachers, enhanced behaviour management strategies for teachers, and improved academic outcomes and focused attention for students (McClowry et al., 2005; McClowry et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2014; Sealy et al., 2021). Teachers, parents, and students benefit from INSIGHTS because it helps "children and teachers recognize and work with temperament, thus fostering the development of social–emotional competence for navigating current and future challenges" (Blair et al., 2004; Perry, 2007 in Sealy et al., 2021, p. 10). Students who participate in INSIGHTS intervention programmes had improvement in behavioural engagement (McCormick et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2014) and exhibited less aggressive and disruptive behaviours (McClowry et al., 2010; McCormick et al., 2015). In addition, McClowry et al., (2010) found that children were more focused and more attentive to their work with fewer cases of emotional dispositional behaviours. There was also improvement in the academic development of shy children (O'Connor et al., 2014).

Males benefitted significantly from participating in INSIGHTS — those with temperament profiles that were industrious showed improvements in their literacy scores. In addition, boys who were considered cautious had higher mathematics scores, in comparison to girls (Collins et al., 2017). It is noteworthy that INSIGHTS intervention programmes have the strongest benefit among at–risk children (McClowry et al., 2005; McCormick et al., 2015). According to McClowry et al. (2005) the intervention improves the behaviour of students who are diagnosed with disruptive behaviour disorder; while for McCormick et al. (2015), high risk children who are impacted by the social reality of the family have improved outcomes when engaged in the programme.

The INSIGHTS programme also benefits teachers. Teachers learn strategies that help students to deal with aggressive behaviours based on their temperament. They are able to use meaningful responses when students engage in negative reactivity (McClowry et al., 2010). In addition, they learn to be sensitive to children and engage in reframing the reactivity of their responses (Collins et al., 2017; McClowry et al., 2010). According to McClowry et al. (2010, p. 30), "Teachers are taught to use scaffolding and stretching strategies for students whose temperaments are low in task persistence, a dimension of temperament often associated with attentional problems". The success of INSIGHTS in maintaining and developing self-regulatory skills after the early childhood level is due to its sustainability through the grades. This suggests that teachers should embed the programme in their curriculum delivery (McCormick et al., 2020).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to ascertain the views of the principal and teachers about the usefulness of the INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament Programme as a tool for enhancing teachers' behavioural management competence. The behavioural management approaches that were used by teachers before participating in the programme were explored. The following research questions guided the study:

**RQ1**: What behavioural management approaches did teachers use at the early childhood level before participating in INSIGHTS?
**RQ2**: What are educators' views on the usefulness of the INSIGHTS programmes?

## Methodology

### Research Context

The participating school was St. Tekakwitha (pseudonym), a Catholic institution that comprised an infant, primary, and single-sex high school for girls. This case study involved only the infant and primary schools in keeping with INSIGHTS target age group. The institution is located in a major urban area of Jamaica. St. Tekakwitha is a faith-based community that "fosters positive relationships among learners, teachers and parents". Tekakwitha, the infant school, was founded in August 1896 by the Roman Catholic Sisters to facilitate the education of children 4-6 years. For the years 2021 and 2022, The infant school had a capacity for 300 students, however, the school had 185 children enrolled, with ten teachers, one guidance counsellor, and the principal. Initially a preparatory school started 125 years ago, the primary school has a current population of 1,000 students. There are two principals: one for the infant school and one for the primary school. The infant school is a feeder school for the primary school.

The INSIGHTS intervention at this educational institution occurred in two phases. The first phase (2013) involved two teachers who taught a class of 5-year-olds at the infant level and two teachers who taught Grade one classes at the primary level. In addition, the two guidance counsellors from both the infant and primary schools participated in the INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament intervention for ten weeks.

Subsequent to this phase, the infant school became a licensed school for integrating INSIGHTS into the school's curriculum. As a licensed school, St. Tekakwitha Infant re-entered the programme, having previously participated in the INSIGHTS intervention. In the first year as a licensed school, the school based facilitator (who is usually the Guidance Counsellor) trained as a programme facilitator at a 2-day training workshop and then implemented the programme for the required ten weeks. The guidance counsellor was monitored regularly; including visits from one of the team members of the INSIGHTS programme. The guidance counsellor was then assessed and the school subsequently certified by the INSIGHTS in Jamaica programme. It is important to note that the parent sessions can be facilitated by a team from INSIGHTS if the school makes the request. The school rents the INSIGHTS tools from the programme office at a minimum cost per academic year.

The guidance counselor who was trained as the facilitator for the programme is no longer employed to St. Tekakwitha and some of the teachers who were trained to implement the programme have also left the school, to be replaced by new teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the principal thought it was opportune to organize an online professional development session for the teachers. From 2021 to 2022, the INSIGHTS programme was delivered via Zoom video conferencing software to 12 staff members of the St. Tekakwitha school for two hours once per week for eight weeks. The sessions were facilitated by two co-facilitators (university lecturers) who implemented the programme. In addition, the principal and the guidance counsellor also participated in the weekly sessions.

The present study reports on the 2014 phase when the school became licensed to integrate INSIGHTS into the curriculum. The programme is housed at the School of Education, The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

### Participants

The participants for the two focus group discussions were ten teachers from all grade levels in the infant school, with more than two years of working experience; the principal of the infant school also participated in one of the focus group discussions.

## Data Collection

Virtual focus group discussions were used to obtain principal's and teachers' views of the usefulness of the INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament programme as a tool for enhancing teachers' behavioural management competence. Using the Zoom video conferencing software, one of the programme facilitators moderated focus group discussions. Volunteers were organized into two groups; one group consisted of six classroom teachers and the other group had five participants including the principal. The focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed using otter.ai. Both facilitators read the transcription and modified it where necessary. The interview protocol used the following items as a guide for the focus group discussions:

1. Explain the behavioural management strategies you regularly use in managing the children's behaviour (before INSIGHTS).
2. How do you find the children's response to these strategies?
3. What is your understanding of the INSIGHTS programme?
4. What aspect(s) of the programme have you implemented? (Could you provide some details and examples).
5. How have the children responded to your implementation of the programme? (Anecdotal evidence/examples).
6. How has the programme impacted or influenced their behaviour in the class?

## Data Analysis

Teachers' and principal's statements were coded using the constant comparative method of comparing each segment with the previous coded segments. Codes were grouped based on similarities. Both facilitators met regularly to code and analyze the data collected. QDA miner software was used to manage the qualitative data analysis process.

ACES-Understanding the Effects of Childhood Trauma Daniella Watson (2016)
https://slideplayer.com/slide/13278289/

Scenario 1
Quan is a 6 year old 1st grader who moved to Framingham from Vietnam when he was 4 years old. He has great difficulty dealing with disappointment and anger. He often wants to be first, particularly when lining up for class, and will cry, yell, kick and tantrum if he cannot be first. When Quan feels it is unfair that he is 'out' in a game, he exhibits these same behaviors. These episodes can last anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes, and can be triggered by something that appears to his teacher and peers to be very insignificant. These meltdowns prevent Quan from engaging in positive social peer interactions and leave him feeling very embarrassed once he has calmed down.

## Results

The research questions guided the reporting of the results:

### RQ1: What behavioural management approaches did teachers use at the early childhood level before participating in INSIGHTS?

Behavioural management approaches used by teachers at the early childhood level before participating in INSIGHTS were both productive and counterproductive. This suggests that teachers were using strategies which were effective in managing children's behaviour. However, because of the limited tools available, teachers admitted to employing some counterproductive strategies inadvertently — used in a primarily reactive manner to the situations in the moment. The theme *productive and counterproductive* reflects teachers' overall management approach before participating in the INSIGHTS programme.

### Use of Productive Behaviour Management Approaches before INSIGHTS

Before INSIGHTS, teachers employed different behavioural management approaches, including reinforcements, behaviour modifications (time-out, sending students to the principal, and consulting with parents to understand a child). In addition, some teachers also believed in setting the tone at the beginning of the school year by instilling rules, structure, and expectations.

Reinforcements used were: providing tokens, points, and stickers; and praising the students. Teachers reported that students responded positively to reinforcement. The following are selected teachers' comments regarding the use of reinforcement:

> I use my reward system where they get rewards at the end of the day, and at the end of the week … this reward system, has been there long before INSIGHTS. I definitely use my stickers, my treasure chest, because if you're [students] good, you get to take something from my treasure chest, it might be daily or at the end of the week

> I always use my reward charts where I give stickers and points. And I always use rewards, for example, I keep my points system. So, at the end of the year, students will be getting their trophies and so forth from my class, so they work towards achieving these.

Behaviour modification was utilized by some teachers in addressing problem behaviours. Some teachers would re-direct the students' attention by getting them to participate in activities. The teachers expressed their perspectives:

> I would do a number of finger plays, I would say stretch your arms up to do a lot of actions to bring them back and then I would talk to them about the noise or what they were doing. Hands up, down, forward, sideways, and then you'll get everybody's attention, and then you can speak to them.

In addition, the teachers noted that strategies such as finger play and the teachers presence projecting authority helped children to be more attentive and controlled in their behaviour during classes:

> I use finger play and so forth to get their attention. Or sometimes for me, I'll just stand in the room. And once my presence is there, and I stand looking at them, you'll hear the group leaders, because I use group a leader system, the group leaders would be saying to the members of their group, "Miss is in the room", or "Miss come in". So once your presence is there, they will just get quiet, or you will hear them whispering to each other to get quiet. You just stand in that room and they understand what it means.

Consultation with the children's parents helps the teachers to get a better understanding of the students and to determine the most appropriate strategies to be used:

> Just hearing from the parents to find out what they did.

Some teachers were of the opinion that their college training was more theoretical and not practical. This can be observed from the following comment:

> We have read the theories, but they do not apply to us. The context is different.

### Use of Counterproductive Behaviour Management Approaches before INSIGHTS

There was consensus among all the teachers that before exposure to INSIGHTS they would rely heavily on harsh disciplinary strategies such as corporal punishment, rough talking, naughty corner, put students out of the class, hands on their heads, and silence. These strategies were considered by the teachers on reflection to be counterproductive and punitive.

"Timeout" and "the naughty corner" were seen as synonymous prior to INSIGHTS. Teachers commented:

> The timeout corner, I find that a lot of times the children will adhere because nobody wants to go to that corner. Nobody wants to be in the naughty corner. Because guess what? If you go in the naughty corner, you don't get to take anything from the treasure chest. Before the program, we would have used the methodologies we were taught in college like timeout.

Quarrelling with the students was another example of counterproductive action by the teachers. Teachers even admitted to not negotiating with their students concerning consequences for behaviour.

> Now, seriously, so when they become disruptive, I tend to get a little bit loud and quarrel and say no. Put them [the student] in a corner. Remove them from the class itself. I put them in the naughty corner. I send them to the principal.

> Well, for me, the whole task is in punishment. Everybody has their heads down. If they're not cooperating, they would stand up with their hands on their head. It wasn't a matter of negotiation. You're disruptive then you get punishment...the approach will silence them for the whole time.

Teachers admitted that some of their strategies did not have a sustainable effect on children's behaviour in the classroom:

> Well, for me, it would work for a while, for a period of time. And then they would just get disruptive again. Everybody would be quiet for a while, until another week, they went back into the same mode. It was very frustrating. Because you're applying the practices you learned in theory at college, but it doesn't apply to Jamaican children. You place them in a corner and they will be playing with the wall.

## RQ2: What are educators' views on the usefulness of the INSIGHTS Programmes?

Educators view the INSIGHTS programme as a comprehensive one that helps them to understand the differences in students' temperament and how to deal with these differences. The teachers' perspective is that INSIGHTS also helps the students to understand themselves and develop problem-solving skills. In addition, they were more informed on how to use time-out effectively and gained additional tools for training students in how to behave in a regulated manner. The themes that emerged from teachers' and principal's feedback following their participation in the programme were: INSIGHTS enhanced relationships and the skills learned through INSIGHTS are sustainable and transferrable.

## INSIGHTS Enhances Relationships in the Classroom

INISGHTS is a comprehensive programme that enhances relationships in the classroom. Teachers recognise that the INSIGHTS programme helps with improving relationships among all stakeholders in the school, specifically teachers, parents, and children — thus enhancing social interactions in the classroom. The teachers felt that the principles of INSIGHTS were comprehensive because they were not restricted to the classroom only. They shared that:

> The INSIGHTS program, it's not only for the teachers, the INSIGHTS program caters for teachers, students, parents, and caregivers. INSIGHTS is a program that helps the teacher, the students, the parents, any adults or anybody, for that matter, to deal with different people, and helps you to understand that even though we think that everybody should probably have an idea of how to behave, the programme helps them to regulate their behaviour.

INSIGHTS program benefits all stakeholders involved in raising children.

> The INSIGHTS programme helps teachers to understand and reframe how they see misbehaviour. Some teachers state that the programme helped them to deal with students in different situations and from different environments; to understand that each student has a unique temperament. They explained that, INSIGHTS:

Helps us to know the students, know their temperaments and know that no child is rude. So it's just that they are different in temperament and we now learn to adapt.

Everybody has a different temperament no matter what age you are, or whether you are a child or an adult … INSIGHTS helps the teachers to find the best ways to deal with children who have different temperaments.

> St. Tekakwitha school's earlier participation in the programme involved not only teachers, but parents and children. The programme was implemented in a comprehensive manner, so that parallel to the 8-week teacher sessions, there were also parent and child sessions for the same duration. The teachers who gave feedback on the

> most recent training in the programme were reflecting on the sustainable effects of INSIGHTS on children's problem–solving and relationship skills. They shared that:
>
> The programme definitely helps them [students] to problem solve. When they have issues that they need to solve they stop, think about it and then they plan what they're going to do. A lot of them will come to you and tell you, miss I have a dilemma. So they get the understanding.

INSIGHTS assisted teachers in understanding the differences among children and teachers explained how the programme has continued to influence children's interactions.

### The Skills Learned through Insights are Sustainable and Transferrable

The INSIGHTS programme is sustainable, and the skills are transferrable to other situations beyond the school environment. Evidence of the sustainability of INSIGHTS is that not only are children applying the principles at school, but they are transferring these principles to their homes. Teachers reported that the children would label their parents with the different temperament profiles and use the strategies (such as negotiation) when communicating with their parents. This internalization of INSIGHTS principles by the children reflects the posture of the school; INSIGHTS has been built into the school's culture. The teachers voiced the following perspectives:

> It works. It's sustainable.
>
> Our students are calmer, less likely to get into altercations, they are more the mediators, they're more tolerant of their peers, because they learn not to get frustrated easily.
>
> Across cohorts we have seen this for over six years. We don't have fights and that's what is amazing about the program, it's sustainable.
>
> I was given the opportunity to participate in INSIGHTS and to learn and to take away what I've learned to use in everyday life, not only at school.

The principal interjected by voicing:

> For me INSIGHTS has made me look good. As a principal at a school that is very calm, we don't have a lot of complaints from parents about students being aggressive. To me, the fact that the teachers have been trained in INSIGHTS is another asset, because when they deal with the students, it's a matter of a wanting to come to school. So for me, it is less stress on the principal, everybody used to take students to the principal's office.
>
> Now, I rarely have cases unless it's a new teacher. And then she's like — I want to do INSIGHTS, I need to do INSIGHTS because she's hearing the students. She's hearing the other teachers. And it's a wonderful tool; I think it is the only tool for behaviour management right now. Because the theory that we learn at college doesn't apply as well as INSIGHTS, I've done, so that adaptability and being able to see less violence, even coming from a violent home, the children are helping the parents who are having issues in the home as mediators, I'm talking 4- and 5-year-olds.
>
> So for me, INSIGHTS has been a blessing.

In addition, the principal explained that parents who participated in earlier sessions endorsed the INSIGHTS programme and recommended it to other parents for training, noting:

> When the parents started to complain, two parents [during a PTA meeting] turned and said — that's why you need to do the INSIGHTS programme. I was so impressed, the parents turn to the parents and say, "so when is the other one, Miss when can we sign up?". This is what we are getting because the parents know that when my child does X, Y, Z, I use this strategy and the other one agreed and said yes, INSIGHTS is working and more parents need to join INSIGHTS.

The principal continued to highlight the effects of INSIGHTS by noting that the principles are internalized by the students in that she hears the students using the vocabulary learnt in the programme and implementing the solving dilemmas principles. This suggests that the students who participated in INSIGHTS were not only transferring learning from the sessions to their everyday interactions, but through these interactions influencing other students who did not participate in the programme. The principal reported:

> You can see the difference in the students when they talk about their dilemma. When they use the word, the different terms, the characters—they are fascinated by the characters. Okay, so you can see even the look on their faces when they are watching the vignettes. So I think the characters in the vignettes, and the words that they use, the different words, temperament, dilemma, the students are really interested in them and they use these words and talk about them even at play outside. So even though the 4-year-olds' teachers don't practice it, the 4-year-olds will learn from the 5-year-olds in the yard while they play. So you will hear them say to a baby, "we are having a dilemma here".
>
> They love to come and tell you, "Miss I have a dilemma". I remember, once a child said, "Miss, stop, I have a dilemma". So the whole class said, and I looked at them, and they were the ones who helped her solve the dilemma. So that's the part that I find tends to stick with them. Whether we wish to believe it or not, their little lives have dilemmas. And once they're able to deal with it, once they're able to stop and think and think that they can resolve their dilemmas, they are fine. And the fact that they are even able to recognize they have a problem, and try to figure out ways in which they can work it out or ask for help.

Teachers, parents, and students benefit from the programme when it is reflected in children's behaviour and their approach to problems at school and at home. Teachers are of the view that INSIGHTS empowers children by showing them that they have choices. Students are able to evaluate and apply problem–solving strategies and negotiate with their teachers and parents when there is a dilemma. The principal was confident that the INSIGHTS programme contributed to children's overall social and emotional growth and problem–solving skills, commenting:

> The students feel empowered; and practicing it. Yes, so you find that crosses boundaries and break down barriers, they're using it with their siblings. Yes, come on. Come on, we were having a dilemma. And they're going to the parents with the dilemma, they had to try and solve it. Now, they [parent] are learning that their children help them to solve their own problems. For example they [children] will say, "alright mommy, I know, you don't have eggs but you have sausage, and if you don't have the sausage I'll take porridge".

The INSIGHTS programme has psycho-emotional benefits for teachers; they develop patience and are able to manage their emotions. It was expressed by some of the teachers that before INSIGHTS, counterproductive methods were used to deal with challenging students. Following their participation in the programme, the teachers voiced that they were now more competent in managing their emotions. This is reflected in the following comments:

> It has helped me to calm down, learn patience.
>
> I learned great patience, and what more for me actually emphasize the love, love and attention that they [children] seek.
>
> INSIGHTS helped me to deal with the situation at hand and to be very calm when I'm doing so. Well, for me, it has helped me to exercise a little more patience and think about INSIGHTS and using different steps.

Teachers have also gained more understanding, and appreciate the differences in students through INSIGHTS.

> INSIGHTS helps me to better assist the child with the personality or the trait that they have.
>
> Because you can't treat everybody the same way and so INSIGHTS, opens your eyes in how to treat a situation. And to bring all the positive out of that situation.

The INSIGHTS programme helps teachers to reframe how they view misbehaviour and influences the behavioural management strategies utilized. The most effective strategies for teachers were contracts with children and parents, negotiating, solving the dilemmas using the stop light, and social competence strategies. Similar strategies were presented when teachers were asked to share how they would respond to

a child who has issues waiting his turn and was likely to be disruptive whenever he does not get what he wants. There was overwhelming support among teachers for negotiating with the student and using contracts to reduce the negative behaviour. Teachers' comments included:

> I would negotiate with Juan[student], in negotiating and helping Juan to understand that, yes, it's good to be first, but not always, because somebody should get a chance to lead. We could do a contract to say, look, you're going to lead today, tomorrow, you're going to help me to choose a leader.

> I could enter into contracts. But that's the last resort, the first is to help him to recognize that we cannot always be first or not all the time we would win and what we will use for that is for them to stop and empathize with others, to see how they feel. So it's learning to negotiate. Yes, so literally stop, think, I would do the stoplight as well, reasoning as well.

Despite the positive gains from INSIGHTS there were some teachers who still had misunderstandings of certain principles. Some misunderstandings were about temperament and the dimensions. Some teachers did not remember that they were told in the sessions that they should look for the predominant behaviour in children's response to the environment to determine their temperament profile. A few of the teachers were still not clear on how to identify the children's temperament profile. A few teachers felt that temperament changed based on the situation and environment; in other words temperament was unstable.

> I am also aware that I have multiple temperaments and it helps me to better understand the students who do and who display them more than the others.

> Because a student might be well behaved in class, but once they go outside on the playground, that student's temperament may change. So we know how to deal with the student when in the particular situation that they're in.

This finding suggests that some teachers may need further clarification and reinforcement of the core INSIGHTS principles. For example, if a temperament dimension such as task persistence had other dimensions (such as being withdrawn), it was difficult for the teachers to understand the combined dimension in students. So teachers can get locked into the positive dimension of the child's temperament and neglect the shy aspect that the child will need skills to manage.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers' feedback on INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament gave us some understanding of how the programme impacted teachers, the classroom, and the school environment; and highlighted teachers' classroom management approaches before participation in the programme. Before INSIGHTS, teachers used both effective and counterproductive behaviour management approaches. Based on the findings, it can be argued that before INSIGHTS there was a mismatch between the support provided by some teachers and the temperaments of their students. These results reinforced those of Hipson and Séguin (2015) and Roubinov et al. (2017) that the relationship between teacher and student impacts the quality interaction in the classroom. Some strategies used by the teachers were effective, because they used certain classroom management approaches learnt in college, such as managing students' behaviours through reinforcement and behaviour modification. However, others said that there were gaps in their training—which is one of the reasons they struggled with counterproductive strategies as teachers. They felt that their training in college was too theoretical and did not equip them fully with practical tools for behavioural management in the classroom.

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the repeated reinforcement of the desired behaviour is likely to result in children exhibiting the behaviour in the future (Bandura, 1965; Bandura & Walters, 1977). Teachers modeling behaviour along with reinforcement are likely to contribute even more effectively to students' behaviour regulation. Students learn effective and counterproductive behaviours from their teachers by observing the daily activities of the teachers. This is particularly true at the

early childhood level where children are in their formative years. Social learning theorists argue that after a certain time these behaviours are internalized by children paying attention and modeling what they observed. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are continuously trained and participate in professional development to increase their capacity and skills in classroom management strategies.

The INSIGHTS programme is considered efficacious in helping teachers understand and work with students (Cappella et al., 2015). The current findings suggest that teachers are more understanding and appreciative of the role of students' temperament in managing their behaviour in the classroom. Teachers now realize that their limited understanding of students' temperaments can lead to harsh discipline (Kinkead-Clark, 2020). In accepting the importance of temperament in understanding children, teachers have also accepted responsibility for creating a goodness of fit environment in the classroom. The goodness of fit principle involves realizing that behaviour management strategies are more optimal when aligned with students' unique temperaments. Hence, the INSIGHTS programme challenges teachers to accept differences in their students and see "misbehaviours" as teachable moments —since all temperaments have strengths and constraints. It is these constraints that children need to learn how to manage as they grow and mature.

The strategies of INSIGHTS not only enhance relationships but as the teachers testified, they are transferrable. Furthermore, teachers also applied the INSIGHTS strategies in their households. Parents reported to the principal and teachers how their children were using the INSIGHTS vocabulary at home and implementing the strategy for solving dilemmas; teachers confirmed observing children managing their dilemmas on the playground. Despite the positive feedback, there were some principles that a few of the teachers seemed to have misunderstood. For example, a number of teachers referred to children as having multiple temperaments and did not have a clear understanding of the combined dimensions. This suggests that facilitators will need to spend more time on these issues in future training by giving more activities such as role-play to clarify and discuss these misconceptions.

Overall the findings from this study are consistent with those of Cappella et al. (2015) and the results reflect those of McClowry et al. (2005), McClowry et al. (2010), O'Connor et al. (2014), and Sealy et al. (2021) that the INSIGHTS programme contributes to a reduction in behavioural problems, and improves behaviour management strategies by teachers who are more thoughtful in their use of disciplinary practices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the INSIGHTS programme is transformative because it promotes mindset change in how teachers perceive children's temperament and behaviour while enhancing positive behaviour in the classroom.

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# A Toolkit Intervention for School–Aged Jamaican Students: Strategy for Collaborative Involvement during the Pandemic

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## Abstract

The Ministry of Education and Youth, Jamaica, designed Home Learning Kits (HLKs) for students in Grades 1–6 to address learner disengagement due to the change in classroom settings because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This intervention required a collaborative approach by diverse educational stakeholders for the production, distribution, collection, implementation, and bi–directional return of the kits. This novel approach to learner engagement prompted a need to understand the implementation of the HLKs and their use by students. Using a convergent explanatory mixed method approach, the sample included 167 of 400 schools and approximately 36,000 students islandwide. The quantitative data was analysed descriptively and thematically for the qualitative data. Overall, the results revealed the need for better collaborative efforts to execute the HLK intervention. The findings are significant to assist the Ministry of Education to implement policies and further initiatives for transformed educational outcomes.

*Keywords*: National Standards Curriculum; parental involvement; school leadership

## Introduction

Transformation in society is enabled through deliberate community efforts (Anthony, 2019; Gerdes et al., 2020; Levkoe et al., 2016; Rees et al., 2020; Weale, 2013; Wiek et al., 2014), and transformation requires organisational structures that promote partnership and commitment to implementing initiatives (Boons & Lüdeke–Freund, 2013). Collaboration leverages the strength and resources of partners that are stronger collectively than by an individual or agency (Kinsella–Meier & Gala, 2016; Krahmer & Douglas, 2020). Therefore, COVID–19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity to demonstrate collective efforts in positive transformation.

Teaching and learning are crucial to societal functionality (Musbaing, 2020; Van de Werfhorst, 2014), and national development (Burriss, 2017; Sundaram, 2020). In Jamaica, the government's response to abate the disastrous long–term impact of the COVID–19 pandemic on the education system required contextual research data to provide pivotal responses. Since these were unavailable, this research used quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to unearth rich, thick data (Merriam, 2014), to understand this phenomenon, and posit learning interventions.

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This study uses a convergent explanatory mixed methods approach to highlight the collaborative efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Youth (Hamilton-Flowers Head of the MoE core curriculum unit, Jamaica], personal communication, October 12, 2020) and stakeholders: The National Parenting Support Commission, parent mentors, parents, educators, educational researchers, and non-profit organisations to address student learning challenges during the COVID pandemic.

## The Problem

While natural disasters occur globally and the Caribbean is prone to experience hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, which causes infrastructural damage and dislocation; the COVID–19 pandemic was unprecedented. It caused the largest disruption in the world's education system by restricting physical contact including face–to–face classes. Additionally, literature pre and post–pandemic suggest that in instances of limited learning opportunities, despite the presence of virtual or online learning activities, primary school children were the most affected demographic (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2020).

Due to interrupted face–to–face instruction with the onset of the pandemic, the learning deficit for over 600,000 school–aged children in Jamaica has not been empirically numerated (S. Bennett [Acting Head of the MoEY curriculum unit, Jamaica], personal communication, January 14, 2021). Internationally, researchers posited that children ages 6–12 years were the most affected (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2020). Researchers suggested this learning deficit was due to the dependent nature of these students on their learning compounded by lowered reading and comprehension skills (Bratsch–Hines et al., 2020).

The inadequacies of digital gadgets and technical infrastructure, such as reliable internet connectivity to enable economical teaching platforms, limited the technical capabilities of parents, teachers, and students, and complicated teaching and learning endeavours. To ascertain which intervening variables significantly impacted student learning is a question yet to be answered. Notwithstanding the response, the issue was the absence of face–to–face which was once the educational norm. The prolonged lack of face–to–face interaction adversely affected the student learner incrementally. The result was learning loss, and loss of opportunities for new learning (García & Weiss, 2020).

However, not all countries were devoid of statistics to assess lost learning opportunities. Within eight weeks of a sustained school lockdown, the Netherlands reported three percentile points or a fifth of the school year was lost for the comparable period pre–COVID. Additionally, children of less educated householders suffered a 60% loss in learning (Engzell et al., 2021).

Comparatively, Jamaica's school system was closed to face–to–face activities since March 2020*, albeit* the statistical data for evidence–based decision–making is unavailable. With the second wave and persistent high numbers of COVID cases, there was mandated school closure across the island with exceptions for students sitting external examinations. In 2019, the Jamaican government allocated 17.3% of its Gross Domestic Product to education. In 2020–2021 the MoEY received some J$117 billion of the government's J$853.5 billion budget, which equalled approximately 14% (McIntosh, 2020). However, the vast inequity in school facilities, programme offerings, and funding across schools was so pronounced that this allocation did little to address the persistent inequity. Students from less–resourced schools and the lower socio–economic brackets were at greater risk of limited or no access to the internet, had fewer familial resources, and were limited or demotivated to seek learning opportunities. This was coupled with inadequate adult support throughout the lengthened school closures.

### COVID-19 Impacts on Sustainable Development

A significant proportion of Jamaica's population experienced reduced income resulting from the loss or low employment during the pandemic (Statistical Institute of Jamaica [STATIN], 2020). This situation exacerbated the

disproportionately skewed impact on the lower socioeconomic sector (Bottan et al., 2020; STATIN, 2020). Students in less economically stable households were extremely disadvantaged by this income reduction.

Similar to other countries, COVID affected the psychological stability of teachers and learners; albeit, in Jamaica, citizens were already burdened with escalating crime and an over–burdened health system.

The sustainable development goal (SDG 4) posits inclusive and equitable education and the promotion of lifelong opportunities for all (UN Sustainable Development) and is a determinant of national development (Boeren, 2019; Fägerlind & Saha, 2016; Nazar et al., 2018; Tsang, 2000). Therefore, interventions were needed to allow the kind of transformation required to reinstate education levels to their pre–COVID stage during and post–COVID. Any other alternative could result in devastating socioeconomic consequences and derail sustainable educational goals (Bailey, 2018; Khan et al., 2018; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021).

## Implications of School Closures on Student Transition in Jamaica

The Primary Exit Profile (PEP) is a series of placement tests done from Grades 4 to 6. PEP creates a profile of each learner who is then placed in an appropriate secondary school. One of the downsides of the pandemic was the rescheduling or cancellation of these examinations. Accordingly, students due to exit Grade 6 to transition to secondary schools were placed based on their grades from the previous two years (i.e., 2018 and 2019). This occurrence pointed to the need for strong profile assessments of students and the abatement of learning gaps so that school transition was not hampered by the absence of standardised test scores. This pinpointed that transition from primary to secondary school is more successful when students' learning is consistent (Uka & Uka, 2020).

## Learning Deficit among Jamaican Students

The MoEY conducted diagnostic tests at grade levels to assess students' grade level completed in 2020. In the absence of similar data from previous years, the results were unhelpful in determining learning loss. What was ascertained were figures that showed that of the national student cohort of approximately 600,000 at least 100,000 (16%) students were not adjusted to school and were outside virtual schooling (S. Bennett [Acting Head of the MoEY curriculum unit, Jamaica], personal communication, January 14, 2021). Most of these students were disconnected from formal learning programmes and considered most "at risk"—a term used to describe "students with a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school" (Trauth & Harris, 2019, p.25).

## The Home Learning Kit Intervention

The MoEY conceived the Home Learning Kit (HLK) as a means of reaching students who would have been underserved by virtual learning during the pandemic. The HLK was designed to help students in Grades 1 to 6 connect with structured learning as well as to promote community collaboration and awareness of the importance of continued learning.

The HLKs were developed from the national school curriculum around specially selected subject areas and represented objectives assessed by the curriculum developers. To facilitate the success of the program, particularly among the lower socioeconomic groups, an enabling environment needed to be created to motivate and support student learning. Therefore, students needed to receive the kits promptly, and schools should devise systems to collect students' work and provide feedback. This logistics could only be possible with collaborative community effort and a buy–in between school and community. Parental, church, and community organisations needed to lend their influence to promote student engagement.

## Stakeholders and Collaboration

Education should matter to everyone; therefore, all institutions should be considered committed partners in this sector (Gorur, 2020; Hernandez, 2010). According to Kinsella–Meier and Gala (2016), four levels of partnership exist, i.e., communication, coordination, and collaboration. However, collaboration is characterised only when interactions between individuals or multiple agencies establish interdependency to achieve common long–term goals. Collaboration requires "increased involvement and investment of time" (Kinsella–Meier & Gala, 2016, p. 6).

The interconnected network of individuals and organisations who work to provide educational opportunities and support for student success represents the educational ecosystem. In this ecosystem, school leaders, teachers, community organisations (e.g., The National Parenting Support Commission), parent mentors, parents, students, educational researchers, and non–profit organisations are all collaborators to enable meaningful intervention at the local school level (Potochnik et al., 2017).

**Principal Collaboration**. The principal is the main school leader called to provide transformational leadership within their sphere of influence to enhance the educational ecosystem. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership involves mutually influenced leaders and followers performing at advanced levels to benefit the team. Transformational leadership is evident when principals mobilise staff and influence the behaviours of teachers, parents, and students to achieve the desired outcome of HLK delivery, collection, feedback, and bi–directional return of HLK material to students within the two weeks cycle (Anderson, 2017; Putra et al., 2020). This convergence of attitudes from players influences positive behaviours toward the goal and is required before the start of the project. Attitudes should be aligned for successful intervention (Wightman et al., 2020). This suggests that various stakeholders of the collaborative team, especially the school leader, need to be impactful to formulate cohesion with other stakeholders at the school level. Additionally, the school leader needs to nurture parents to understand their role in a successful objective (Prestiadi et al., 2020).

**Parent Collaboration.** Parental involvement included parenting, communicating, volunteering, attending, supporting learning at home, partaking in decision–making, and working in partnership with the community or schools (Sylaj & Sylaj, 2020). Parental involvement implies efforts to take an active role in their child's education via participating or volunteering in school activities (Sad, 2012). For the educational process to function successfully, there must be a respectful and appreciative relationship between teachers and parents. This relationship must be extended within the teaching and learning and communal spaces. The importance of parent–teacher collaboration and its positive impact on children is well documented and shows a strong statistical significance between parental involvement and academic achievement (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016). According to Sylaj and Sylaj (2020), the lack of effective communication is the greatest barrier to increased parental involvement because weak communication reduces the partnership between family and school.

Teacher collaboration with the families of students also helps to maximise the school's role to ensure the achievement of common goals. The link between school and parents in the school–home intervention is so significant that the ability of the MoEY to engage parents at a national level, particularly among the targeted population of those households with little or no virtual learning opportunities, should require little effort.

## The National Parent Teachers Association (NPTA)

Collaborators such as the National Parenting Commission engaged parent mentors islandwide for the HLK intervention, and they were instrumental in strategic alliance with their communities. The National Parent Teachers Association was also contacted to collaborate and provide parental support to other parents to empower them to support and motivate their children when using the HLK. Home–based

learning during the pandemic has resulted in greater observance of the home–school relationship (Zhang, 2021). This has led to the interrogation of home–to–school collaboration, the perceptions of immediate stakeholders, and investigations to address the learning loss challenges in Jamaica as well as to find ways to deliver best practices for equitable and inclusive quality education.

### Aim of Study and Research Questions

The overall aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of distribution and use of the HLK for children at the primary level, aged 6–12, during the pandemic, and the extent to which collaborative design influenced the effectiveness of this process. Five research questions guided the study:

***Research Question 1 (Quantitative)***:
How many HLK were distributed?

***Research Question 2 (Qualitative)***:
While executing the HLK intervention, what did the school leaders perceive their roles to be and how were these roles demonstrated?

***Research Question 3 (Qualitative)***:
In what ways did the roles of parents impact the HLK intervention process?

***Research Question 4 (Mixed)***:
To what extent did the kit delivery numbers translate into effective remote teaching and learning?

***Research Question 5 (Mixed)***:
What was the best practice for the HLK intervention during natural disasters in Jamaica?

## Method

### Research Design

The research employed a convergent explanatory mixed methods research design. The quantitative stage used a survey while the qualitative phase used focus group interviews. Integration occurred with concurrent data collection. The mixing continued through analysis and the presentation of the data. Data collection was impeded by COVID restrictions which impacted the research team's ability to validate reports of HLK distribution numbers post–school delivery.

### Participants

The sample population was delimited to government–owned public primary schools for students, aged 6–12 years (Grades 1–6), their principals, teachers, and parents. The selected schools for delivery of HLK were perceived by the MoEY as having the most disadvantaged learners, and they were located in urban, rural, and deep rural areas, within regions one to seven, across all 14 parishes. Selected communities had limited or no internet connectivity, had reported disengagement from the teaching and learning process since COVID, and students had little or no access to devices. Approximately 462 schools received HLKs at each cycle; a total of 752 schools received HLKs in February 2021.

### Research Instrument

The instrumentation process consisted of a mixed survey on the HLKs, a parent survey, and a semi–structured and two focus group interviews.

**Survey instruments.** The HLK mixed survey was a Google Form questionnaire administered online to school leaders. The items included demographic queries, four were rated scales, three were closed–ended (quantitative) and five were open–ended (qualitative). The survey collected numerical data and rated perceptions and opinions. Here is a sample of the survey items:

- Was the number of kits provided adequate for the student population in your school?
- Were the kits distributed on time after drop–off at the schools? (RQs1–2)
- What was the volume of completed work submitted by students?
- How did administrators rate their perception of how students used the Learning Kits?

- What was the perceived level of use of Learning Kits when rated against online, radio, and television use by students?
- Did school leaders perceive a need for continued publication of the Learning Kits? (RQs3–5)

Analysis of the HLK survey directed qualitative data collection. The follow–up checks and monitoring of the schools' distribution process were interrogated. School leaders who reported high, low, and median collection numbers, or challenges on the HLK survey were prioritised for the next phase of data collection.

## Ethical Considerations

The participants provided consent. All ethical considerations were followed and consent was received from all participants.

## The Intervention Perceived by the MOE

The intervention logistics involved the preparation and production of the HLK, delivery, and distribution to the schools which was managed by individual school leaders. Feedback was completed before the students could receive another HLK as a quality assurance measure and to track the HLK's use and students' progress.

**Preparation and Production.** The content for the HLK intervention was prepared under the supervision of the MoEY's Core Curriculum Unit. The 28–page HLKs were in tabloid format. Approximately 50,000 and 96,000 copies were prepared and published by two media houses and distributed to the schools biweekly. Kit learning is best augmented by teaching content (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2020); therefore, at another level, collaboration was logistically sought to have weekly programmed radio and televised broadcasts concomitantly addressing the content of the Learning Kit. The HLK intervention ranged from October 2020 until February 2021. There were no publications in January 2021 based on a late December publication schedule that extended into January after the Christmas holidays. Monitoring of the distribution was done at a regional level by the MoEY, and the communication for delivery and collection was coordinated between the publishing media house, the school principals and teachers, and the parents and students.

**HLK delivery and distribution to schools.** The printed Kits were delivered via the newspaper publisher's delivery route mechanisms to centrally located schools and then redistributed to other schools. The principals/school leaders collected HLK for their respective schools and local arrangements were designed by the schools.

**Parent Survey on Virtual Learning.** This survey was administered online to parents of students in receipt of HLK for Grades 1–6. Questions surrounded the collection, student home use, and redelivery for feedback (RQs 3 and 5). The instrument consisted of 14 questions on a 4–point Likert Scale ranging from 1 – never, 2 – sometimes, 3 – always, 4 – I do not know. Both survey instruments had a suitable reliability score ($\alpha > 0.8$).

**The semi–structured interviews.** Interviews were conducted with the school leaders including principals and teachers. Two separate focus group interviews were conducted – one session consisted of a face–to–face with parent mentors and the other session involved parents via an online virtual platform. Data collection modes ensured triangulated validation.

## Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The data were collected in two consecutive phases up to March 2021. The quantitative data was obtained initially from production to delivery of the HLK. Validation of the delivery data was done via the delivery records from the publishers as well as the main survey instrument which captured numerical data on the HLK delivery to the students (RQ1), return from the students to the school and subsequent feedback from the teacher (RQs 4–5). The different schools as well as pool of multiple participants allowed for varied responses through the intermixing and intramixing during data collection and the mixing design also occurred during the analysis (Johnson et al., 2007).

A sample of 12 principals was interviewed; an appropriate number to assess a phenomenon qualitatively to get rich, thick explorative data and achieve saturation (Creswell, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The school leaders' interviews were done via telephone and lasted on average 30 minutes. Twenty parent mentors attended the face–to–face focus group in an open courtyard under strict COVID protocol. Five outspoken and willing parent participants were selected for the focus group engagement from a MoEY parent meeting of 97 parents. The focus group engagements for the project lasted one hour and pseudonyms were provided to protect the participants and the integrity of the data. Qualitative data were transcribed and managed by an appropriate coding system which included the date, time, place, and pseudonyms, to ensure an ethical research process. The qualitative codes and subsequent categories were highlighted from the transcribed scripts with the best practice of consistent memoing being employed for the qualitative analysis procedure (Merriam, 2014). This continued until data reduction was achieved independently by each researcher (Creswell, 2013). Thematic revelations were reviewed together for further research validation.

## The Results, Qualitative Findings and Discussions

### Research Question 1: Distribution of HLK

School leaders reported the number of HLKs distributed to the students were adequately prepared and delivered to centrally located schools within the set timelines. In February 2021, 752 schools collectively received a total of 79,000.00 HLKs. The delivery detail is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Typical Publication and Delivery Detail of HLK*

| Time | Region | Parish | Number of Schools | Quantity of Learning Kits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | Kingston & St. Andrew | 59 | 13,447 |
| Oct. Week 1 | 3 | St. Ann | 60 | 5,084 |
| | 3 | Trelawny | 33 | 2,851 |
| | 5 | St. Elizabeth | 69 | 8,902 |
| | 5 | Manchester | 53 | 6,709 |
| | 6 | St. Catherine | 80 | 13,514 |
| Oct. Week 1 | 1,3,5,6 | 6 parishes | 354 | 50,507 |
| Dec. Week 3 | All 7 | 14 parishes | 627 | 95,408 |
| Dec. Week 4 | All 7 | 14 parishes | 627 | 95,408 |
| Dec.18, week 5 | All 7 | 14 parishes | 627 | 95,408 |
| | | **Total** | **627** | **432,139** |

*Note.* Table 1 represents publication and delivery detail of the HLK for October-December 2020. One week is itemized (as seen in the first half of table-above line) to show details of the summary of publication and delivery for October week 1. Thus the total publication and delivery for October week 1 is 50,507 and the Grand Total for October week 1 through to December week 5 in 2020 is 432,39. The Gleaner published five series of Kits, totaling 115 lessons. Printed, packaged, and delivered were 432,139 copies of learning kits to a maximum of 627 primary schools in Regions 1-7.

Figure 1 shows 88.4% distribution of HLKs were to primary schools, and 13.6% were to multi–grade schools. Multi–grade schools have small populations so multiple grades are taught by a single teacher. Approximately 84% of the schools reported the HLKs were adequate for the intended number of students.

The survey returned a 21% response rate. The preceding in–depth qualitative exploration enhanced the data analysis. Of the 160 responses, 120 (75%) school leaders indicated that the HLKs were promptly distributed to students/parents. This meant that 40 (25%) of the schools in the sample either failed to deliver the HLKs to the students/parents within the week or did not deliver them at all (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of HLK Islandwide based on School Type*

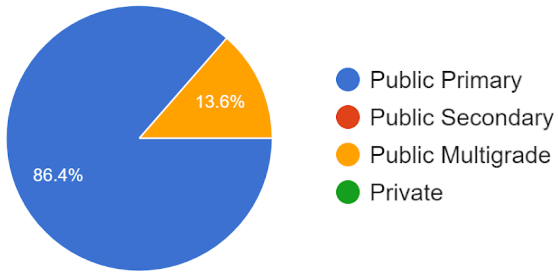
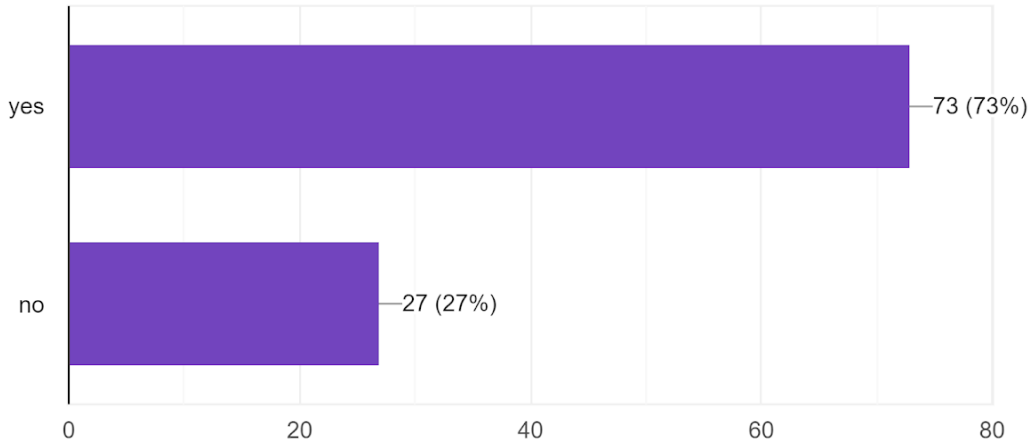



**Figure 2**

*Collection Time of the Kits by Parents*




Both approaches facilitated a comprehensive appreciation of the phenomenon. The quantitative data alone was insufficient to interpret the perceptions submitted during the interview or the behaviours displayed by interviewees towards the HLK intervention programme. The qualitative study concluded on four significant themes:

1. School leadership requires resourceful creativity in challenging times;
2. the distribution of the HLKs were impacted by the varying levels of apathy among parents;
3. The 21st–century learner must be self–directed, and
4. Jamaica's educational ecosystem needs supportive collaboration.

Interestingly, the participants did not offer any specific solution to the HLK distribution or usage challenges. Participants expressed disparate satisfaction with the overall intervention process, i.e., school leaders successfully delivering and returning feedback for student engagement consistently or parents who sought their child's learning with the HLK and associated media. Satisfied participants were triumphant, and dissatisfied ones complained. These parental challenges and benefits of involvement were supported by the literature (Wanat, 2010; Coleman & Churchill, 1997).

## Research Question 2: School Leadership's Response to the Distribution of the HLK

**(Theme 1) School leadership required resourceful creativity in challenging times**. The interviews revealed that successful delivery of the HLK from schools depended on the efforts of both school leaders and parents. Some targeted schools had different degrees of online teaching, and some students were able to gain varying degrees of access, depending on internet connectivity. The principals distributed and prioritised the HLK to the disengaged portion of the student population while teacher leaders were responsible for the teaching and learning process. The school leader received the HLK after being briefed by the MoEY, to ensure the delivery and mobilisation of the teaching staff to retrieve work from students and provide feedback. The schools successful at this task had principals who could be described as resourceful, creative, and interested in their students' learning. (*Teacher interview–007*), "My Principal called me in to assist with the HLK distribution and…I went to some workplaces to deliver and collect…"; "I visited the homes of the students but they were seldom home …" (*Teacher–009*); "I personally made several calls for parents to pick up the kits. We did not confine the HLK to remote learning but included the HLK activities for all students in the school while online.''

(*Principal interview–012*), Principal Clear said, "The HLK supplements the learning resources, and my teachers formatted the content to teach students online." Principal Determined (*pseudonym, interview–008*) shared how he took the HLK to the post office and delivered it to agreed locations in the community by riding his bicycle after realising a number of students had not received their kits. This was a stark difference from Principal Nonchalant who said, "I do not have students' contacts…"; (*Principal interview–001*), Principal Nonapologetic hastily retorted, "I was not able to reach my teachers to assist…"; (*Principal interview—002*), The HLK got wet when the pipe …", Principal Frustrated explained (*Principal interview–010*). Principal Excuses ensured that we understood the geographical constraints, "Most of our students live outside of the community…" *(Principal interview–004*). The principals also expressed their encounters with some parents who promised to show up but did not visit the school. Mrs. Patterson, Johnson, … were just too busy… (*Principal interview–003)*. Miss Patsy (pseudonym) hurled her frustration at me and reminded me that COVID was still raging (*Principal interview–006*). "Principal, the work is too hard and I cannot assist my child, I require help myself…the technology…" (*Principal interview–005*).

The principals also reported that office hours were mentioned by some parents as a deterrent and most understandably were the unfortunate cases of ill health and or death of family members which impacted students and their families negatively.

Overall, the principals explained facing geographical challenges, infrastructural mishaps, uncooperative or frustrated parents, low administrative or personnel support, lowered communication capabilities, and general non–idealistic circumstances that hindered the timely distribution and collection of the HLKs and bi–directional flow to students. However, in successful cases, there were animated tales of self–involved volunteerism to ensure the task was executed or by rallying supportive teachers. These principals and teacher teams perceived their professional roles as critical to student learning and emphasised the HLKs as a learning resource. This resulted in successful distribution and aligned content for online lessons.

## Research Question 3: The Response from the Parent Mentors and Parents

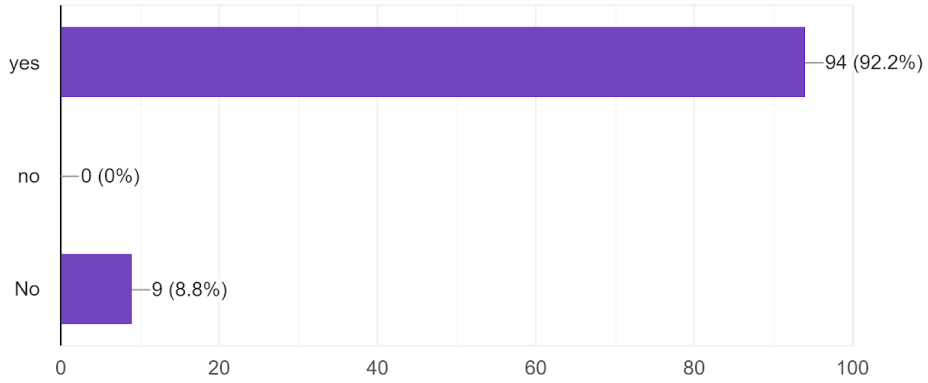
**(Theme 2) Varying levels of apathy among parents that impacted the distribution of the Learning Kits**. The more apathetic parents were less likely to collect the kits or make arrangements for collection. Individual educational convictions coupled with socio–economic circumstances determined the learning outcome for children. Responses from the parent mentors and parents were noted from the online parents meeting*;* qualitative details were captured from the focus

group interviews. Varied comments emerged from parents who participated in the online parent meeting. Participants spoke freely and broadly covering issues surrounding school closure, parents' attitudes towards children being at home, and parental response to the new modes of schooling being used in the pandemic. The comments were informative. Some parents were quite passionate, for example, Miss Icilda declared, "My child has to sit and do the work online because she knows what she will get from me if she forms the fool". Mrs. Tarant shared, "Some parents don't care if the children are online or doing schoolwork, they are relying on children being taught when schools are open, so when schools are closed there is no need for children to do school work". Some parents reluctantly admitted, "I had to go to work before the school office opens so I could not collect the Learning Kits".

In the telephone interviews, parent mentors were asked to suggest reasons parents did not assist students with their school work during the pandemic. Some common responses were parents' frustration because they were not used to "sitting down" with their children. Mr. French and Mr. White reported that parents were not trained to assist their children with schoolwork. Other sentiments expressed were the lack of motivation by some parents to help their children. It was also reported that some parents distracted children from classwork by assigning them chores. When asked about the challenges preventing the collection of their child's learning kit despite being notified by the school, Velma responded, "I have no time to go collect the kit." These comments suggest that they saw student discipline and attitude toward schoolwork. Parents' investment of time, their technical skills, and financial status were intervening challenges that affected the collection, usage, and return of the HLKs for feedback. These parental perceptions were not unique to Jamaica (Putri et al., 2020). However, though the parents did not dwell on the benefits, the parental collaboration of home learning activities with their children improved academic success as well as psychological well–being (Bhamani et al., 2020). Interestingly, 94% of the respondents indicated that they wanted the continuation of the HLK (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Parental Support for Continued Publication of the HLKs*




Students who benefited from programme had parents who collected the HLKs, ensured their children followed the media, completed the assigned tasks, and returned them to the school for feedback. Students who benefited most from the HLKs intervention were closer to the higher end of the spectrum as a result of parental interest in their child's learning. The collaborative display sent a message of interest to which the student would have made an autonomous effort to do and use the HLKs. Ultimately, the HLKs cannot affect learning on its own; the learner's input is pivotal (Xie & Yang, 2020).

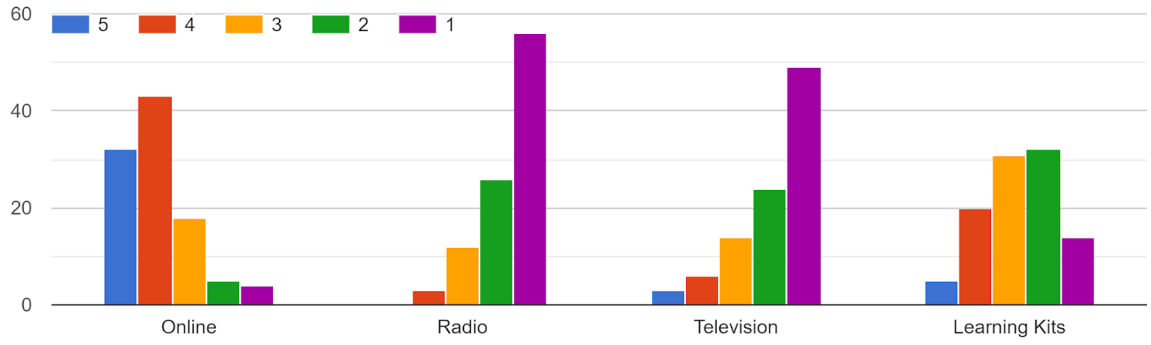
## Research Question 4: The Impact of the HLK Distribution

**(Theme 3) The 21st-century learner has to be self–directed**. The ensuing discussion highlights that the success of remote learning is highly dependent on what the student learner can accomplish autonomously when not engaged face to face with the teacher. Overall, the data confirmed that the use of the resources provided by the MoEY was minimally engaging. The MoEY was able to secure the collaboration of the teacher presenters and media houses to facilitate the synchronous radio and television programmes in addition to the HKLs. These media programmes were prepared using the same content as the HLKs. Students were able to use the virtual resource to assist them in completing the HLKs assignments. The researchers believed that ascertaining how these resources were used to support learning would indicate the extent to which self–directed learning featured among students.

The triangulated data suggested that students seldom used the media support (television, radio). The school leader and parent survey enquired about the prevalence of use by each of the four media modalities relative to the other. Online was the most prevalent, followed by the HLKs, then television, and finally radio (see Figure 4). The parental interviews revealed the unavailability of cable services in many parts of the country. The issue was exacerbated by poor television reception even when using the traditional antennas. The low rate of students returning assignments and the low use of radio and television was an indication that the MoEY efforts could have achieved a greater impact.

**Figure 4**

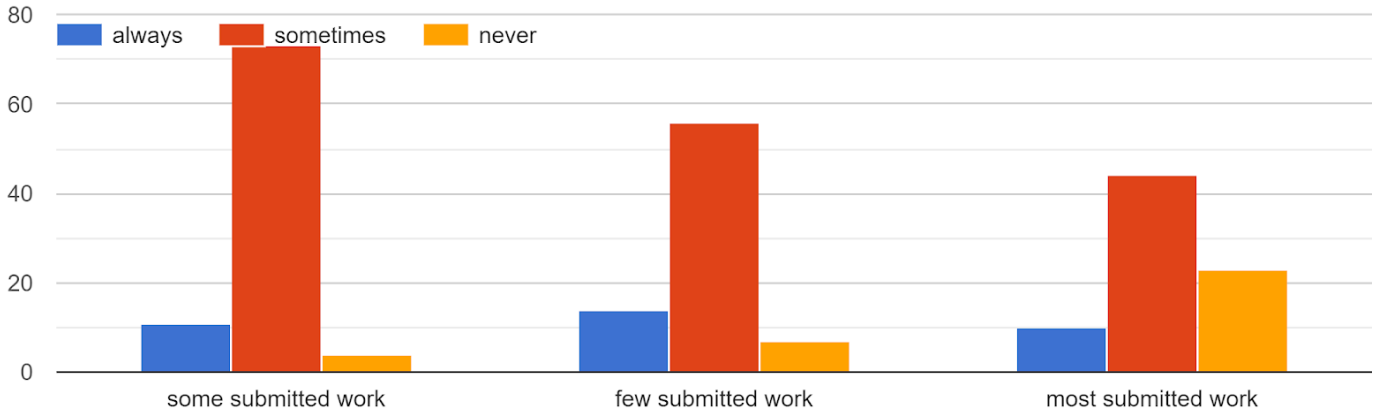
*Perceived Usage of Four Modalities (online, radio, television, and HLK)*




The researchers then assessed how beneficial the HLKs were perceived by determining the return response for feedback and the feedback provided. Only a small proportion of students returned kits consistently while about the same proportion never returned work. The data suggested that most students sometimes submitted assignments versus not at all (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*An Estimate of the Proportion of Students/kits Returned to the Schools and its Completeness at the Time of Submission*

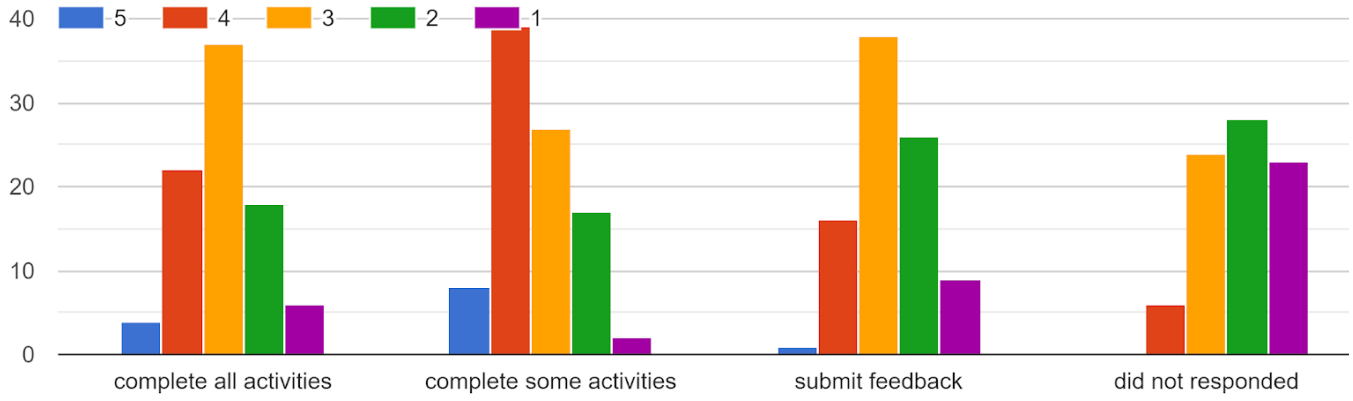



*Note.* Based on the responses only, a small proportion of students returned kits consistently, with about the same proportion that never returned work done. The chart seems to suggest that most students submitted sometimes, as opposed to not at all.

Figure 6 highlights responses in the context of students' responses to feedback. Of the students who submitted feedback, most students completed some of the activities while few students completed most activities.

**Figure 6**

*Completion and Return of HLK to the Schools*



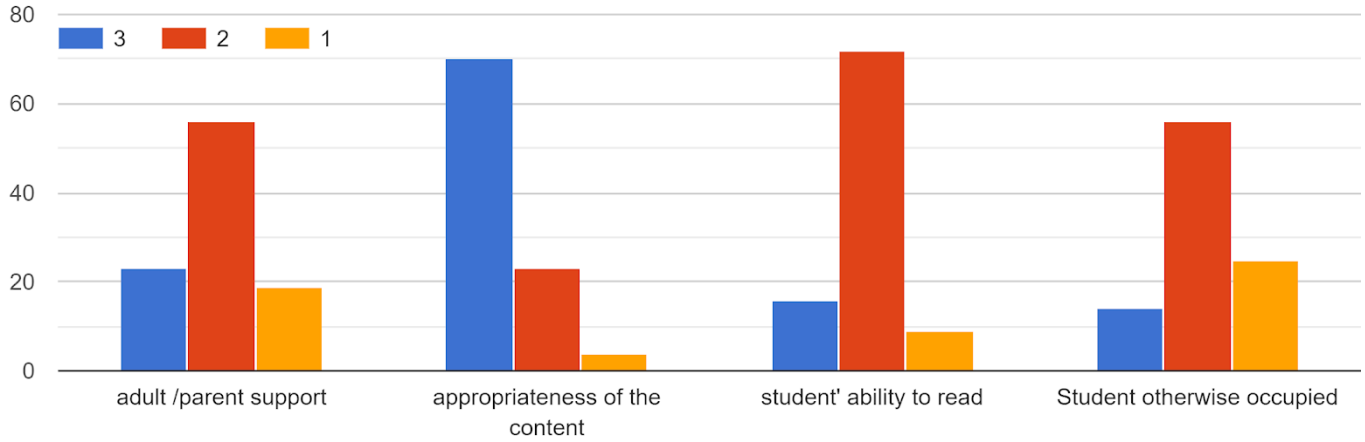

*Note*. The school leaders' perceived report of how their students made use of the kits.

Considering the incomplete response of the HLK activities submitted to the school, it was useful to ascertain the impact of some identified factors on the use of the HLKs (see Figure 7). The appropriateness of the content was a positive influence on the use of the HLKs. Adult/parental support and students' ability to read also reflected significant impacts. Students who were otherwise occupied were interpreted as being absent from home and engaged in non–school activities as well as present at home but not engaged in educational activities in the virtual space.

Overall, the schools with proactive school leadership, including efficacious teacher leadership were best able to assist their students in accessing the HLKs and benefiting from it. The research focused on the production and distribution of the HLKs, mainly because the emphasis was on physical accessibility for students without internet facilities. However, it was recognised that accessibility also extended to interaction with the HLKs' content. How individual schools responded to the various student–home needs and provided mechanisms to handle responses largely impacted how well students benefited. Therefore, the transformational leader would have been able to convert his school community into an active learning environment despite COVID and in so doing lessen the learning deficit challenge for this cohort.

**Figure 7**

*The Impact of some Identified Factors (parental support, appropriateness of content, students' ability to read, or students' otherwise engaged) on Use of the Kits*




*Note*. Students who were otherwise occupied were interpreted as being absent from home and engaged in non-school activities; however, they could also have been present at home, but engaged in educational activities in the virtual space.

There was an assumption that all parties recognized the same problem and understood their role as being equally important to warrant an attitude of urgency to execute required tasks. School leaders, teachers, and parents did not maintain the same level of urgency to ensure the delivery and full usage of the HLK. According to Wightman et al. (2020), participant attitudes were a key antecedent of effective collaboration.

## Research Question 5: The Impactful Reflections on the Data Analyses

### (Theme 4) Jamaica's Educational Ecosystem Needs a Life Support of Collaboration

RQ5: What was the best practice for the HLK intervention during 'natural disasters' in Jamaica? This was answered by the researchers assessing the data and analysis that reflected the policies and processes of the MoEY. Based on the evidence unearthed in the research, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The majority of schools distributed most of the HLKs.
2. Most kits were collected on time by the students and their families.
3. The kits were perceived as most valuable for the appropriateness of the content.
4. There was significant parent apathy associated with late or non–collection of kits for some students.
5. Few students returned kits consistently with most activities completed; most students returned kits with some activities completed.
6. Of the four modalities for remote learning, HLKs were ranked second after online teaching and learning, followed by television and radio which was the least used. This suggests students did not use multiple media to support their learning as intended by the MoEY, and which rationalised their investment in multiple media to achieve wider coverage and earn greater learning gains. It could also be argued that greater collaboration between actors could have promoted the use of multiple media by students where those possibilities existed, to bolster learning.
7. Of all the respondents, 94% supported the continued publication and distribution of the HLK.
8. Overall, the major data analysis revealed that the collaborative efforts to execute the HLK intervention fell short.

Based on the above conclusions it can be deduced that some critical factors were identified that could translate kit delivery numbers into effective remote teaching and learning. In summary, while the distribution of the kits from the schools posed some logistic challenges, some schools devised creative ways to distribute the kits. Participants mentioned principal and teacher drop–offs, post office drop–offs, and the use of other community points for drop–offs. They also mentioned the travel distance to pick up kits by some students and the prohibitive cost of transport in some cases. Concerning the use of the kits, some schools reported making full use of the its by integrating the contents as a major teaching resource for all students, including in their online spaces. Conversely, some other schools treated the kits as unconnected to the regular learning process. Kits were distributed to offline students, but no framework was put in place for feedback and inclusion of those students to whom kits were distributed. School leadership and an effective teacher remained catalytic to the teaching and learning process in the face of the pandemic as interventions were sought to execute the HLKs in Jamaica.

The recommended strategy to continue education opportunities during a crisis such as the pandemic must be based on collaboration among parents, school and community, and the MoEY. The strategy has to be convincingly presented to all stakeholders in their various groups. This requires partners to have a common goal with the will to resolve issues and commitment to achieve this goal. To recover from this pandemic, policymakers, educators, school leaders, parents, and all stakeholders need to be focused and motivated to intervene to prevent long–lasting COVID effects on student learning. Stakeholders need to collaborate by creative means to accelerate learning and reduce learning gaps.

Unlike the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1996, it is not anticipated that the pandemic will leave behind the health and environmental impacts

that will interplay with educational outcomes. Hence, greater control of the future is possible. However, it is necessary to employ strategies that will achieve early and short–term gains to negate the long–term consequential impact of the pandemic on the social and economic systems. The recovery and transformation of the education system in New Orleans 10 years after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 are instructive (Harris, 2015; Newmark & De Rugy, 2006). Recovery of losses in education as a result of COVID is hinged on committed stakeholder collaboration in the educational ecosystem. SDG 17 calls for a revitalisation of global partnerships for sustainable development. The SDGs cannot be realised without strong global partnerships and cooperation, and this principle is most critical for Jamaica to achieve SDG 4, inclusive and equitable quality education.

The HLK initiative was an innovation of the MoEY, and lessons learned from the intervention are important for future cases in education. Recommendations arising from the study are:

1. As part of their general education, students should be trained to be self–directed in their learning pursuits.
2. Prepare students to learn under extreme conditions by exposing them to possible modalities that could constitute a response to education in an emergency based on their contexts.
3. Prepare teachers, parents, and school leaders to exercise specific courses of action to support student learning in response to possible local or national emergencies.
4. Design a system to engage schools and communities to foster learning in home and settings outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Although the researchers concluded that the use of the HLKs by students was low, the educational benefits of the initiative to promote equity and inclusiveness were admirable. Indeed the low number of returned assignments may not accurately reflect the positive results. This includes the ability to reach thousands of students who would be otherwise disconnected from the education system. The initiative could have significant positive latent value for these students. However, further research is needed with the return to face–to–face mode, to unearth possible educational impacts of the HLKs on students' learning.

The Jamaican HLK experience suggests the need for society to devise new perspectives, rethink education, and ascertain how teaching and learning can be more integrated into real–life experiences, and how schools and communities can collaborate for meaningful inclusive, and equitable education.

## Limitations

The study had some limitations. For example, the geographical areas selected conformed to the sampling criteria for the population in need of the intervention. Additionally, limited or no internet connectivity may have affected the response rate to online questionnaires, which was lower than anticipated (34.6%). Over 462 schools population were targeted in the intervention but only 160 responses were received. Moreover, researchers could not determine that the characteristics of respondents were representative of the overall sample population, hence, the assumption was made that the population was heterogeneous. The fact that the research was conducted during the pandemic limited the collection of primary quantitative data and placed greater reliance on the perceptions of participants from online interactions.

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# Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago

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## Abstract

Using a quantitative research approach, this study aims at investigating the wage returns and the gender wage gap of Trinidad and Tobago's minority groups in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. To do this, data from the Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP), for the period 1991–2015, is used to estimate a Mincerian earnings function via the quantile regression method, after which the standard Oaxaca–Blinder Decomposition method is employed to decompose the wage differentials. This analysis revealed that regardless of ethnic class (i.e. minority group [persons who are of mixed, white, Syrian/Lebanese, Chinese, and other heritage] or majority group [persons of an Indian and African heritage]), there are more men trained in STEM than women. 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. The gender wage gap between minority workers in STEM appears to be much more prominent (9.8%) than that of majority workers (8.5%). This implies that the issue of gender inequality in STEM is more pronounced amongst minority workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

*Keywords*: gender, STEM, wage gap, Mincerian Earnings Functions, Blinder–Oaxaca Decomposition, gender inequality, quantitative study

## Introduction

Building diversity in education has been a topic of interest in the education economics literature for decades, as early researchers such as Verdugo (1992), tackle challenging issues related to wage discrimination and earnings differentials of minority groups based on their ethnicity. As time progressed, many countries sought to develop their human capital base with easier access to higher education and training, but the lingering problems of discrimination, inequity, and lack of diversity began to resurface with a greater reprisal about minority groups. Countries focused on the development of their human resources, issues such as discrimination, inequity and lack of diversity, often arose with minority groups having less access to higher education and training opportunities. According to Wirth (1945 p. 347) a minority group is, "any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects

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of collective discrimination." Minority workers refer to persons who belong to minority groups based on race or ethnicity while ethnic minority groups refer to a group of persons who based on their cultural or physical characteristics are treated unfairly leading them to experience discrimination. In this article ethnic class, refers to if the worker is considered to be in either the minority group (persons who are of Mixed, White, Syrian/Lebanese, Chinese, and Other heritage) or majority group (persons of an Indian and African heritage).

Bearing this in mind, many universities have tried to become more diversified through student enrolment, so that underrepresented students from various minority groups can enter academic programmes. However, as Anderson and Kim (2006) explain, even though many universities may be able to attract a more diverse group of students into the STEM field, the challenge remains to create a successful experience which allows these students to complete their respective programmes. Apart from these administrative issues, there are several factors which may influence the ability of persons from minority groups to have a successful academic and working experience in STEM fields. As noted by Dasgupta and Stout (2014, p. 21), some of these considerations include, "the feeling like a misfit in STEM classes, being vastly outnumbered by male peers, and lacking female role models make women avoid STEM majors or leave prematurely. In early to mid–adulthood, subtle gender bias in hiring and promotion, biased evaluation of scientific work, non–inclusive department climate, juggling work–family responsibilities, and difficulty returning after a family–related pause".

Focusing on the labour market aspect of these challenges, studies conducted in countries such as the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK) reveal that for both sexual and ethnic minority groups in STEM, a great deal of interpersonal marginalization and devaluation of persons exists, originating from the lack of inclusion and respectful communication with colleagues, which can indeed reduce the productivity of persons (Cech & Waidzunas, 2022). These problems may be linked to not only the ethnic background of the worker but also the characteristic features of the STEM labour market; for instance, the rate at which highly skilled STEM workers retire from their current positions may vary by sector (Smith & White, 2022).

Differences in the wage gap of minorities were attributable to their education, ability to speak English, and parents' education (Black et al., 2006). Much of the gender disparities in STEM are driven by students' peers and learning environment, as well as the education and employment background of their parents (Dasgupta & Stout, 2014). This outcome may also link to the leaky STEM pipeline, where the educational experiences of minority students play an integral role in their persistence within their field (Griffith, 2010). Kerr and Kerr (2013) explain that United States (US) immigrant workers in STEM take longer to make career adjustments due to the lack of job opportunities. British minorities fare no better, as the inequitable distribution of labour market opportunities reinforces the stereotype threat that they may encounter (Blackaby et al., 2002). If, however, ethnic minority immigrants are better educated, then they experience higher earnings (Dustmann & Theodoropoulos, 2010).

A study of this nature, which seeks to examine the wage returns and the gender wage gap of STEM minority groups from Trinidad and Tobago, expands the empirical literature on the topic for the Caribbean region. In this context, given that most of the literature on this topic focuses on the experiences of minority workers in the US and the UK, there remains a virtual absence of literature on the topic of minority workers in STEM for Trinidad and Tobago. There is no quantitative study which focuses exclusively on the education and labour economic outcome of ethnic minority groups in STEM for Trinidad and Tobago. This creates a significant research gap, as there are no studies in the literature which quantitatively examine the earnings, wage gap, and presence of discrimination experienced by this segment of STEM workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

This reality created the perfect conditions to use modern literature, data, and econometric techniques which are more relevant to the current labour market atmosphere to fill the gap identified. To do this, two research questions were proposed:

(1) How does the wage return of ethnic minority groups in STEM change over the period 1991–2015?

(2) Is there a gender wage gap amongst ethnic minority workers in STEM?

By answering these research questions, this study contributes to the literature in four ways, by: (1) examining the wage returns of ethnic minority workers in STEM fields over the entire wage distribution and across 24 years (1991–2015), (2) highlighting the gender wage gap that ethnic minorities in STEM may experience, (3) broadening the empirical and applied literature in the field of education economics which implements the Quantile Regression and Oaxaca–Blinder methodologies, and (4) developing and pioneering the empirical literature in education economics for Trinidad and Tobago which focuses on the ethnic groups in STEM.

Using data from the 1991–2015 Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP), the Mincerian earnings function was estimated to observe the overall wage returns of STEM minority workers; while the Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition method was used to determine how their gender profile influences their wage gap. This study found that the wage returns of STEM minority workers have improved over wage distribution for the period 1991–2015, with the highest returns being experienced by those employed in high–income jobs, which refers to persons who are employed in high-paying positions that are associated with specialized skills and advanced education. On average, the earnings of female minority workers in STEM was found to be higher than that of male minority workers. The gender wage gap of minority workers in STEM fields appeared to be much larger than that of workers from the majority group implying that the issue of gender inequality in STEM is more prominent among minority workers.

## Literature Review

The underrepresentation of minority groups in STEM fields is not a new problem, as the lack of inclusion of these groups continues to persist in higher education and the working environment. According to Atkins et al. (2020), the mentorship of students in STEM plays a crucial role in not only the diversity and retention of students in the field, but also their scientific identity, as mentors are often in key positions to offer greater development opportunities. This is especially important since underrepresented minorities such as African Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans, tend to integrate into the STEM community at a different pace than non–minority students (Estrada et al., 2018). One reason for this may be due to the unconventional approach to instruction in STEM fields by faculty, leading to the creation of "exclusive" classrooms where STEM minority groups are not traditionally represented (Dewsbury, 2020). One interesting example occurred in the US, where faculty members in the selection of post–doctoral candidates in STEM in the areas of physics, biology, and engineering exhibited greater levels of gender and racial bias, and racial microaggressions towards female and African American and Latinx students (Eaton et al., 2020; Kuleshov et al., 2021; Miles et al., 2020).

In the case of Latinx students, the recruitment, admission, program expansion, networking, and negotiations between students and faculty were important factors in the academic and cultural integration of these students in STEM (Bensimon et al., 2019). However, even though faculty members' role as institutional agents can make a difference in the development of STEM minority students, there are still some faculty who view the ability of STEM students as a fixed concept, thus leading to large racial achievement gaps (Canning et al., 2019). Such a view not only creates a barrier for underrepresented students, but also leads to greater negative experiences within the classroom thereby reducing their level of achievement and motivation. For this reason, the vulnerable population of women and minority students in STEM in countries such as Israel, Latin America, Malaysia, and the US,

are more likely to perceive such environments as threatening, as there are more instances of stereotyping, control, biases or cultural norms, and discrimination further exacerbating the underrepresentation of minority groups in STEM at the secondary and university levels (Casad et al., 2019; Diamond & Kislev, 2020; Garcia–Holgado et al., 2019). The consequence of this type of environment is that minority students not only switch from their STEM field of interest, but may also drop out of college entirely (Riegle–Crumb et al., 2019).

In addition, demographics, math ability, and career development were also vital to the retention of United States (US) undergraduate students in STEM majors (Belser et al., 2018). Students who were enrolled in more STEM–focused career planning courses were of African American and Hispanic descent, and those who scored higher on the math component of the SAT exam, had a greater chance of being retained in STEM majors. Minority and first–generation college students with strong family, cultural, and social network connections to a particular STEM field were also influenced in their career pursuits (Dewsbury et al., 2019; Meador, 2018; Puccia et al., 2021).

Despite this, it was noted by Jelks and Crain (2020) that Non–Asian minority students in the US who completed their undergraduate degrees tended to leave the STEM field due to a lack of social capital and job opportunities. One could posit that this may be due to the creation of racially hostile work and education environments (McGee, 2020). When examined in greater detail for Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian minority workers, it appeared that their inability to obtain better job opportunities was due to invisible biases, horizontal segregation, and the glass ceiling effect in the decision–making process throughout workers' career stages (Lendak–Kabok, 2020; Liu et al., 2019).

## Data and Descriptive Statistics

### Data

The dataset used in this paper was derived from the Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP) for the period 1991–2015. This dataset collects information on a biannual basis covering a wide array of topics such as individual employment status; hours of work; duration of employment; industry of employment and occupational status; level of education/qualifications; and biographical and demographic information. The sample data used in this article comprised economically active persons (i.e., individuals aged 15–65) who were employed on a full–time basis (working more than 33 hours per week), within either public sector or private sector enterprises.

There are two important restrictions made to the sample used in this study:

1. it is limited according to the ethnic class of the worker. The ethnic composition of Trinidad and Tobago embraces a wide array of ethnicities; as a result, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the minority group comprised persons who are of Mixed, White, Syrian/Lebanese, Chinese, and Other descent, while the majority group comprised persons of Indian and African descent.
2. A STEM variable was designed to reflect those who are trained in the STEM fields (i.e., science; engineering and architecture; medicine and veterinary science; and mathematics and computer science.

A host of explanatory variables (inclusive of the workers' gender, potential experience, marital status, years of schooling, father's and mother's years of schooling, occupational grouping, the industry of employment, geographical location, educational mismatch, level of training and year of data collection, were also considered.

## Descriptive Statistics

The summary statistics for a few of the main variables are shown in Table 1. For the period 1991–2015, Table 1 reveals that, on average, there was less tendency for workers in the ethnic minority group to be married. Those in the ethnic minority group appeared to benefit from higher hourly and annual earnings than those in the ethnic majority, even though the latter group had more working experience. Persons from the ethnic majority may be more predisposed to being undereducated, while those in the ethnic minority group are more likely to be overeducated, holding more years of schooling. On average, parents of workers in the ethnic minority group had higher levels of education than parents from the ethnic majority group. A brief examination of the gender profile for both samples (as reflected in Figure 1), reveals that more workers are falling into the ethnic majority group than the ethnic minority group. According to Figure 1 (Panel A), from 1991–2007 the ethnic majority appears to be growing; however, there were two dips in the sample growth, first in 2000, and again in 2004. As expected, there were more men than women in the ethnic majority. However, towards the beginning of the timeframe (1991–2008), while there is a large difference in the number of men and women, at the end of the period (2009–2015) this change begins to decrease in size.

In comparison, according to Figure 1 (Panel B), the number of workers in the ethnic minority is much smaller than that of the ethnic majority group, with a great deal more fluctuations in its sample growth throughout the period 1991–2015. The composition of men in the ethnic minority is much higher than that of women. However, the difference between genders is much smaller throughout the time frame, especially from 2005–2011.

**Table 1**

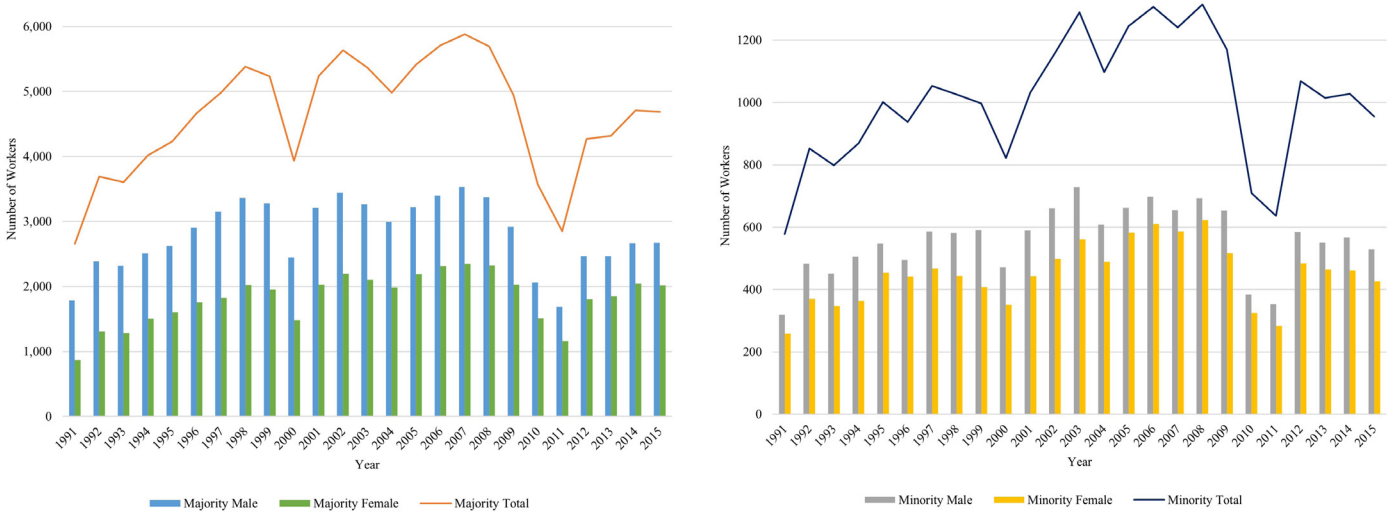
*Summary Statistics of Minority and Majority Workers (1991–2015)*

| | Mean | |
|---|---|---|
| **Variables** | **Minority Workers** | **Majority Workers** |
| Married | 0.34 | 0.39 |
| Real hourly wage | TT$27.57 | TT$24.58 |
| Annual income | TT$51,257.59 | TT$45,719.34 |
| Undereducation | 0.15 | 0.19 |
| Overeducation | 0.15 | 0.13 |
| Years of schooling | 12.38 | 11.95 |
| Working experience | 16.98 | 17.82 |
| Fathers' years of schooling | 0.20 | 0.19 |
| Mothers' years of schooling | 1.94 | 1.75 |
| No. of Observations | 25,201 | 115,653 |

*Source*: Author's compilation.

**Figure 1**

*Gender Dynamic of Ethnic Minority & Majority Workers (1991-2015)*




*Source*: Author's compilation

## Econometric Specification

To support the answering of the previously outlined research questions, this study makes use of two frameworks pioneered by Becker (1975) which focus on the Human Capital aspect of education and training; as well as the work of Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1973), who focus on the male–female wage differentials. These studies serve as the conceptual framework of this research. Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills which persons accumulate throughout their lifetime through education and training, empowering them to become productive members of society, since labour can be sold as a commodity to earn an income (World Bank, 2022). For this reason, the most valuable capital is that which can be invested through education and training in the growth and development of an individual.

The framework which forms the basis of this study is drawn from the ideologies of Becker (1975) concerning the wage returns of specific training. In this study, the form of specific training is the education and instruction received in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. According to Becker (1975, p. 26), such specific training in STEM is training that "does not affect the productivity of trainees that would be useful in other firms." As a result, the skills and abilities developed by such training in STEM may have limited transferability to other firms, as it may only enhance the productivity of those firms and industries which use such skills (Becker, 1993). Thus, specific training in STEM may not be useful in most firms, but only in those which produce either an explicit product or service.

Further to this, the provision of specific training in STEM fields is either borne by the worker, or by the employer. So if the employer covers the cost of training, then they would collect the returns in the form of larger profits resulting from higher productivity which would be achieved only when the return is at least as large as the cost (Becker, 1993). Bearing this in mind,

this study implements a quantitative research methodology because it allows for the use of a large sample of minority workers to be extracted from the CSSP dataset, which in turn enhances the objectivity and accuracy of the findings made using statistical tests and analyses to show relationships among the data. To learn more about the wage returns of minority workers, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) version of the Mincerian wage equation put forward by Mincer (1974), is used to estimate the average returns of minority workers in STEM, which is specified as,

$$lnw_i=\beta_0+\beta_1 STEM_1+\beta_2 X_i+e_i \quad (1)$$

where the $i^{th}$ minority worker, $lnw$ is the natural logarithmic of the real hourly wage; $STEM_1$ is the dummy variable reflecting the workers with qualifications in the STEM fields; $X_i$ is the vector of control variables highlighted in the previous section, and $e_i$ the error term.

Given that the OLS technique is sensitive to the presence of outliers, which can distort the results of the regression analysis, the Quantile Regression (QR) method is often implemented to estimate the returns of workers over entire wage distributions, to consider the workers' employment characteristics that may influence their position on the wage distribution scale. Bearing this in mind, the QR equation is specified as,

$$ln\ w_i=X_i \beta_\tau + e_{\tau i}\ ,\ \tau(lnw_1 | X_i)=X_i \beta_\tau \quad (2)$$

where the $i^{th}$ minority worker, $lnw_1$ is the natural logarithmic of the real hourly wage rate; $X_i$ is the vector of the set of independent variables; $e$ is the error term; $\beta_\tau$ is the unknown vector of parameters (constant); $\tau$ is the sample quantile; $\tau(lnw_1 | X_i)$ and is the conditional quantile $(\tau)$ of the ith minority workers' hourly wage rate $(lnw_{1)}$, given the vectors of independent variables $(X_i)$.

In the second case, to examine the gender wage gap of minority workers in STEM fields, the Oaxaca–Blinder Decomposition method was implemented as the primary framework for this study as it is popularly used to explain inequality in earnings across groups of persons, either by their sex or race (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973). Thus, the technique enables one to decompose inequality into contributory causes that indicate the differences in the mean predicted outcome between two groups of workers (Rahimi & Hashemi Nazari, 2021). This is especially important to the STEM field, as discrimination against different groups (i.e., minority workers), may influence the rate at which different genders can effectively integrate themselves within STEM occupations and industries (Oaxaca, 1973). As a result, labour force characteristics such as workers' sex and ethnicity, can create an unequal distribution of female workers to male workers in STEM occupations, resulting in a wage difference between both sexes employed in the same occupation.

To investigate the distinct facets of inequality that minority workers in STEM experience, regressions are used to explain the inequality of incomes for both men and women (Blinder, 1973). According to Blinder (1973), this can allow the gender wage gap to be decomposed into its explained and non–explained portions, as derived below. For the purposes of this study, consider the linear regression presented in Equation 3, which shows an unadjusted model of wage determination for the ith minority worker in STEM.

$$1nw_i= X_i \beta_i +e_i \quad (3)$$

where, for the $i^{th}$ worker, ln $w$ is the natural logarithmic of the real hourly wage rate, $X_i$ is a vector of individual characteristics, $\beta_i$ is a vector of coefficients, and  is the error term.

To investigate the gender differentials of minority workers in STEM, this equation is decomposed to estimate the wage distribution of both men and women individually. Thus, these wage equations are specified as,

$$lnw_i^{mSTEM} = X_i^{mSTEM}\ \beta_i^{mSTEM} + e_i^{mSTEM} \quad (4)$$

$$lnw_i^{wSTEM} = X_i^{wSTEM}\ \beta_i^{wSTEM} + e_i^{wSTEM} \quad (5)$$

where m represents male minority workers in STEM, and w represents female minority workers in STEM. The disparity between male and female minority STEM workers can be found by taking the mean wage difference between both groups, such that,

$$lnw_i^{mSTEM} - lnw_i^{wSTEM} = X_i^{mSTEM}\ \beta_i^{mSTEM} - X_i^{wSTEM}\ \beta_i^{wSTEM} + e_i \quad (6)$$

Bearing in mind that the difference between male and female STEM minority workers' mean wage is the result of differences in both individual characteristics and the vector coefficients, the general decomposition must now take into account both aspects. Thus, incorporating the vector of coefficients for male minority workers with the individual characteristics of female minority workers in STEM, the wage differential is partitioned into the observed gender wage gap and the unexplained gender wage gap. Thus, the reference group becomes,

$$lnw_i^{mSTEM} - lnw_i^{wSTEM} = \beta_i^{mSTEM}(X_i^{mSTEM} - X_i^{wSTEM}) + X_i^{wSTEM}\ (\beta_i^{mSTEM} - \beta_i^{wSTEM}) + e_i \quad (7)$$

where the first term on the right–hand side of Equation 7, is the observed gender gap i.e., the "explained" portion of the wage gap. It highlights the differential attributable to the different endowments or characteristics of male and female STEM workers. It also captures how the wage differential between male and female workers in STEM changes in response to the gap in characteristics. The second term on the right–hand side of Equation 7, is the "unexplained" portion of the wage gap. This term often reflects that aspect of the differential attributable to differing vector coefficients.

## Analysis and Discussion

### The Wage Structure of Ethnic Minorities in STEM

The wage returns of Trinidad and Tobago's minority workers employed in STEM fields were found by estimating Equations 1-3. These equations were assessed under the assumption that there was no correlation between the variable which represents the workers in STEM fields and the error term. The graphical illustration of the earnings of workers' wages across the wage distribution (reflected in Figures 2 and 3) are statistically significant at different p–values; where for this study, the p–values considered are when $p < 0.01$, $p<0.05$, and $p<0.1$. A brief examination of the returns reveals that during the period 1991–2015, STEM minority workers benefitted from average earnings of 0.5% and STEM majority workers benefitted from average earnings of 2.3%. In both instances, for the workers in the industry of employment, occupational grouping and gender had the largest, most significant impact on their earnings.

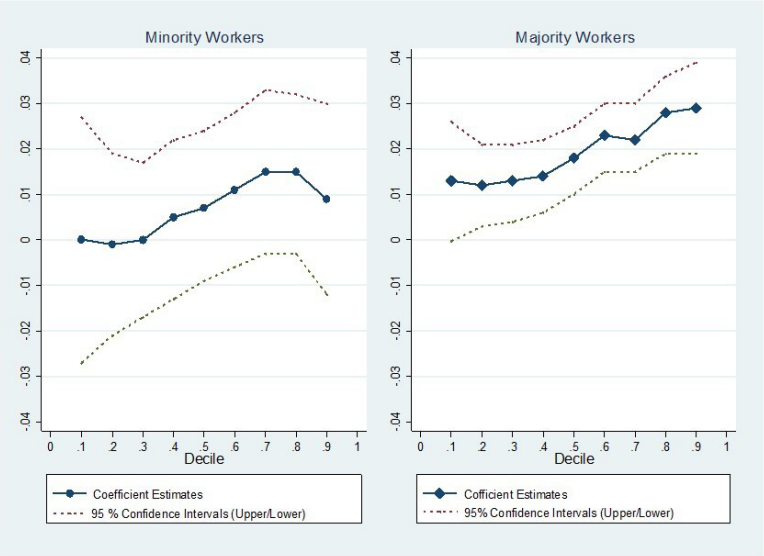
Given that the OLS estimation accounts for the average returns only and does not highlight changes across the wage distribution, the QR estimates are also included. When considered, the returns of STEM minority workers shown in Figure 2 were found to have improved across the distribution. They experienced their highest returns if employed in high–income jobs, and smaller returns if employed in low–income jobs.

The earnings of high–income minority workers in STEM appear to be driven by their gender, schooling, university educational qualifications, and occupational grouping. However, the returns of this group also declined by 40% from 1991–2015, perhaps due to the various factors which drive the profits of high–income businesses such as economic opportunities, labour market characteristics, and what each business values.

The returns of the STEM majority workers are also estimated as a check of robustness. The outcome shown in Figure 2 reveals that STEM majority workers earn more than STEM minority workers. A similar pattern emerges in earnings, as the returns for the STEM minority group appear to be rising across the wage distribution. A key difference develops as the returns of STEM majority workers employed in high–income jobs (unlike the minority group) improved steadily. Although driven by similar factors of occupation, industry of employment, and education, it is possible that such a difference in the earnings of high–income workers may be due to insufficient preparation for these types of roles, limited opportunities for professional development, and changes in industry demand for STEM skills.

**Figure 2**

*Wage Returns of STEM Workers by Ethnic Composition (1991–2015)*




*Source*: Author's compilation

## The Gender Dynamic of STEM in the Workplace

Aside from the overall trend in the returns of each group of workers, it is also worth looking at the gender dynamic of their wages. Based on the results, the average earning of minority women in STEM (2.4%) is much higher than that of minority men (1.9%). An examination of these returns across the wage distribution shown in Figure 3 reveals that minority women in STEM earn more than minority men. However, the returns of minority men vary across the wage distribution (Figure 3, Panel A), with the highest returns at the 4th decile, and lowest at the 6th decile. In comparison, the earnings of minority women in STEM (Figure 3, Panel B) appeared to be a mostly positive trend across the wage distribution, but like minority men in STEM declined consistently from the 7th to the 9th deciles.

When the majority of workers in STEM is considered as a test of robustness, the average returns of the majority of women in STEM (4.9%) was again higher than that of men (3.5%). However, the returns of the majority of men in STEM were not only higher (Figure 3, Panel C) but appeared to be rising steadily across the wage distribution, while the returns of the majority of women, though small (Figure 3, Panel D), declined consistently across the wage distribution. Like minority workers, a similar descent in returns amongst high–income majority women in STEM was observed.

In general, the findings uncovered revealed that from 1991–2015, the earnings of minority men and women, and minority women in STEM were impacted the most by changes in the economy based on their labour market characteristics. This much was reflected most notably by the earnings of high–income men and women, which seemed to plummet consistently, while those in low–income jobs remained small. The reason for such an outcome can range across several issues greater demand for the development of middle–income

STEM jobs; possible reductions in the productivity of high-income and low–income STEM–related jobs (which may be linked to shorter hours worked); lower corporate profits; and less job growth in these areas.

The exception to these findings is that the earnings of the majority of men in STEM are not only higher than other workers under consideration, but appear to be improving across the wage distribution. Again, such a positive outcome may be strongly connected to the demands of the industry, such as the preference for men of either Indian or African ancestry from the majority group to hold positions in high/middle–income jobs in STEM fields. It is noted however, that while this outcome may be a reflection of the structure of Trinidad and Tobago's population, the result implies that there might not be as much diversity and inclusion at the senior level of STEM jobs. This is especially important, as the earnings of minority women in high–income STEM jobs, although higher than that of minority men, may continue to erode in the future.

**Figure 3**

*Gender–Specific Returns of Ethnic Minority & Majority Workers in STEM (1991–2015)*


*Source:* Author's compilation

## The Gender Wage Gap of Minority Workers in STEM

To analyse the gender wage gap between minority and majority workers in STEM, the Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition method was implemented. This technique is frequently used to examine the labour market outcomes of different groups of workers using labour market characteristics, where the aim is to decompose the mean difference of the log wages in the regression models from a counterfactual perspective. By implementing this procedure, the wage differential is divided into two groups, where according to Jann (2008, p. 1),

> "the first part is "explained" by group differences in productivity characteristics such as education or work experience and a residual part that cannot be accounted for by such differences in wage determinants. This "unexplained" part is often used as a measure for discrimination, but it also subsumes the effects of group differences in unobserved predictors."

The outcome of such a decomposition in Table 2, shows that the mean predictions of the two groups and their differences were statistically significant at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels of significance. An examination of this table reveals that the mean of the log wages of minority men in STEM is 3.076, which was significantly higher than the 2.979 produced for minority women. This produced a gender wage gap of 9.8%. In comparison, the average earnings of men (2.965) and women (2.880) in the majority group was much smaller than that of the minority group, which produced a smaller wage gap of 8.5% amongst the majority workers.

When decomposed, the gender wage gap produced three different statistics for the three different effects (i.e., the endowment effect, the coefficient effect, and the interaction effect). In the first instance, the endowment effect measured the average increase/decrease in wages of female workers if they had the same characteristics as male workers

(such as their working experience, skills, abilities, etc.) Based on this information, if female minority workers had the same features as male minority workers, it was expected that their earnings would decline by 18.4%. In the case of female majority workers, the decline in their earnings was smaller (i.e., 22.7% for the 1991–2015 period).

In the second instance, the coefficient effect examined how much of the difference in wages was the result of how the characteristic features were treated. Such a difference in the treatment of workers' characteristics can be indicative of discrimination. So, in the case of minority workers, 17.1% of the average wage was a result of discrimination, while 19.6% of the average wage of majority workers was a result of discrimination the higher percentage being in the latter group.

In the third and final instance, the interaction effect (which measures the simultaneous effects of the difference in the endowment and the coefficient effects), revealed that from the female minority and majority workers' point of view, a positive effect of 11% and 11.7% respectively on the wages of both groups of women was experienced.

The outcome of the wage decomposition analysis shows that both groups of workers experience wage inequality, and that the gender wage gap for minority workers in STEM is much bigger than that of majority workers in STEM. There are many economic factors which may be linked to such a gender pay gap being felt more prominently by not only minority workers in STEM but all workers in general. These factors include women in STEM fields taking time away from employment to start their family and take care of dependent family members (which leads to limited working experience); the time demands of STEM jobs may be more stringent; and the employment demand for STEM jobs may vary by field of speciality. In addition to these disparities between men and women, in the case of minority workers, discriminatory practices, gender bias, gender stereotyping, and exclusion in the workplace, compounds the gender wage gap even further.

**Table 2**

*Oaxaca Wage Decomposition of Workers in STEM (1991–2015)*

| *Variables* | *Minority Group* | *Majority Group* |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Lnwage | | |
| Men (Group 1) | 3.076 *** | 2.965 *** |
| | (0.006) | (0.003) |
| Women (Group 2) | 2.979 *** | 2.880 *** |
| | (0.007) | (0.004) |
| Difference | 0.098 *** | 0.085 *** |
| | (0.009) | (0.004) |
| Decomposition | | |
| Endowments | -0.184 *** | -0.227 *** |
| | (0.012) | (0.006) |
| Coefficients | 0.171 *** | 0.196 *** |
| | (0.007) | (0.003) |
| Interaction | 0.110 *** | 0.117 *** |
| | (0.010) | (0.005) |

*Source:* Author's Calculations.
*Note:* *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

To address these issues, several policy recommendations can be implemented to improve the situation. Some of these include the use of STEM enrichment programmes at the secondary and university level, and within the workplace to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion; the mentorship and professional development of early career students and workers to help build their scientific identity and competency in STEM as well as their intercultural competency; the creation of real–world STEM partnerships with industry leaders to provide formal and informal STEM opportunities; the creation of STEM support groups for minority students and workers who may be struggling to complete their programmes, or to integrate into the workplace, to foster greater peer–to–peer relationships.

## Conclusion

The effect of race on the earnings of workers in the STEM field is related to the persistence of inequality in both the academic and working environment. Findings from this study indicate that not only are workers from the ethnic majority of Trinidad and Tobago's workforce impacted negatively by the existence of the gender wage gap in STEM, but so too are workers from the ethnic minority. Trinidad and Tobago's ethnic minority workers in STEM join many other minority workers and women from around the world in STEM who experience lower wages; fewer job opportunities; and fewer chances for professional development and promotion due to economic changes in the labour market. Hidden issues within the workplace such as gender bias, discrimination, and exclusion are also key factors. Based on these issues, this study puts forward policy recommendations that may contribute to reducing the gender wage gap experienced by minority and majority workers in STEM — effectively closing the gap in labour economics research on ethnic minorities in STEM for Trinidad and Tobago.

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# Enhancing Academic Achievement for Students Living in Poverty Through Transformative Leadership, Instructional Practices and Professional Learning Communities

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## Abstract

This study utilized the mixed methods research to explore the correlation between academic achievement and poverty. The collection and analysis of quantitative data on reading, writing and mathematics; demographics (born outside of Canada, primary home language, special needs learners) and school community characteristics (e.g. family income) facilitated the identification of high performing schools (performing above 60% at levels 3 and or 4 in EQAO [Education, Quality and Assessment Office] reading, writing and mathematics at either Grade 3 or 6) serving economically disadvantaged students. The stratified sampling technique allowed for the selection of a subgroup representative of the sample under study. The purposive strategy enabled the selection of the most outstanding successes related to academic achievement and poverty. The qualitative data was used to explore transformative leadership, instructional practices and professional learning communities (PLCs) as possibilities for changing the trajectory of underachievement to achievement. From the data collected, analyzed, and presented, the researcher made the following conclusion: Schools in the sample experienced a higher level of academic achievement even though their placement on the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI) ranking was considered high. The findings have implications for policy development, leadership training, teacher education, and professional development.

*Keywords*: transformative leadership, instructional practices, academic achievement

## Introduction

There is a preponderance of evidence in research done in other Canadian jurisdictions (Burton et al., 2013; Coughlan, 2017; Volante et al., 2019); the United States (Ainsworth, 2002; Evans, 2004; Fagan, 2017); and Europe (Azzolini & Contini, 2016; Carey, 2008) that links poverty to academic achievement, cognitive gaps, school readiness, retention, and behaviour—among other variables. Although some of these research studies use the variables "socioeconomic status" instead of poverty, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data portray remarkable similarities that render logical inference valid.

Ferguson et al. (2007) state, "Canadian research confirms poverty's negative influence on student behaviour, achievement and retention in school" (p. 701). These writers also suggest that persistent socioeconomic disadvantage has

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a negative impact on the life outcomes of many Canadian children. "The reality, in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and in every other assessment of student outcome", Levin (2007) argues, "is that socioeconomic status remains the most powerful single influence on students' educational and other life outcomes. This is true in Finland and Canada as well as in the United States and everywhere else" (p. 75).

Studies that originate from the Vulnerability Index (Statistics Canada, 1990) created from the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY) have also repeatedly shown that socioeconomic factors have a significantly pervasive and persistent influence on academic achievement. Lethbridge and Phipps (2006) found that socioeconomic disadvantage and other risk factors associated with poverty (e.g. lower parental education and high family stress) have negative effects on cognitive development and academic achievement. Conversely, these studies claim that higher incomes were consistently associated with better outcomes for children. Isaacs and Magnuson (2011) further explore the cognitive domain using Peabody Picture Vocabulary Score (PPVT) and standard math and reading tests scores. Their findings concluded that low-income children n (i.e. children living in poverty), living in poverty, have lower than average scores (-0.246 of a standard deviation), while affluent children have higher scores (+0.256 of a standard deviation) in reading.

There is substantive evidence that in many subject areas affluent students outperform low-income students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2005) reported that 13% of children living in poverty scored proficiency, compared to 40% of students who were from affluent backgrounds. Students living in poverty also scored 40% below the threshold of basic competency, while 21% of students not living in poverty have scores in a similar threshold. NEAP test results for grades 4, 8 and 12 students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were lowest in math, reading, writing, and science. Studies by Ma and Klinger (2000), Willms (2007), and Entorf and Minoiu (2005) have also established links between academic, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes and poverty. The links established by these and other studies are clear indications that educators cannot lose sight of the reality that many variables impact on achievement. Variables such as home environment, limited resources or lack of resources, and affordability of out-of-school programs and opportunities, contribute to gaining previous knowledge and closing achievement gaps. These opportunities can be safely linked to family income. However, despite the challenges faced by some of our students and their families, our schools are still viewed as the only hope of making a difference in their situation by improving learning outcomes.

International studies have also consistently shown similar associations between socioeconomic measures and academic outcomes. For example, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS] 2011 assessed the comprehensive literacy skills for Grade 4 students in 35 countries (Mullis et al., 2012). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessed reading, math, and science scores of 15-year-old students in 43 countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2000). The reports indicate a significant relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and educational measures in all countries. There is support for the conclusion inferred from the PIRLS and PISA data that income or SES has significant effects on educational attainment from elementary school through high school (OECD, 2000).

Several Canadian studies have documented links between low-income households and decreased school readiness. Thomas (2007) reported that children from lower income households score significantly lower on measures of vocabulary and communication skills; knowledge of numbers; copying and symbol use; ability to concentrate; and cooperative play with other children from higher income households. Willms (2007) concluded that children from lower SES households scored lower on a receptive vocabulary test than children from higher SES households. As a result of these findings, there is evidence that some

children begin formal schooling with gaps in their academic achievement. However, in spite of the "achievement gap", schools can use effective instructional practices to interrupt the achievement disadvantage and create learning opportunities for these students to succeed and meet high expectations. The leadership of the school is crucial in creating equitable learning opportunities.

Equity means treating each learner differently based on learning needs shaped by various experiences which result in different maturity, achievement, self-esteem, motivation, and interest levels, among other variables. These differences should not be construed as weaknesses, but as strengths that can enhance the richness of the learning experience for teachers and students. Consequently, if there must be a change in the trajectory of poor academic achievement to high levels of achievement for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, schools and classrooms must portray evidence of conscious, intentional, and focused attempts to use instructional practices that create opportunities for these students to achieve learning outcomes based on equitable practices and not necessarily equal opportunities.

## Transformative Leadership

The multiplicity and complexity that characterize the leadership role of schools has kept the topic as a focus in the literature and research for decades. The renewed call for accountability that expects each school to produce outstanding academic achievement for all students has resulted in researchers' differentiating aspects of the leadership function, presenting various iterations and definitions of leadership and careful analyses of leadership application in school improvement and student achievement. In addition to the definition and application of the roles, there are also definitions of leadership styles and research studies focused on their impact on organizational performance. Leadership style highlights the characteristics and behaviours used by leaders to interact with their subordinates.

Transformative leadership focuses on systemic changes and interrogates questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise of greater achievement and a better way of life (Shields, 2010). Through this leadership style, equity and justice can be enhanced. In the school context, academic achievement for marginalized learners can be improved, and consequently their life chances. Another strength of transformative leadership is the recognition that leadership exists at all levels of the school. Therefore, drawing on the leadership of teachers is a crucial and necessary element in any improvement effort and process. Transformative leadership views improvement as a process. This implies that student achievement is never complete, but a work in progress. One level of accomplishment triggers a higher level of success, greater effort, and resilience on the part of leaders and students alike. Both transformative leadership and equity are therefore mutually inclusive. As a result, transformative leadership should characterize the roles and behaviours of those who undertake responsibilities for enhanced student achievement. From the principals' responses to the interview questions, it is deduced that all the schools in the sample focused on a social justice process.

Principal X said, "Leaders and teachers develop and use a social justice kit". Principal D said, "Leaders and teachers focus on social justice issues in implementing curriculum and assessment practices". The implication is that there is a recognition and use of transformative leadership connected to social justice aimed at higher academic achievement.

As schools continue to face community pressure to improve academic achievement, leaders must focus their attention and efforts on demonstrating the belief that all students can learn and achieve success. Stronge et al. (2008) argue that principals should concentrate on building a vision for their schools, sharing leadership with teachers and influencing schools to operate as learning communities. Also, Reason& Reason (2007) believe that as leaders, principals share their leadership with teachers to improve reflection and collaborative investigation

to improve teaching and learning. Subsequently, teacher leaders lead change from the classroom by asking questions related to improvement when they feel empowered to help find answers.

## Professional Learning Communities

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an educational concept that has undergone many decades of research, practice, and consequently revision. However, it still remains a construct that varies in definition, understanding, and implementation. Despite the variability, there seems to be consensus among researchers and practitioners alike on its usefulness in transforming teaching and instructional practices and learning outcomes.

Hord (1997) indicated that PLCs engage teachers in a cycle of looking at what is happening in their school; determining if they can make it a better place by changing curriculum, instruction, or relationships between community members; and assessing the results — all with the goal of enhancing their effectiveness as professionals. A similar point of view is expressed by Stroll et al. (2006) when they state that PLCs suggest a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practices in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way. Fulton and Britton (2011) also identify the goal of PLCs as, "focusing teachers on improving their practice and learning together about how to increase student learning" (p. 7). Another group of contributors to the wealth of information present in the literature is DuFour et al. (2009) who define PLCs as educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. The similarities in the points of view indicate that a PLC is not an event, but a process involving learners using research to inform and modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment tools and strategies. Evident also is collaboration aimed at improvement in teaching practices and learning outcomes.

There are significant benefits to be accrued in a school environment where focused intentionality on leadership and collaboration is applied to continuous improvement of learning for all students. Principals recognize that teachers have expertise, can determine their learning needs and that of their colleagues, and can contribute to student achievement. Teachers can provide leadership to school initiatives, including professional development.

In exploring theories of cognition, Putnam and Borko (2000) declare that thinking and reasoning are most effective when distributed across a system or group, rather than confined to an individual. This concept points to the importance of teachers sharing not only their knowledge and expertise on instruction, but also pertinent and relevant information about student learners, and strategizing to undertake shared responsibility for enhanced academic achievement. In this environment, individuals can reflect on their instructional practices, share perspectives, and collaborate on problem-solving, especially on strategies to support underachieving learners. This collaborative approach expands beyond individual classrooms and has greater propensity to meet the learning needs of the individual student as they journey from classroom to classroom, grade level to grade level, and from school to school. DuFour and Marzano (2011) say, "The focus of (PLCs) must shift from helping individuals become more effective in their isolated classrooms and schools, to creating a new collaborative culture based on interdependence, shared responsibility and mutual accountability" (p. 67). Rosenholtz (1991) also noted that teachers' sense of optimism, hope, and commitment reside in workplace conditions that enable them to feel professionally empowered and fulfilled.

While a lot can be said for teacher benefits, at the core of a professional learning community is student-enhanced academic achievement. Marks and Louis (1999) analyzed data from 8 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 8 high schools to examine the relationship between the quality of professional development community and student achievement, and found moderate correlations between the quality of professional collaboration and classroom pedagogy. They concluded that achievement levels were

significantly higher, to the extent that the schools were strong professional communities. The moderate correlation established through their data analysis provides no indication of the frequency, focus, approach, or even application of the professional development community.

Vescio et al. (2008) articulate the positive effects of PLCs on teacher performance and student achievement:

> Participation in learning communities' impacts teaching practice as teachers become more student-centred. In addition, teaching culture is improved because the learning communities increase collaboration, focus on student learning, teacher authority or empowerment, and continuous learning; when teachers participate in a learning community, students benefit as well, as indicated by improved achievement scores over time (p. 88).

Fullan (2010) says, "Essentially, capacity-building implies that people take the opportunity to do things differently, to learn new skills and to generate more effective practice" (p. 57). Sharrat and Fullan (2009) also purport that capacity-building must be systemic if it is going to make a performance difference for all students. They argue that capacity-building is a highly complex, dynamic, knowledge-building process intended to lead to increased student achievement in every school (p. 8). The evidence is clear that the core purpose of capacity-building is enhanced student achievement, and the approach involves teacher collaboration and support for each member of the team.

## Description and Significance of Problem

Poverty is a challenging construct to explain with any sense of clarity, because of the frequent shifts in the many variables that have ramifications for its definition. This study uses the Statistics Canada (2011) definition, which considers families to be living in poverty when their income falls below 50% of the median household income. In October 2014, the Low-Income Measures for single parents with one child was $28,185.00 after taxes.

According to the Toronto District School Board Urban Diversity Strategy: On Student Achievement (2008), "Many societal factors contribute to the marginalization of communities, families and students — factors such as poverty, racism, sexism, classism and so on" (p. 2). Poverty impacts students' learning and the curricular opportunities schools provide to improve academic achievement. Poverty sometimes has an impact on readiness for learning, gaps in learning, student class placement, and the rigor of the curriculum to which they are exposed. If students are streamed into low level program opportunities and experience ineffective instruction, the likely outcome will be underachievement.

Although many schools are serving a significant number of students from poor communities, some of these schools seem to perform above expectations. This motivates my desire to explore the reasons these schools do well despite the economic challenges their students face. It is my belief that student achievement is not determined by SES, but by the quality of learning accomplished through a synergy of leadership and PLCs that facilitates the development of effective instructional practice.

This study sought to examine the impact of poverty as described by elementary schools' ranking on the LOI and student academic achievement measured by the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) results in reading, writing, and mathematics over 3 consecutive years. The study further tested whether leadership and PLCs contributed positively to enhancing academic achievement where evidence pointed to high academic achievement for students from poor communities.

## Conceptual Framework

Sociological, psychological, environmental, and socio-economic factors shape the diversity of our student population. Students bring diverse characteristics to their learning, which influence the way learning takes place and the final outcome. A combination of all or any of these factors can have either a powerful positive or adverse impact on achievement. Not

only do these factors external to the classroom impact on learning, but also on certain internal classroom factors. This implies that relevant and rigorous curriculum delivered with differentiated instructional strategies must be informed by the demographic and community characteristics data that describe students' lived experiences. These experiences are crucial to understanding students' level of motivation, readiness to learn, and intensity of instruction (Bryk et al., 2009). To achieve the maximum effectiveness of instruction and enhanced academic achievement may require educators to constantly and consistently seek to develop their expertise through additional professional development.

In each classroom, therefore, teachers are faced with the opportunity to create a synergy between individuality and collectivity in the delivery of curriculum, differentiated instructional, and assessment practices aimed at providing equitable access and opportunity for every student to achieve academic success. Individuality speaks to the idea that each student is unique and has individual strengths and learning needs. These needs are probably different from those of their other classmates and form part of the complex learning environment. While this is true, individual students must learn and grow within a broader context. Consequently, the teacher may need to encourage cooperative or collective learning in order to enrich the experiences provided to all learners. In addition, students come from homes and communities with multiple experiences, cognitive abilities, language proficiencies, social and emotional well-being; and different exposure or lack thereof to learning enrichment opportunities. These sociological and psychological factors help shape their uniqueness, but are also indicators of their strengths and needs. Identifying this diversity and incorporating the existing enormous strength in the learning environment, should yield dividends for both teachers and students.

> While these realities may present obstacles to academic achievement, they should not be viewed as defining learning outcomes. The learning opportunities that schools provide can make the difference between success and failure for students.

These demographic and economic changes have consequences for assessment and evaluation practices, pedagogy, curriculum, leadership, teacher preparedness, and continuous development. Therefore, school leaders and teachers must use many assessment tools and measures (diagnostic, formative, or summative) to identify students' learning needs, so that more informed decisions can be made about pedagogical practices. Since these factors influence learning outcomes for all learners, but more specifically students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, it is imperative that a careful analysis of multiple data sources be undertaken to fully determine both the complexities of work to be done, and the multiplicity and diversity of the teaching/learning strategies to be employed. Therefore, in addition to assessment data, a good understanding of student demographics and environmental information (parental income; level of education; access to educational opportunities; neighbourhood challenges such as violence, discrimination, and even stereotypes and racism) should be pertinent in informing and shaping instructional practices. Comprehensive knowledge (which includes information collected from formal and informal assessment) may influence instruction and curriculum as well as learning outcomes. This knowledge will allow teachers to view students not as empty vessels that come to the learning environment to be filled with knowledge dispensed by the teacher on the stage, but as learners with strengths from previous knowledge that should be incorporated into the rich learning experiences to be created. It must be acknowledged that students from all backgrounds and socioeconomic status bring a wealth of knowledge to learning tasks. In light of these findings, this study engages Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Vygotsky (1978) describes these factors as the role of social interaction in learning and development, the role of a more knowledgeable other in learning, and the significance of the Zone of Proximal Development in learning.

Vygotsky (1978) deduced from his research that social interaction played an important role in learning and cognitive development and that

learning is a social process originating with relationships with others before occurring with the individual. He subscribes to the idea of learning occurring in the Zone of Proximal Development (what the learner can do with or without help) and the role that a more knowledgeable other plays in the learning process. In a school context, the principal and teachers are the "more knowledgeable other".

The concept of a more knowledgeable other for the purpose of this study is linked to leadership acquiring knowledge about the diverse student population and using this knowledge to inform instructional practices and collaborate on leadership practices when delivering to PLCs aimed at intentionally improving academic achievement for economically disadvantaged learners. Since sociological, psychological, and environmental factors shape our diverse student population and socialization impacts learning, the question is — What is the impact of having more knowledge on the achievement of students from poor communities? How can schools use this knowledge to enhance student learning? One should not view learners having knowledge as the panacea to producing equitable learning outcomes. However, being armed with accurate information on students' learning needs should assist teachers in the determination of appropriate intervention strategies.

## Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore what leadership practices characterize high-performing schools serving elementary students from poor communities.
2. To discover the strategies implemented by schools in developing leadership and building instructional capacity to enhance academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students.
3. To investigate the instructional practices employed by high performing schools to improve academic achievement for elementary students living in poverty.

## Methodology

In conducting this study, the researcher used the mixed method sequential explanatory design approach. Mixed methods research is defined as a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2005). The rationale for "mixing" methods was that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods on their own could adequately capture the relationship between poverty and its impact on academic achievement. Consequently, a combination of the methods complemented each other, facilitated a more comprehensive analysis, and allowed the researcher to capitalize on the strengths of the two methods. This mixed methods strategy also allowed the researcher to collect and analyze first quantitative, and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study. Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) data was collected for the 25 schools that were highest on the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI), and then 5 high achieving schools were selected from the sample. Both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers and principals were also collected and analyzed to determine possible relationships between academic achievement, leadership, and PLC's.

The Stratified Purposive Sampling Strategy was used to select participating schools. The stratified technique allowed for the selection of a subgroup that was representative of the sample, while the purposive technique involved selecting samples at either end (bottom or top) of the distribution of the sample of interest. The purposive strategy allowed the researcher to select the most outstanding successes related to poverty and academic achievement; and facilitated the collection of valuable information, and the gleaning of greater insights into the study of the impact of poverty on academic achievement.

The mixed methods methodology allowed for the analysis of EQAO data to identify 5 schools with significantly higher academic achievement

in reading, writing, and mathematics. The EQAO data represented results achieved by schools in the most recent 3 consecutive years. This decision was made in order to observe consistent, sustainable performance and delineate such variables as cohort performance. From the demographic and community characteristics data collected, it was deduced that there were no significant differences between sample schools on median family income, family income below the Low Income Measure, families receiving social assistance, lone parent families, adults with a low level of education, or adults with a high level of education. Schools also portrayed close similarities on the demographic attributes. Therefore, the minor differences on some of the demographic and school community characteristics could not significantly skew the achievement outcomes of the sample schools.

## Source and Data Collection

The teacher survey and principal interviews were used to explore leadership (principals and teachers championing high expectations for student learning and ensuring the high quality professional development, collaboration, and support needed to enhance or improve instructional practices). The internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the teacher survey, which was developed specifically for this research. In addition, an interview protocol which consisted of 8 items was developed to explore leadership and instructional practices, where the quantitative data revealed differences in students' academic achievement between schools. Both instruments were peer-reviewed by colleagues, research department staff, principals, and teachers outside the sample group. The final instruments were modified based on feedback received.

All of the 129 teachers in the 5 high-performing schools were selected to participate in a survey, with items capturing leadership and PLCs. Fifty-three teachers returned completed surveys representing 41% of the population.

All five principals agreed to be interviewed and responded to 8 open-ended questions. The researcher visited all 5 schools and interviewed all 5 principals. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, were audio-taped, and later fully transcribed by the researcher. The content analysis included reading the transcript, labelling relevant pieces, coding and creating categories or themes, labelling categories, and making connections to the variables under study. This approach also facilitated the exploration of principals' perception of factors that contributed to enhanced student academic achievement and the development of a new and in-depth understanding of these factors. The inductive approach used enabled the researcher to recommend lessons learned in order to support under-achieving schools. To assist with the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data, the researcher also collected demographic and community characteristics and EQAO data from all the sample schools. The collection and analysis of this data were aimed at learning more about students, their learning needs, and achievements.

## Data Analysis

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Statistical Procedure was applied to EQAO data to establish the relationship between the independent variable – poverty, and the dependent variable – academic achievement. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Procedure was also used to determine correlations among leadership, PLCs (PLCs), and instructional practices. Descriptive Statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to analyze the teacher survey results. Charts categorizing the themes extrapolated from principals' responses were developed and used in the analysis of the data. A triangulation of the data was done to further explore and verify observations and patterns identified from the analysis of the quantitative data with findings from the qualitative data.

### School Profiles Developed from Data

The elementary schools in the sample (D, G, H, N, and X) were located in inner-city communities of Toronto, Canada. Their placements on the Toronto District School Board's LOI[1] were from

[1] The LOI (Learning Opportunity Index) provides a score and ranking for schools according to external challenges; and is calculated from median income, the proportion of low-income families and families receiving Social Assistance, education levels of adults, and the proportion of lone parent families.

1-25—considered high (facing significant socio-economic challenges). Each of the schools portrayed demographic, sociological, psychological, and socio-economic diversity. Each school achieved varying degrees of student academic achievement on EQAO[2], CAT4[3], and in-school assessments. Their achievements have shown consistency over the 3 consecutive years (2013–2016) for which these data have been collected and disaggregated. Highlighted below are specific demographic, community characteristics and achievement results of Schools D, G, H, N, and X. These schools portray varying degrees of challenges, yet demonstrate significant student achievement.

### *School D*

School D's student population was comprised of 19% Special Needs Learners: 10% of the students were born outside of Canada and 48% of the students spoke English as their primary home language. The median family income was CAN$39,013.00; 53% of the families had family income below the Income Measure; 39% of the families received Social Assistance; 54% had lone parent families; 33% had adults with low education (educational attainment-below high school diploma graduation); and only 9% of the adults had university degrees or above. The school's results in EQAO were 76% in reading, 83% in writing, and 69% in mathematics.

### *School G*

School G's population comprised of 19% Special Needs Learners: 18% of the students were born outside Canada, and 47% of the students spoke English as their primary home language. The median family income was $27,000; 54% of the families had income below the Low Income Measures; 39% of the families received Social Assistance; 68% had lone parent families; 35% had low level education; while 11% had university degrees or above. This school attained 90% in reading, 85% in writing, and 80% in mathematics in EQAO test results.

### *School H*

Eighteen percent of the school's population were Special Needs Learners: 20% were born outside Canada, and 60% of the students spoke English as their primary home language. The median family income was approximately $35,000.00: 48% of the families had income below the Low Income Measures; 34% of the families received Social Assistance; 56% had lone parent families; 26% had adults with low education; and 13% of the adults had university degrees or above. School H achieved 80% in reading, 89% in writing, and 61% in mathematics in EQAO test results.

### *School N*

The student population consisted of 9% Special Needs Learners: 10% of students were born outside of Canada and 43% spoke English as their primary home language. The median family income was approximately $37,000.00: 49% of the families had income below the Low Income Measures; 36% of the families received Social Assistance; 56% had lone parent families; 28% of the families had adults with low education (without a high school diploma); and only 17% of the adults had university degrees or above. The school also achieved 93% in reading, writing, and mathematics in EQAO test results.

### *School X*

School X had a student population of 16% Special Needs Learners: 10% of the students were born outside of Canada and 47% of the students spoke English as their primary home language. The median family income was $39,908.00: 50% of the families had income below the Low Income Measure; 37% received Social Assistance; 49% had lone parent families; 39% of the families had low adult education; 9% had adults with tertiary level education or above. The school achieved 66% in reading, 73% in writing, and 53% in mathematics in EQAO test results.

[2] EQAO (Education, Quality and Assessment Office) standardized tests in reading, writing,
and mathematics.

[3] CAT4 (Cognitive Ability Test) is a diagnostic assessment that is designed to help students and their teachers understand how they learn, what their academic potential may be, and how students think — which is known to make a difference to learning. Tasks involved non-verbal, verbal, special, and quantitative reasoning.

These school profiles highlight the specificity in demographic, school community characteristics, and achievement results. These schools are similar in demographics, school community characteristics (except the percentage of lone parent families), but vary slightly in their academic results. It should be pointed out that similarity does not imply homogeneity, but rather heterogeneity. There is no monolithic group. This connotes the complexity of the issues facing each school and the possible numerous and varied strategies that must be creatively implemented to effect enhanced academic achievement. Therefore, there must be a number of diverse strategies employed to support diversity among the learners in order to achieve enhanced results. All of the schools in the sample (D, G, H, N, and X) performed above expectations (at or above provincial standard). Schools N, H, and G demonstrated a higher level of academic achievement in demographic and school community characteristics despite the similarity to Schools D and X.

However, in spite of the similarities in the challenges faced, these schools are still diverse. They also experience different levels of academic achievement although they all can be characterized as successful. The question then is: What can we learn from the strategies employed by these schools to inform policies and practices in underachieving schools to transform their achievement to levels of excellence?

This research is premised on the idea that SES or poverty is not the final determinant of the educational outcome for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Leadership developed through PLCs may be instrumental in schools' attempts to turn negative learning outcomes into positive outcomes and experiences. This could be the necessary change needed to improve the economic chances for some students and their families. Some schools serving students from poor communities have employed strategies that seem to be transformative and successful. Investigating these strategies can be informative and instructive. Lessons learned from this exploration could assist educators charged with the responsibilities of teaching students from poor backgrounds in their attempts to produce higher academic achievement outcomes.

## Ethical Review Process

Prior to undertaking this research project, applications were made to the York University Research Ethics Review and the Toronto District School Board Ethics Review Committees for approval. The application contained a description and rationale for the project; identification and description of participants and how they would be recruited; expectations of, risks, and benefits to participants; securing informed consent and anonymity; and the confidentiality and security of data collected.

## Presentation and Discussion of Findings

### School Profiles Developed from Principals' Perceptions

#### School D

Students undertake many responsibilities at home and respond well to their responsibilities in the classrooms and school. Teachers recognize students' differences and use different approaches to meet their learning needs. Teachers use Guided Reading, STAR Reading Strategy and running records to develop literacy skills. Math clubs help us enhance numeracy skills. Monthly assessment data is collected and used to inform our discussions on achievement and learning. At this school, we use Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP), focus on social justice issues, and integrate special needs learners into the regular classes. Special Needs Learners are also provided with additional assistance. (Participant's response)

Teachers in School D used CRRP, differentiated instruction (DI), accommodations for special needs learners, good assessment data, and the incorporation of social justice issues in the curriculum as strategies to improve academic

achievement for economically disadvantaged students. Other strategies employed were guided reading and additional opportunities offered through a math club. The principal identified program initiatives such as Early Literacy, English as a Second Language classes for newcomers and students whose first language is not English as factors that influenced the school's success. According to the principal, accommodations were made to support special needs learners with the aim of integrating them quickly into regular classes. All teachers participated in professional learning communities, sometimes in grade level teams and at other times as a school. Instructional Rounds is a professional development strategy practiced at this school. Supply teacher coverage, common prep time, and use of learning coaches facilitated teachers' meeting opportunities.

### School G

In response to the interview questions, the principal said:

> Eighty percent of the students at this school are from the lower SES background, with limited support systems. Teachers understand the stressors that impact on the students and their families. We use our staff meetings to facilitate conversations on meeting students' needs. Our PLCs also focus on developing teaching strategies. We use data from many sources to help us understand how to move under-achieving students upward. We use differentiated instruction, CRRP, excursions, and different student engagement strategies to enhance learning. We provide support for students with special needs and re-integrate them into regular classes as soon as their skills improve. (Participant's response)

The teachers' use of different instructional strategies such as CRRP, DI, and the use of rich questions to encourage higher-order thinking skills were strategies perceived by the principal of School G as contributing factors to the level of student success the school experienced. According to the principal, the staff study on growth mindset, barriers to learning, and the impact of stereotypes on assessment, instruction, and the learning environment created in each classroom, enhanced staff understanding of the learning needs of students living in poverty. Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions were implemented to help staff develop expertise. The additional model school and student success funds received by the school contributed to providing additional student opportunities and staff development. Student opportunities included excursions, guest scientists in the classrooms, and additional technological support and equipment. The school pursued a practice of integrating special needs learners into the regular classrooms and used Special Needs Assistants and Child and Youth Workers to support them. The principal believed that her training in diversity did have an impact on her leadership, instructional stance, values, beliefs, and practices.

An analysis of the school profiles developed from the principals' responses revealed similarities and differences.

### School H

The principal of School H observed:

> Our school is the 8th on the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI). In this school, students speak 33 different languages. A significant number of our students are special needs learners. They enjoy learning. In our classrooms you can observe equity in action. We use assessment data as, for, and of learning. The use of data helps us know which students are not achieving in spite of our best efforts. We use data to inform our instructional strategies. Teachers implement Differentiated instruction, use rich questions and 3-part math lessons. In all lessons, teachers try to provide multiple entry points for students. We implement weekly PLCs where we learn together. Lead teachers work with administrators to plan PLCs. I believe in shared leadership and we practise it. Teachers always share experiences and strategies. (Participant's response)

The principal of School H attributed the level of student success to teacher efficacy and collaboration. As characterized by shared immigrant experience, love for students, high morale, and a cohesive working relationship

supported by the administrative team. The school's instructional capacity-building strategies included weekly professional learning community (PLC) sessions in which lead teachers worked with administration to plan and implement staff learning opportunities. These opportunities were supported by the school's timetable model, funds to facilitate teacher release, and the encouragement and support from union representatives. Assessment data were used to establish a sense of urgency among staff and focused instructional practices on the learning needs of all students, especially on the needs of those still under-achieving despite teachers' best efforts. The evidence gathered from data analyses also informed professional development needs. Staff explored research on growth mindset; high expectations for student learning; delivered rich lessons with multiple entry points and DI. There was strong feeling expressed by the principal on the stability of the administrative team; leadership by example; teacher retention; the concept of the staff as a family or team; and the administrator's flexibility in considering teachers' expertise in determining their class assignments. Inner-city model school funding and teacher coach support were lauded as vehicles to address inequalities.

### School N

The principal of School N highlighted the following:

> Our school is ranked number one on the LOI. The student population is very diverse, with 50% of African heritage. The students have rich histories and strong oral language skills. We connect students' histories and experiences to the curriculum. They are open to learning and want to succeed. Our teachers plan instruction using a social justice lens. We study assessment data and the teachers are engaged in collaborative inquiry. Teachers work together to develop common assessment tools. Critical thinking is encouraged in each lesson across all grade levels. We use instructional strategies such as CRRP, D.I. and technology as additional resources for our students. We use excursions to encourage learning outside the classrooms. Our students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) get special assistance.

The principal of School N declared that the level of student success experienced by the school could be attributed to leadership that was well rounded and included collaboration with teachers and instructional or teaching coaches. The principal noted that this approach is complex, but a necessary team strategy. Staff teaching assignment, such as assigning males to teach kindergarten classes, was perceived as important to effective classroom management and the provision of male role models.

The school administrator recognized that their teaching staff came to the task with different levels of expertise that represented strengths, but also with gaps in knowledge about students' diverse backgrounds and how to connect their histories and experiences to the curriculum and teaching strategies. The study of many sources of data was undertaken to close the knowledge gap and inform instructional practices. Emphasis was placed on researching theories and practices such as high expectations for all students; a focus on social justice issues in curricular offerings; and CRRP as a possible instructional practice. The school undertook what was perceived as a shared leadership approach and embarked on collaborative inquiry as part of their "Teacher Action Research" aimed at professional reflection and instructional capacity-building. Staff used instruction as a vehicle to address inequalities such as excursion; use of technology[4] to differentiate instruction; and a social justice[5] approach to student engagement and combating negative stereotypes.

### School X

The principal of School X noted that:

> Our students are from very diverse backgrounds — Blacks, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Tamil. They all have strengths in speaking English and strong oral language skills. Students and their families view this school as a

[4] Differentiated assignments posted on the computer for individual or small group completion. Individual or group performs tasks with peer or teacher assistance as necessary. Students change task levels as mastery is achieved. Completed tasks are recorded, shared and feedback provided. A similar approach used for mathematical problem solving, research and writing process (editing, peer and teacher feedback, publishing).

[5] Social justice approach recognizes learning gaps based on inequity and create opportunities to achieve equitable learning outcomes.

> positive space. From our climate survey and assessment data, we identify gaps in student learning. We use PLCs to address community income levels, growth mindsets, and instructional strategies; as well as to share success stories and celebrate success. The teachers participate in co-planning and co-teaching. With the use of technology, teachers incorporate Google Docs in learning activities. Differentiated instruction is one of the instructional strategies used by teachers to meet different learning needs**.**

Teachers in School X reported the use of CRRP; the delivery of interdisciplinary thematic units based on social justice issues; accommodations for Special Needs Learners; and the use of technology to differentiate instruction, as strategies to enhance academic achievement for students from poor communities. Through PLCs, they have shared, analyzed assessment and community characteristic data, and identified students' learning needs. This information was used to determine instruction. Teachers shared research on growth mindset; high expectations; use of technology in differentiating instruction; social justice issues and their impact on curriculum and teaching-learning strategies; co-planning; and celebration of successes. The principal also highlighted the school's reading program, which incorporated literature written by authors from diverse backgrounds. All students received a book-bag which was taken home weekly with a fresh supply of books to be read and shared as a family.

### Question 1: Are there leadership practices that characterize high performing schools serving elementary students from poor communities? What are they?

From the data it was deduced that teachers in the sample schools believed that leadership is associated with academic achievement (median score of 1.5). From the principals' interview responses, 2 of the variables related to student success were: administrative support of staff and leadership. The principals perceived that strategies aimed at engaging staff in developing an understanding of the attributes and functions necessary to help students living in poverty to succeed included leadership: principal and teacher team collaboration. Principals intimated that stability in administration, leadership by example, principals' training in diversity, and principals in general, are among the factors that impact student academic achievement. There was also a correlation established between leadership and instruction, (0.914 at 0.01 significant level - 2-tailed).

Over 51% of the teachers in the sample considered leadership to be a factor associated with student academic achievement. The teachers identified strategies (such as working in collaboration with staff to set high expectations for student achievement and monitoring progress), that created the environment for teachers to willingly seek and develop their expertise and value, and empower others to authentically share responsibilities.

## Conclusion

The evidence suggests that when leadership is supportive, collaborative and empowering instructional capacity-building is enhanced and high student academic achievement may be evident. School leadership is instrumental in developing, implementing, sustaining, and enhancing the quality of instructional practice (Bass & Faircloth, 2013; Hopkins, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2001). Blasé and Blasé (2000) label this construct as, "instructional supervision" and purport that it supports improved teaching, positive interaction, and trusting relationships. The collaborative and collegial relationships that exist between principals and teachers enhance the quality of instruction through the recognition of teacher leadership by creating and providing professional development opportunities in an atmosphere of trust. As a result, there is a recognition that the paradigm has shifted from the principal as master teacher and keeper of knowledge, to an approach that embraces shared practice and greater staff collaboration. Leadership practices that offer timely and tiered opportunities for staff collaboration in their quest to enhance student academic achievement are wise investments in improving learning and life chances.

In our current economic climate, therefore, creative ways must be explored, researched, and implemented to develop staff expertise so that all students can maximize their learning potential. Identifying some signposts towards excellence in education, Hattie (2012) states, "Teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning" (p. 18). Transformative leadership in this context could include a collaborative process for implementing equitable practices to achieve common goals.

Professional development opportunities allow teachers to hone their skills. However, in classrooms where these practices are limited, or not evident, professional development can also assist in filling the void and building collaborative efficacy. Even in classrooms where the practices are exemplary, professional development can be instrumental in shared capacity-building and the further pursuit of excellence (Hargreaves & Frank, 2006; Harris & Chapman, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2002; Murphy, 2002; Reeves, 2006).

Many authors contribute to the discourse on PLCs: (Bass & Faircloth, 2013; Caine, G. & Caine, R., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Katz et al., 2009). Darling-Hammond (2007) argues that professional development sustained over time, focused on important content that embeds knowledge of community strengths, will positively affect ongoing improvement in teachers' practices. Danielson (2006) says, "Teacher leaders develop a collaborative relationship with colleagues; they inspire others to join them on a journey without a specific destination." (p. 13).

Contributing to the discourse, Fullan (2001) says, "The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people's commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilization" (p. 9). While one is cognizant of the challenges facing each school, one must remain optimistic that schools can make a difference in influencing academic achievement for all learners.

There is a recognition that some variables impacting on learning are outside the remit of schools. However, leadership is a variable over which the schools have direct control and influence. While schools do not directly influence poverty, they have direct control of curriculum; instruction; teacher and student interactions; and the interactions among teachers, students, and curriculum. It is the synergy of the interrelated parts that maximizes learning outcome; in this case, leadership, professional collaboration, and growth do impact student achievement.

## Question 2: Are there strategies implemented by schools to develop leadership and instructional capacity to enhance academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students? What are they?

The data shows that leadership, as associated with academic achievement, at a median value of 1.11, and reveals that with a median of 1.5, professional development was associated with academic achievement. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers perceived that professional development was associated with academic achievement, while 55% believed that involving PLCs had an impact on academic achievement. With a median of 1.2, teachers perceived that PLCs were associated with academic achievement. The data also shows an overall correlation of instructional practices, leadership, professional development, and PLCs, with a variance of 0.972.

From the data it is deduced that PLCs were contributing factors to schools' success, and to the strategies used to engage staff in understanding the attributes and functions necessary to help students living in poverty succeed. Leadership through collaborative inquiry was also among the strategies employed by schools to develop instructional practices. The data extrapolated from the teacher questionnaire reveals professional development opportunities, PLCs, teachable moments, and professional dialogues as capacity-building strategies. Principals identified two factors that contributed to school success as principals' training in diversity and PLCs using coaching support.

## Conclusion

There was a perception from teacher respondents that professional development and PLCs were associated with academic achievement. Principal and teacher team collaboration and PLCs were strategies used to develop teacher instructional practices and enhance leadership development and collaboration. Strong leadership and collaborative inquiry were also strategies prevalent in the schools. From the evidence collected, it was deduced that there was diversity in approaches, strategies, foci, frequencies, and even outcomes of professional development opportunities and PLCs. However, teachers and principals felt that the success of the schools in terms of academic achievement was significantly linked to the implementation of these two strategies. One principal indicated that strong leadership was demonstrated in well-roundedness or a willingness to be vulnerable in expressing knowledge gaps, as well as learning together with staff members. This, he said, created the opportunity for staff to emulate preferred examples, build trust, and pursue authentic learning without fear of evaluation.

Principal H said, "At our PLCs we use data to do assessment as, for, and of learning, to decide which students are not successful in spite of our best efforts."

Principal G said, "Data guides our instructional practices and next steps."

Principal D said, "We use monthly assessment data and observation of instructional strategies through Walk Throughs to inform opportunities to enhance student learning."

Principal H said, "Our teachers share knowledge of student needs and teaching expertise. Teachers are not afraid to ask for help with challenges."

DuFour and Eaker (1998) believe that in the professional learning community schools, professional development is designed to support and build upon the collective capacity of teachers to work effectively as members of a collaborative team and share knowledge and understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

In describing teachers' impact on students' academic achievement, principals in this study, commented, "Teachers have high morale and give service to students beyond the call of duty. Teachers provide extra academic and social support in after-school programs. Teachers' professional relationship with students and each other, as well as their collaboration in sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources are significant contributors to student success. Teachers possess growth mindsets and have high expectations for all the students."

It seems that with the belief that all students can learn at a high level, and the willingness to provide extra access to opportunities and collaboration, teachers intensified their efforts and achieved significant learning outcomes for their students. Danielson (2006) said, "Teacher leaders develop a collaborative relationship with colleagues; they inspire others to join them on a journey without a specific destination. They recognize an opportunity or a problem, and they convince others to join in addressing it" (p. 13). From the data, there is a clear indication that teacher participation in PLCs is linked to student academic achievement.

## Question 3: Are there instructional practices employed by high performing schools to improve academic achievement for elementary students living in poverty? What are they?

The principals identified the following strategies: high teacher expectations; use of rich questions; Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP); use of good assessment data; DI; accommodations for special needs learners; and the use of technology.

They further indicated that the use of students' and families' prior experiences; in-class technological support; and the use of data and planning instruction through a social justice lens were strategies that positively impacted on academic achievement. Principals' responses identified the strategies employed in developing instructional practice capacity in three areas: teachers — learning together, co-planning, co-

teaching and use of data to monitor progress; leadership—shared leadership; professional development — use of model school lead teachers and coaches, collaborative inquiry, theory of action, and accountable talk.

Principals' responses about factors that contributed to schools' successful academic achievement included: instruction—use of technology as part of instructional strategies; leadership—stability in administration, leadership by example, principals' training in diversity and succession planning, and teacher retention and leadership. From the teachers' questionnaire response data, it was deduced that teachers perceived instructional practices to be one of the variables significantly correlated with student academic achievement.

## Conclusion

From the data, it appears that when principals and teachers collaborate and implement a variety of research-based instructional strategies that meet diverse learning needs, there is great propensity for high academic achievement. Despite the challenges, schools have been exploring strategies for improvement. Some of the studies that offer insights on relevant improvement efforts focus on leadership and PLCs as a strategy to build teaching-learning capacity. Teachers in this study perceived leadership (variance 0.914) and PLCs (variance 0.910) to be significantly correlated to academic achievement. The principals in the sample attributed the high level of student success at their schools to leadership, PLCs, and instructional practices. In reporting on the meta-analyses on the relation of quality of teaching to learning, John Hattie (2009) identified the highest correlations as: teachers challenging students (encouraging them to think through and solve problems, either by themselves or together as a group, r= 0.64); high expectations (encouraging students to place a high value on mathematics, r=0.53; monitoring and evaluation (getting students to think about the nature and quality of their work, r=0.46; encouraging them to test mathematical ideas and discover mathematical principles, r=0.40), and teaching the language, love, and details of mathematics (helping students construct an understanding of the language and processes of mathematics, r=0.47; developing their ability to think and reason from a mathematical point of view, r=0.41. (p. 115).

The essence of these findings implies that high quality instructional strategies can positively impact on academic achievement for students living in poverty.

According to Haberman (1991), labels identify some children as being less worthy of high-quality experiences. The result of such systemic labelling is called "pedagogy of poverty" (pp. 290–294). This pedagogy focuses on an instructional approach that mirrors giving instruction, asking questions, giving directions, marking assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers, and giving grades (p. 291).

The contention is not with the activities themselves, but with the implementation of these activities to the exclusion of other best practices and students' most apparent learning needs. Dougherty and Barth (1997) noted, "Poor and minority children are systematically bludgeoned into low-level academic performance with a steady dose of low-level, boring, if not downright silly assignments and curricular"(pp. 40–44). They further purport that in such settings, children are not taught to think critically and therefore are unable to use what they already know to help them understand their world. Effective teaching must capitalize on the strengths or social capital students bring to learning tasks and use these strengths to influence new and profound learning outcomes. Students' learning should be the apparent driving factor that informs teachers' pedagogy.

Conversely, the "pedagogy of plenty" portrays high quality teaching, including sound teaching practices that provide students with many opportunities for academic success. This pedagogical approach reflects the following elements of good teaching:

- Authentic tasks within a meaning-driven curriculum;

- Tasks that offer students real purposes for reading;
- Writing and doing mathematics and real audiences for their work;
- Literacy-rich learning environments that offer a wide variety of high-quality resources;
- Helping to make connections between what students learn in school and their daily experiences in their homes, community, and culture. Exposing students to resources that offer experiential, problem-based, active learning opportunities;
- Engaging students in a variety of social configurations in cooperative and collaborative learning groups, working on issues and problems of deep concerns to them;
- Exposing students to inquiry-based approaches to instruction that make meaning, not just getting right answers (this is the essence of instruction);
- Engaging students in substantive dialogue, discussion, debate, and conversation to help them learn, understand, make informed judgments about, and apply the substance of, a content area; and,
- Allowing students to have their home and community culture, language, and experience positively acknowledged and incorporated into their learning as they explore cognitive and meta-cognitive problems within the context of purposeful activities (Cole, 2008, p. 49-50).

Principal H said, "Our teachers use rich questions to provide multiple entry points for students to achieve some success, but they also acquire new learning and develop higher order thinking skills."

Principal X said, "Differentiated instruction and CRRP are strategies used by our teachers. Rich questions are incorporated in each lesson."

From the principals' responses to the interview questions, it was deduced that schools included rigorous curriculum reflecting students' diverse culture and experiences. The use of "rich questions" to develop higher order thinking, enquiry, and problem-solving skills formed part of every school's instructional practice. The social justice approach to curricular planning and implementation was also used to help students make informed opinions and decisions. The differentiated instructional strategy created opportunities for all students to participate in rich tasks rather than chiefly lower-level tasks portrayed by the pedagogy of poverty. All students, regardless of their SES, need rich learning opportunities that capitalize on their strengths and enhance their academic achievement.

These well researched, documented, and practiced elements identified by Cole (2008) should be present in all learning environments. The intent, however, is not to portray the teacher as "super-person" with knowledge and effective strategies to individually transform all learners. The extent to which each element is operative in each classroom may vary significantly. Some elements may even be absent. However, educators are always reflecting on their practices and pursuing opportunities for growth. Educational practitioners also recognize that no one individual has all the strategies to address the very divergent needs of all our learners, and that one size does not fit all. Pertinent to this discourse also is the fact that there are diverse learning needs among students from financially disadvantaged communities. Knowledge of this diversity is crucial to the effective delivery of instruction to meet the needs of these students.

Data collected from the teachers' questionnaire and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation shows that at a 0.01 level of significance, instruction is correlated to leadership (variance 0.914), professional development (variance 0.907), and PLCs (variance 0.910). There is also an overall correlation of the variables under study at variance 0.963. From the data, it can be deduced that leadership is significantly correlated to professional development (variance 0.885) and PLCs (variance 0.908). An overall correlation with leadership and the other variables is variance 0.972. It can also be extrapolated that leadership, instructional practices, professional development opportunities, and PLCs seem to be interrelated and have direct impact on student academic achievement. Another deduction that may be made is that the

level of achievement at each school is dependent on the effectiveness on each of the variables or on a combination of variables. Conversely, schools demonstrating ineffectiveness on one or more variables may experience lower academic achievement.

## Conclusion

The evidence points to the fact that student academic achievement is associated with instructional practices. Schools used strategies such as CRRP, DI, rich questions to encourage higher order thinking, technology, assessment data, connection of the curriculum to social justice, and the incorporation of students' cultures, histories, and lived experiences into the curriculum. This implies that economically disadvantaged students come to learning tasks and environments with diverse experiences, learning needs, and learning styles — similar to all other students. They require and deserve to experience different strategies to enhance their academic achievement.

This finding is synonymous with the belief held by Cole (2008) that good instruction is good instruction, regardless of students' racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Cole (2008) further states that teaching that is engaging, relevant, multicultural, and appealing to a variety of modalities and learning styles works well with all students.

In referring to the constructivist approach to teaching and learning, Cole (2008) says:

> These practices include activating students' prior knowledge; providing a variety of active learning resources; using a variety of hands-on, minds-on activities; engaging youngsters in a variety of cooperative learning experiences; allowing students to formulate questions and discover concepts that can guide future learning; asking students to think aloud while approaching a task; modeling powerful thinking strategies; and providing students with opportunities to apply new learning within the context of real-life activities (pp. 30–31).

There is an indication here that there is no panacea for achievement. However, the knowledge and use of many and varied resources and instructional strategies that include assessing and incorporating students' strengths seem to make a difference in learning outcomes. These facets of good pedagogical practice acknowledge that each learner brings strengths to the learning tasks and with a variety of resources and skillfully applied teaching strategies and learning opportunities, academic achievement for the most vulnerable learners, students from poor communities can supercede students from economically advantaged backgrounds.

## Summary of Conclusions

From the data collected and analyzed, the researcher makes the following conclusions:

Schools in this sample experienced a higher level of academic achievement even though their placement on the LOI ranking was considered high. Some of these schools even outperformed those schools ranked low on the LOI in both their absolute and relative performance measures.

These schools have a significantly high population of students from economically disadvantaged, single parent households, and families low in educational attainment and yet their academic achievement was high.

When leadership is perceived to be supportive, collaborative, and shared, instructional capacity is enhanced and high academic achievement is evident. A focus on the transformative leadership style is imperative. This practice should be more explicitly included in teacher preparation in faculties of education, leadership qualification programs (Principals' Qualification Program (PQP), Supervisory Officers' Qualification Program (SOQP), and professional development opportunities under the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF).

PLCs contribute to developing leadership and instructional capacities among principals and teachers. The quality of leadership and instructional practices developed and sustained through PLCs positively impact student academic achievement. In addition, the greater the number of variables (leadership, PLCs) on which schools are perceived high, the greater the probability that their academic achievement

will be high (i.e. schools performing above 60% at levels 3 and or 4 in EQAO reading, writing and mathematics at either grade 3 or 6).

When principals and teachers collaborate and implement a variety of research-based instructional strategies that meet diverse learning needs, there is a greater possibility that academic achievement will be high.

High academic achievement is dependent on a synergy of school factors (leadership, PLCs, and the instructional practices developed and implemented through professional development.

## Recommendations

Shared and collaborative leadership should be allowed to permeate every school environment and intentional focus, effort, and resources should be invested in encouraging and developing teacher leadership. Transformative leadership should characterize all school environments and inform all leadership development opportunities and PLCs.

Intentional, purposeful, data driven, structured, teacher-led PLCs should be utilized as a vehicle to increase effectiveness in leadership and instruction. A variety of high effective or research-based instructional strategies should be implemented in every school and classroom.

This mixed method study focused on five high performing schools serving students living in poverty. Further studies of a similar nature including a larger sample, with possibly other variables and in other school boards should be undertaken. Another inquiry on schools serving economically advantaged students, but under-performing may shed additional light on factors that impact on academic achievement. The findings from any such inquiry may help to further improve schools' effectiveness in marking high levels of achievement for all students.

Achieving equitable academic achievement outcomes for a very diverse group of learners is not an insurmountable task. There are no easy and quick answers. The complexities of the challenges, multiplicity of factors that impact learning, and societal demand placed on educators to achieve academic excellence for all learners require constant exploration of different strategies to meet the high expectations of students and their families. Knowledge gleaned from research studies and intentional application and review of any recommendations from these sources should be pertinent to the achievement enhancement journey. The conclusion deduced from the data collected and analyzed in this research project is that poverty does not have the determining verdict on the academic achievement of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Rather, schools, through transformative leadership and PLCs can make a difference in instructional practices.

There are many complex and varied factors that impact achievement. Consequently, each school's success will be dependent on the differentiation of the opportunities provided. All opportunities should have students at the centre. Principals and teachers should continuously learn and grow. The hope is that the findings from this research will add insights and support the efforts being undertaken to achieve successful learning outcomes for all, but more specifically, for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the hope that a combination of the strategies reviewed will benefit all learners and that practitioners will conduct additional research using different samples in different situations — thereby adding to the wealth of information needed to support diverse learners.

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# Asset–Based Community Development and Appreciative Inquiry (ABCD/AI) Approach to Community Transformation: The Case of the Drewsland Community

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## Abstract

This article is based on a 2014 study of Drewsland, an inner–city community in Kingston, Jamaica. It includes an investigation of how the Asset–Based Community Development and Appreciative Inquiry approaches may be applied to identify the assets of the Drewsland community, empower the residents, and guide the community transformation process through collaboration and partnership between these assets. The study concluded that since educational transformation is a subset of community transformation, community transformation in Drewsland is possible through collaboration among a community and leadership network including the school, community–based organizations, government entities, the church, and the business community.

*Keywords*: Asset-Based Community Development, community transformation, educational transformation

## Introduction

Drewsland is one of nine urban communities within the Duhaney Park Development area of the city of Kingston, Jamaica. Howard (2005) described Kingston as a city that "once stood out as the Caribbean's English–speaking capital. It stands now as a capital for all that is right in the world, and much that is wrong" (p. 1). This description seems to fit Drewsland and some of its neighboring communities which includes Waterhouse, Maverly, Pembroke Hall, Patrick City, Washington Gardens, New Haven, and Duhaney Park.

Urbanization, though inevitable as part of a modern nation's economic growth and development process, is associated with many negatives: poor housing and living conditions, high unemployment and low employability, high school dropout rates and low student achievement, teenage pregnancies, single–parent households, and high poverty and crime rates. McKnight and Block (2012) stated, "Our communities are abundant with the resources we need for the future. It is the awakening of families and neighbourhoods to the resources that are needed" (p. 18).

This paper summarizes a study conducted in the inner–city community of Drewsland, with the goal of identifying and mobilizing community assets to facilitate socioeconomic transformation—including the transformation of the school in the community. Most struggling communities have the inherent capacity to prosper, but the

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process of community transformation requires a change in mindset (McKnight & Block, 2012). The aim of this study is to facilitate the required mindset change among Drewsland's citizens and other stakeholders, empowering them to achieve prosperity through partnership, collaboration, and community networking.

## Research Problem

This study of the Drewsland community was carried out through the lens of the Asset–Based Community Development (ABCD) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approaches, which seek to address community transformation through a process of empowerment and mindset change among community members who view themselves as powerless and voiceless. As postulated by Bernard (2006), the mindset (and hence the behaviour of members of a community) is not only the product of intrinsic psychological factors, but more so of the impact of external forces on the mind.

The research problem under study therefore is, the application of the ABCD/AI approach as a community transformation strategy for the Drewsland Community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) defined ABCD as an alternative community development approach that "acknowledges and embraces particularly the strong neighbourhood–rooted traditions of community organizing, community economic development and neighbourhood planning" (p. 9). Hammond (2013) described AI as an approach to community development or organizational change that looks beyond the problems and failures of a community or organization and focuses on its successes, abilities, and capabilities — in essence, all that is good and positive within a community.

Education transformation as a subset of community transformation is student learning that is culturally and environmentally relevant to student empowerment and which enables the learner to develop personal strengths and abilities within a stimulating and engaging environment (Whitby, 2017). This definition therefore adheres to the ABCD/AI community development approaches. The ABCD/AI approach to community development as postulated by McKnight & Russell (2018) also fosters implementation strategies which are unique to this approach. According to McKnight and Russell (2018), three implementation strategies which are used to identify and connect resources are (1) starting with the gifts, skills and talents of residents (2) identifying the need for external help (3) citizens deciding on what they want outside help to do.

As clearly stated by McKnight and Russell (2018) the order in which these strategies are applied makes the ABCD/AI approach unique to the other approaches which usually start at step #3 and so 'preclude citizen power' (p.6)

## Background and Rationale

A 2009 survey by the Social Development Commission (SDC), an agency of Jamaica's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, estimated the population of Drewsland as 7,773, inhabiting a total of 1,610 dwellings, for an average household size of more than 4.7 persons. The households ranged in size from 1–12 members, and 54% were headed by males. All heads of households in the community were at least 19 years old. The survey determined that 54% of all households were headed by a single parent, 20% by married couples, and 18% by couples living in common–law unions. The unemployment level was 41% overall and 44% among men; males represented 54% of all employed heads of households and 56% of unemployed household heads. The monthly income of over 30% of the employed population was $10,000–$20,000 in Jamaican currency, or US$67–US$133.

Drewsland has a reputation for sporadic gun violence, which may be linked to the violence that characterizes its closest neighbor, Waterhouse. Land tenure is also an issue in the community, and squatting posed a problem since some residents refused to pay for the land they occupied. Most squatter settlements in both urban and rural areas of Jamaica are plagued by violence and lack of law and order (Moore, 2014; Tindigarukayo, 2014). In his study of the impact of "place" on human development from medieval times to the 21st century, Inge (2003) pointed

out, "it is of great interest to note that those few people who want to look for a different way forward emphasize the importance of place and the notion of inhabiting as being vital in the formation and nurture of the community" (p. 127). The Government of Jamaica's response to growing squatter settlements and their resulting problems included the development of a housing plan for the Drewsland area (SDC, 2009), which entailed the establishment of the Drews Avenue Primary and Infant school and a nearby health centre.

The rationale for studying Drewsland was influenced by the author's personal experience through church affiliation. The church, though not located in the community, has many Drewsland residents among its membership. This church has established and maintains a Sunday School program at Drews Avenue Primary and Infant, and its pastor and another church member have each served as chair of the Drews Avenue Primary school board.

Student attendance at Drews Avenue Primary has been affected by the crime and violence in the community. The church earlier mentioned seeks to provide spiritual and moral education along with supporting students' academic achievement and employability, to prepare them to lead the process of transformation in their community. The parents (especially mothers (McFarlane, 2017)), therefore send their children to Sunday school because they want better results for their children. The Sunday school program is a collaborative partnership between the church, the school, and the community, and represents an extension of the relationship between Drews Avenue Primary and the church.

The overall project aims to initiate the process of community transformation through collaboration among the residents, community leaders, the church, the school, the business sector, non–government organizations, and public entities and agencies—all of which have an interest in seeing Drewsland change from a troubled, crime–ridden, inner–city community to one that facilitates growth and development.

## Research Questions

Terrell (2016) posed two questions that should guide the researcher in the development of relevant research questions; "Do the problem statement, purpose statement and research questions flow together? Can we ultimately learn something about the research problem by answering the research question?" (p. 29). In adherence to Terrell's recommendation, the following research questions were developed as guided by the research problem, which is focused on the application of the ABCD/AI approach as a community transformation strategy for the Drewsland community.

**Main question:** How can the ABCD and AI approaches to community transformation be implemented in Drewsland?

**Sub–questions:**

1. What are the most utilized assets in the Drewsland community?
2. What role can the school play in the transformation of the Drewsland community?
3. What ABCD and AI strategies can be implemented in Drewsland?

The overarching research strategy was to investigate and determine the readiness of Drewsland's residents to realize their abilities and capabilities to lead and manage their personal transformation and that of the families, systems, institutions, and organizations within their community through applying the principles of the ABCD and AI approaches.

## Research Methodology and Design

The qualitative research process adhered to a phenomenological design, in that both processes and techniques facilitated the incarnational process of close face–to–face interaction through informal, grassroots–level discussions with community members within their space and place of comfort—i.e., their own community. According to Hays and Singh (2012), qualitative research is guided by relationships with people, systems, and the environment, and provides a scaffold for the actualization of human potential.

One characteristic of phenomenological research designs is that they facilitate the sharing of the lived experiences of research participants and privilege the voices of those who have not previously had the opportunity to speak out (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this case, the research design captured the daily lived experiences of the residents of Drewsland and of those who serve the community, and therefore should be able to provide a trustworthy, credible, and transferrable answer to the main research question.

## Research Population and Sample

The research population included leaders from various sectors: community–based organizations (CBOs), healthcare workers, church, business, education, and a public–sector community development agency. A purposive sampling procedure was applied to select a research sample from this population. As Suri (2011) stated, "purposive sampling requires access to key informants in the field who can help in identifying information–rich cases" (p. 4). The selection criteria included (1) residing or working in the community, (2) leadership of a church within or close to the community, (3) leadership in the business community, and (4) the education institutions within or in close proximity to the community.

The eventual research sample contained 11 participants: 1 nurse and 1 patient from the health centre; 1 education officer assigned to the primary and infant school in the community; 1 principal of a nearby school that serves the community; 2 leaders of community–based organizations; 3 leaders of churches of different denominations that serve the community; and 2 representatives of the Social Development Commission assigned to the community. The research sample was therefore representative of the research population, thereby contributing to the trustworthiness of the study's findings (Anney, 2014).

## Instrumentation

An open–ended, semi–structured interview instrument was developed — as guided by the 3 research sub–questions. However, adjustments to some items were made based on 6 of the 7 categories of research participants represented in the research sample, as previously described. This was necessary to ensure that the items included in each interview instrument were relevant to the role and context of each research participant within the community (other than the patient at the health centre) (Qu & Dumay, 2011). An unstructured interview was conducted with one patient at the health centre, but did not require an instrument (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The general interview items sought to establish the role of each research participant (and, where appropriate, the entity they represented) within the Drewsland community, along with their views on the problems the community was facing and the role they or their entity could play in addressing those problems. The specific questions were mainly geared toward gathering in–depth data on each participant and entity represented for the purpose of asset mapping and to determine their level of Appreciative Inquiry. According to Green and Haines (2008), "Asset mapping is a process of learning which resources are available in your community. The asset approach…implies that the community development effort is directed toward the locality or place." (p. 11).

### *Document Checklist*

The Social Development Commission Profile of the Community of Drewsland (2009) was used as a source of data on the community. The process of document review was guided by a document checklist, which included a list of the general assets of a typical community, such as its infrastructure, housing, public services, and facilities (e.g., healthcare, school, church, business, and recreational facilities). The checklist also included a list of items related to human resources as a community asset.

## Data Collection

The data collection process included face–to–face interviews, telephone interviews, and a review of the SDC's 2009 profile of the Drewsland community. These data sources facilitated the asset mapping process, which is the primary phase of the ABCD approach. According to Green & Haines (2008), the asset

mapping process includes four key activities (1) identification of available skills, knowledge and experiences among the residents, (2) documentation of natural resources within the community that may have economic development potential, for example, land and beach, (3) assessment of potential for business pursuits, and (4) development of a community resources inventory; which include services being provided such as education, religious & health care. This process was completed in April and May 2014. The first step in the process was to "gain entry" or make initial contact with each selected member of the sample, so as to obtain their consent to participate in the research. In so doing, the assistance of a reputable community resource person, the leadership of a church that was active in the community, and relevant Government of Jamaica (GoJ) staff was sought. Each research participant was contacted by telephone and an appointment made for either a face–to–face or a telephone interview. It should also be noted that the nurse at the health clinic sought permission from her superior in order to engage in the interview.

The remaining steps in the data collection process are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Outline of the Data Collection Process: April–May 2014*

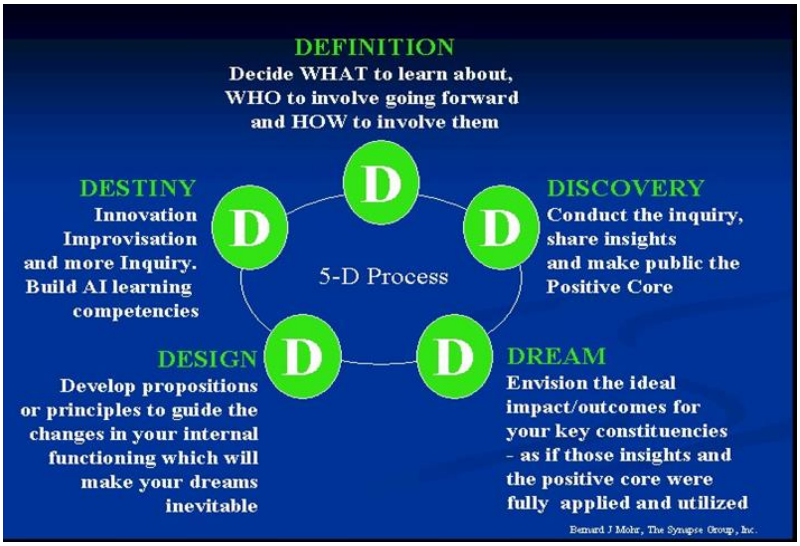
| Steps | Process | Instruments | Participants | Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. **Interviews** | Formal telephone interview | Unstructured interview | Two church leaders from different denominations. Both are within neighbouring communities, and one has an outreach program in collaboration with the Drews Avenue Primary School. | 1. To gain information on the role of the church in the community<br>2. To investigate the potential impact of church unity in addressing the issues being faced by the community<br>3. To probe the church's willingness to partner and collaborate with other community stakeholders in the process of community transformation |
| | Informal interview | Semi-structured interview | Leader of church within the community | Same as in 1 above |
| | Face-to-face, informal interview conducted at the home of a participant within the community | Semi-structured interview | Community-based organization (CBO) leader | 1. To gain information on the role and achievements of the CBOs in the community<br>2. To inquire about community assets and needs |
| | Informal telephone interview | Semi-structured interview | CBO leader | Same as in row 3 above |
| | Formal face-to-face interview | Semi-structured interview | Principal of a primary school located in a neighbouring community that serves Drewsland | To gather data on student achievement, school facilities and infrastructure, school-community initiatives, and school networking for partnership and collaboration |
| | Formal telephone interview | Semi-structured interview | Education Officer of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI) | Same as in row 5 above |
| | Informal face-to-face interview | Unstructured interview | Teacher at a neighbouring high school | Same as in row 5 above |
| | Formal face-to-face interview | Semi-structured interview | Community development and research officers of the SDC | To gather data on the SDC's role in Drewsland, and to identify networking opportunities for the SDC and other community stakeholders such as the school and churches |
| | Formal face-to-face interview | Semi-structured interview | Nurse at the community health centre | i. The role of the health centre in the community<br>ii. To identify networking opportunities between the health centre and the Drews Ave. Primary |
| | Informal face-to-face interview | Unstructured interview | 1. Patient at the Health Centre<br>2. Community health worker | To gather information on the lived experiences of the residents of Drewsland |
| | Formal face-to-face interview | Semi-structured interview | Property manager of a large business complex that serves the community | To gather information on the community development initiatives of the business community |
| 2. **Document Review** | Review of research report on Drewsland | Document Review Checklist | Social Development Commission | Same as in row 8 above; also, to gather data on community assets, problems facing the community, and Drewsland's socioeconomic status and facilities |

*Note*: This table provides a summary of the data collection process, which informed the asset mapping process and also the level of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) of the local community leaders.

The 5–D Appreciative Inquiry model approach was used to guide the data collection and content analysis processes of the study—in which the first D, "Definition," is the most critical step in the AI process—as argued by Sue Ann Hammond (2013). As Figure 1 indicates, at this initial stage of the AI approach, answers were provided to the questions of what to learn, whom to involve going forward, and how to involve them. This process was then followed by the second D, "Discovery," which is the data collection stage of the study. The remaining three D's of the model are related to the data analysis, results, conclusion and recommendations of the research report.

**Figure 1**

*Appreciative Inquiry Model*




*Source*: Hammond (2013).

## Presentation and Analysis of Data

Asset mapping, the initial phase of the ABCD/AI approach to community transformation, was facilitated by the interviews and document review. According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), "each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of these assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents" (p. 6). The asset mapping process also includes an inventory of the community's physical assets, such as land, housing, roads, and other infrastructure features. In addition to these components, asset mapping also identifies local institutions such as schools, businesses, healthcare facilities, and other educational institutions, as well as facilities for citizen networking such as churches, CBOs, and clubs. (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McKnight & Russell, 2018).

### Physical Assets

Through the document review process, it was found that 75% of housing in Drewsland were in good condition and 5% were in very good condition. Seventy–three percent of household heads reported that they owned their homes, while 63% owned their land. Twelve percent of the land in the community were used for agricultural and commercial pursuits. The material assets of the community were mainly for the delivery of services to residents. Table 2 provides details of these assets.

**Table 2**

*Physical and Material Assets of Drewsland*

| Number or Percentage | Name of Asset | Category of Asset |
|---|---|---|
| One | Marverley and Drewsland Health Centre | Public health clinic |
| 84% | Telephone service | Telecommunications |
| Two | Drewsland Youth and Community Development Club | Youth development |
| | Young Individuals Making Progress (Y.I.M.P.) Youth Club | |
| Two | Upper Olympic Citizens Association | Community network |
| | Building Together Citizens Association | |
| Three | Balcombe Drive Primary and Junior High PTA | Parenting network |
| | Drews Avenue Primary and Infant School PTA | |
| | St. Mary's Basic PTA | |
| Four | Kingston Open Bible Church | Churches |
| | Washington Gardens S.D.A. Church | |
| | St. Mary's Anglican Church | |
| | Foursquare Church | |
| One | The HOPE Centre | Faith-based organization |
| Four | Seaward Drive Provident Society | Community-based organization |
| | Balcombe Drive Homework Centre and Internet Café | |
| | Drewsland Development Committee | |
| | FIWI Center-Palms Ave. Community Centre | |
| Two | Waterhouse Football Club | Sports |
| | Waterhouse Mini Stadium | |
| Two | Tankweld Limited | Business partners |
| | My Father's Place Bar | |
| Three | Drews Avenue Primary and Infant School | School |
| | Balcombe Drive Primary and Junior High School | |
| | St. Mary's Basic School | |
| One | Social Development Commission | Government agency |

*Source*: Social Development Commission, 2009.

The data received through the interviews with the two community leaders also identified the community assets listed in Table 2. Additionally, the semi–structured interviews provided valuable details of how the residents functioned as important community assets. According to Mcknight and Russell (2018), there are six category of community assets which are critical to the community development process, one of which is the "contribution of residents". They went on to point out that such contribution includes "gifts , skills, passions, and knowledge of residents which have contributed toward the collective wellbeing of their community."(p.3) Information was also provided on a) the relationship between the parents and a high school in the community through the Parent Teachers' Association (PTA); b) youth development efforts through collaboration and partnership between the Drewsland Community Youth Club, the SDC, and the church; and, c) young people's (aged 15–35 years) involvement in the critical area of elder care.

Apart from addressing the spiritual needs of the residents, the interview with the three church leaders produced data on the church's involvement in the community, which included development of parenting skills, youth education and training, and the creation of employment opportunities for the unemployed and the

unskilled. The question of the possible impact of church unity despite denominational differences in addressing the socioeconomic needs of the community received 100% positive response from all three church leaders who participated in the research.

The obstetric nurse interviewed at the health centre indicated how critical health care is to the general well–being of a community. She also shared her concerns related to the women in the community, family planning, the impact of absentee fathers on child rearing, teenage pregnancies, the high school dropout rate, and the problems of crime and violence that the community had been facing over many years. Since the health centre and Drews Avenue Primary and Infant school are in close proximity, the nurse indicated interest in building collaboration between the school and the community to improve community healthcare and adult education.

One patient at the health centre (a pregnant teenager who agreed to an impromptu interview) shared the pain and stress of her experience—including incomplete schooling that contributed to her lack of academic certification and acquisition of employable skills. She also indicated that the staff of the health centre were very helpful in providing economic support so that she could feed and care for her children. During the interview, the young mother requested assistance in seeking training and employment opportunities, as well as money to purchase food for her children. The nurse also indicated that the clinic staff often felt moved to assist their patients financially from their personal resources.

The interviews conducted with the two representatives of the education system provided insight on education issues facing the community at the primary and secondary levels. The 2013 Inspection Report of the National Education Inspectorate (NEI) indicated that the overall level of school effectiveness of the Drews Avenue Primary is unsatisfactory while the 2012 Report of Pembroke Hall Primary indicated that the school's overall level of effectiveness is satisfactory. Both schools, however, had strong and positive relationships with the parents residing in the community, the churches, and the business community.

One member of the management team of a large shopping center in close proximity to the community, along with a high school athletic coach, described the positive relationships between the school and the business community, which included financial and material support. However, both participants indicated the challenge of student behavioural problems. The business community representative said the behavioural issues had become so severe that students from the high school where the coach works had been banned from the shopping center. The representative had requested intervention by the MoEY and the churches to address the problem of student behaviour at that particular high school.

An interview was also conducted with a community liaison officer and a research officer of the SDC. It is through this interview that access was given to the Drewsland Community Profile and contacts to local community leaders initiated.

## Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was guided by the research questions. Data gathered from the document review and the interviews were analyzed through the application of the content analysis process. Table 3 provides a summary of the process, which includes the establishment of common codes through inductive reasoning, categorization of these codes, and the determination of the frequencies of these categories and the emerging themes through deductive reasoning (Griffiths, 2016).

Table 3 indicates that the level of educational attainment of the residents of Drewsland was a significant issue as recorded in the SDC community profile. The codes, level of education, employable skills and certification as presented in Table 3 represent the data collected by the SDC from the residents who participated in the survey. It is noted however, that a percentage for the category 'Education and Training' in Table 3 was not derived due to the following characteristics of the data as presented in the SDC (2019) profile of Drewsland.

1. **Nature of Data**. The data as presented in the SDC Community Profile was categorised under the following headings:
   - Educational Level Attained
   - Academic Achievement
   - Academic Qualifications of Household Members
   - Training
2. **Issue with calculation of percentage.** It is the differences in the type of data provided by the SDC which do not adhere to the mathematical principles which would have facilitated the arrival at a percentage representative of the 4 categories of education and traning.
3. **Secondary & Primary Education Completion percentages**. According to the SDC (2019), "Fifty four percent (53.8%) of head of households reported receiving up to secondary education followed by 12.5% who received primary education and 10.6% who received elementary education." (p.19)

**Table 3**

*Assets of Impact in the Drewsland Community*

| Research Sub-Questions | Instrument | Codes | Categories | Frequencies | Sub-themes | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1&3 | Document Checklist | Youth clubs, church | Youth development | 36% | Community networking | 1. Establishment of community networks through collaboration & partnership between all stakeholders<br>2. These community networks should facilitate the skills & input of the residents<br>3. The community networks should address the educational & training needs of the residents |
| | | Not involved in CBOs or any other community group | Youth development, adult education, and social awareness | 64% | Community networking and public- and private-sector partnerships | |
| 1,2&3 | | Level of education, employable skills, and certification | Education and training | (Not derived) | Formal and informal education opportunities | |
| 1,2&3 | Unstructured interview with 1 participant | School, youth clubs, PTA, CBOs, private-sector partnerships, church, SDC | Youth development, education and training | 100% | Community networking and public- and private-sector partnerships | |
| 1,2&3 | Semi-structured interviews with 10 participants | School, PTA private-sector partnership, church, SDC | " " | 100% | " " | |

*Note.* This table presents a summary of the application of the content analysis procedure to the data collected in 2014 via document review, and interviews in response to the research questions.

## Results and Interpretation of Data

The results of the data analysis will be presented in response to the three research sub–questions.

### Research Sub–Question 1: What are the most utilized assets in the Drewsland community?

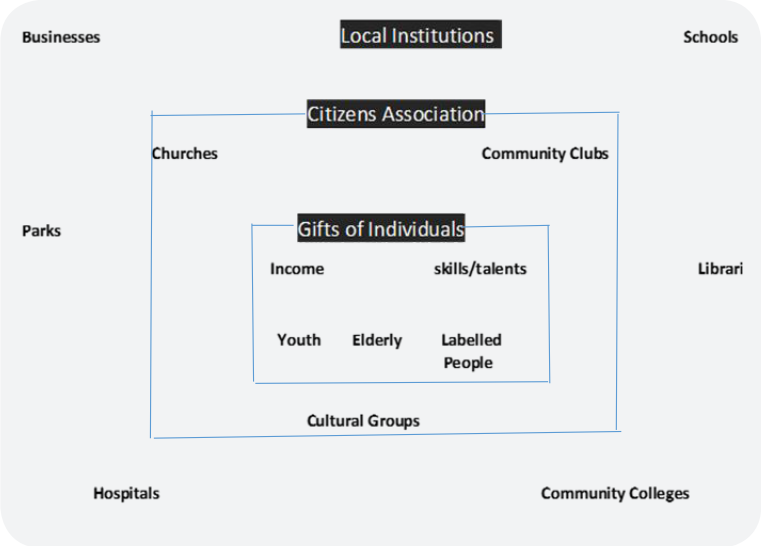
The analysis of the data collected through the processes outlined in Table 2 and as presented in Table 3 indicates that the community assets of impact in the Drewsland community are as follows:

1. Church
2. School (including the Parent–Teacher Association)
3. Youth clubs
4. Community–based organizations (CBOs)
5. Social Development Commission (SDC)
6. Private–sector partnerships

These assets of the Drewsland community are typical of the general community assets, as depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Typical Community Asset Map*




*Source*: Kreztmann & McKnight (1993).

Despite the relatively wide range of community groups that exist in Drewsland, the data in Table 3 indicate that 64% of the residents were not involved in any community activity or associations. However, as indicated in Table 3, 36% of respondents stipulated that the most used assets of the community were the church and the youth clubs. There is therefore an opportunity for the churches in the community to unite and network all other assets in the community for the purpose of change and development. As postulated by Corbett and Fikkert (2012) and Magezi (2017), churches typically do not have the capacity to provide training for the poor, but they can help people identify their long–term goals and further their postsecondary education.

### Research Sub–Question 2: What role can the school play in the transformation of the Drewsland community?

As outlined in Figure 2, the school is one of 6 local institutions that form the basic framework of a typical community, and 100% of the interviewees in this research indicated their belief that the school has strong potential and has been playing a significant role in the development of the Drewsland community. According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), the school serves as one of the most important institutions to the community in which it is located and is therefore categorized as a community asset. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) described the school as a collection of valuable assets which might be mobilised to assist the community development process.

The results also indicated that the primary schools included in the research sample were performing at very different levels (one satisfactory and the other unsatisfactory), as measured by each school's performance in the MoEY, National Education Inspectorate reports of 2012 and 2013 and the schools' participation and achievement in extracurricular activities. In the interviews, leaders of both schools indicated that leadership ability and teacher qualification and dedication were on par with the standards of the MoEY. The interest and participation of parents at both schools were also reported to be high. However, student attendance and cognitive readiness of students for primary–level education were at opposite ends of the education spectrum due to the level of social stability of the wider school community and parents' literacy levels. This scenario has been emphasized by Lipps et al. (2010), who studied secondary school students from selected Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, to determine the factors affecting their academic performance.

Two examples of parent–school partnership that have been operational in each primary school are (1) neighborhood watch committee meetings and (2) parent literacy and skills-training programs. On the other hand, the two research participants from a high school in the vicinity of Drewsland indicated that the high school's performance and its graduates' quality were unsatisfactory and that the PTA,

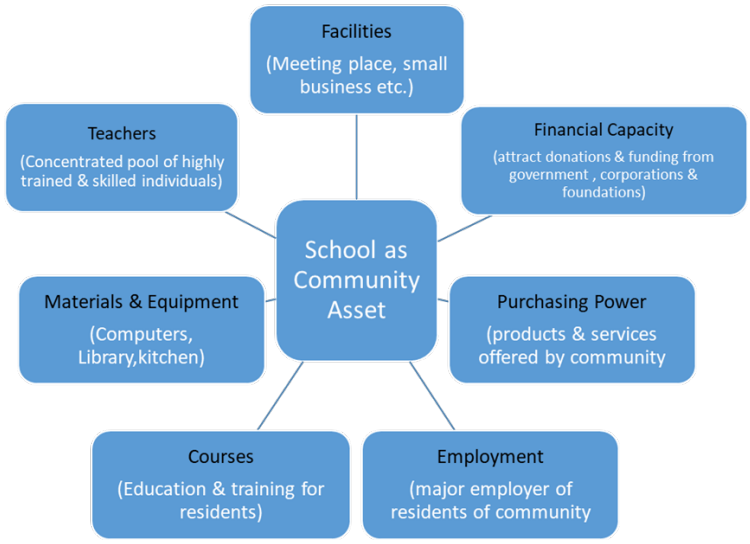
though active, was ineffective. The overall low performance of this high school was blamed on school leadership, lack of parent interest, and the community where the students lived (Lipps et al., 2010).

As a collaborative initiative of the school and the private sector, sports was introduced in the high school in an effort to address issues of student quality and performance. There has been some level of success in terms of both achievement in high school sports tournaments and student performance at school and in regional examinations (Van Deventer, 2012).

Community development, as defined by Green and Haines (2008), "may lead to a more efficient use of resources, reduce a community's dependency on external resources and decision making, and create a better system of managing markets (financial, housing, labor, etc.) to satisfy local (societal) needs" (p. 5). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) identified 9 important elements of the school as a community asset, 7 of which are outlined in Figure 3; the remaining 2 are parents and students, both groups contributing their abilities, ideas, energies and participation to school and community efforts.

**Figure 3**

*Elements of the school as a community asset*




*Source:* Kreztmann & McKnight (1993).

"All over the U.S. creative educators are reconnecting their institutions with their local community, building new alliances which recognize that healthy schools and healthy communities reinforce each other" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 209). However, as pointed out by Lipps et al. (2010), Jamaican schools located in low–income, inner–city areas are stereotyped and stigmatized as prone to violence and are less equipped to address the stagnation of community transformation. To strengthen the point of Lipps et al. (2010), the results of a study by Samms–Vaughn & Lambert (2017) indicate that "the direct impact of violence on IQ shows that Jamaican boys and girls who have suffered such victimisation are at increased risk for compromised functioning…."(p. 77).

## Research Sub–Question 3: What ABCD and AI strategies can be implemented in Drewsland?

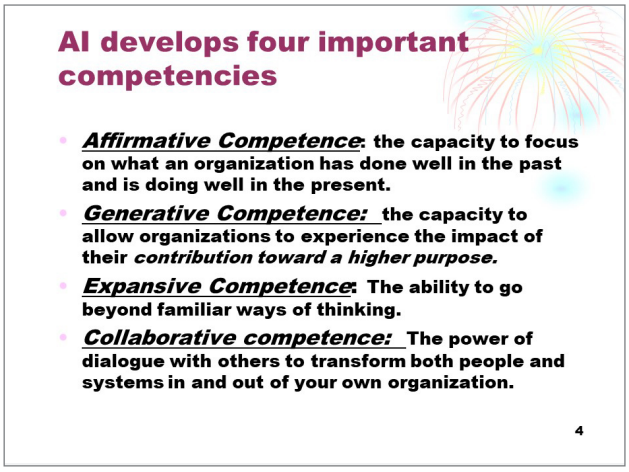
The transformation of the Drewsland community through the ABCD/AI approach would constitute the building of a Drewsland Community Development Network, as outlined in Table 3. This network would result from a collaboration and partnership relationship between all the stakeholders in Drewsland and would guide the collaboration of each stakeholder group to form sub–networks. There would therefore be sub–networks for the churches, schools, youth clubs, citizens associations, PTAs, CBOs and the business community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) outlined the positive outcomes of community networks, which include organizational strengthening, capacity building, expansion of resources, and expansion of the scope and impact of community development projects and proposals for future projects. Green and Haines (2008) reiterated the strength of community networking in the process of community development, stating, "this is why community buildings, recreational centers, and other public buildings (e.g., schools) are so critical to the development of communities" (p. 116).

The ABCD approach seeks not only to identify the strengths within the Drewsland community but, through the application of the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, could guide the residents of Drewsland to create and implement strategies for the development of their community through the recognition of their abilities to manage and lead the process. The application of the ABCD and AI approaches through the community network strategy, would facilitate the development and implementation of a plan to foster the unity of the churches and youth clubs in the community. It is assumed here that the churches and youth clubs, which are the two most popular community assets, are being used by residents of two different age groups and interests, adults and youth. McKnight and Block (2012) pointed out that "the idea of community abundance is about our common interest and who will care for the whole" (p. 52).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the data analysis process have implications for a multifaceted approach to address the main research question; how can the ABCD and AI approaches to community transformation be implemented in Drewsland? One approach is to obtain the answers to the questions posed by the AI 5–D model by holding a meeting of the leaders of all stakeholder groups identified in Table 2. Bakke (2004) identified 4 competencies that are developed by AI; 2 of these are "Affirmative Competence, [which speaks to] the capacity to focus on what an organization has done well in the past and is doing well in the present," and "Collaborative Competence, [which is] the power of dialogue with others to transform both people and systems in and out of your own organization"

**Slide 4**




The Definition stage of the AI approach will seek to develop both competencies within the residents, leadership, and partners of Drewsland, to effect the desired change. The ultimate goal is to arrive at the fifth stage of the 5–D Model, "Destiny," where each stakeholder group would have acquired all 4 AI competencies: Affirmative, Generative, Expansive, and Collaborative. However, for effective leadership of community transformation, the progression has to include all 5 stages of the model to facilitate the personal transformation that can have a strong bearing on the mindset change of each stakeholder. According to Keane (2012), "AI is a fresh way of seeing the Jamaican context, recognising the best in the people and systems that touch their lives" (p. 95).

The proposed Drewsland Community Development Network is the dominant theme that emerged from the content analysis process (See Table 3), and would include various sub–networks — one of which should be an education transformation network. This networking facility would provide the opportunity for community members to share their resources among the different groups within the community and to identify all the existing and accessible community resources. Therefore, this community networking facility would empower the residents of Drewsland to address their community development needs

by pooling all the available resources or assets within the community. Some of the areas of need that could be addressed are as follows:

1. Increased employment opportunities provided through the creation of connections among stakeholder groups.
2. Fostering collaboration and partnerships between the schools that serve Drewsland and other stakeholder groups such as the church, youth clubs, and the business community to address school violence, behavioural problems, lack of resources, and poor academic performance.
3. Access to professional groups, mainly through alignment with the church, school, and business community, to provide people who could serve as counsellors, mentors, advisors, and trainers (or as part of a project management team).
4. Overall improvement of quality of life in the community to help foster the reduction of violence and eradication of gangs in the community.
5. Expansion of the resource base through public and private–sector partnerships, to address the developmental needs of stakeholders who use the services offered by the school and the public health clinic.

The National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) and the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC) are products of the Education Transformation programme of the MoEY. The NPSC works closely with communities to increase parental involvement in the education of their children and to foster community parenting networks. The JTC's Education Circles program, an education resource–sharing community network facility, is also a relevant community–based initiative that can facilitate the connection of community resources for the education of school children (aged 6–17 years) and adults.

The final recommendation is that the Social Development Commission considers the adoption of the Appreciative Inquiry approach in the constitution of its CBOs, to foster maximum use of the many assets of Drewsland by residents with a focus on the inclusion of the existing educational facilities in the community. This can be achieved through the networking approach, by which all residents become aware of all the assets within the community, identifying themselves and the knowledge and skills they possess as assets, and learning to maximize the personal and collective benefits that can be accrued through collaboration and networking among community assets.

For many centuries education has been seen as the engine of economic and social development in developed and developing countries such as Jamaica. Therefore, financial investment in Early childhood, Primary and Secondary education is seen as the most important path to take, in view of the successes of first world countries. For example, as evident in the rates of literacy and numeracy among students at the primary and lower secondary level as reported by the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment results (OECD, 2022). The education transformation process, however, requires more than financial investment for sustainable community and national transformation. According to Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010), "a key differentiator between transitional and transformational change is the degree of impact on people and the required attention to human and cultural dynamics" (pp. 67–68). Therefore, educational transformation seeks to change the minds of people — an undertaking that can be facilitated by the application of the ABCD/AI approach to community transformation, since the focus is the mobilisation of the residents of a community to develop a vision of the required change and to become aware of their abilities to lead, maintain, and sustain that change.

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# Rapid Response to Professional Development: How Online Teacher Professional Learning Networks Supported Teachers in Pandemic Times

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## Abstract

During COVID-19, when teachers rapidly shifted to remote teaching and learning, it became evident that there was an educational crisis—teachers were unprepared for teaching using digital pedagogies. A group of teachers and teacher educators in Trinidad and Tobago, ITTPN Global, responded to the call for emergency professional development in ICT tools with a free workshop series via Zoom. The workshop series served to address teachers' upskilling in key areas of ICT as digital pedagogy became the pandemic pedagogy. Pandemic pedagogy refers to teaching and learning during COVID-19. Teachers built confidence and competence in using ICT tools and designing online lessons. The professional learning model highlighted in this paper utilized authentic and active learning and teacher agency. This reflective essay examines the transformative possibilities of networks in a crisis with implications for professional teacher learning post pandemic.

*Keywords*: teacher professional learning communities, ICT tools, pandemic pedagogy

## Introduction

As part of the emergency response to remote teaching due to COVID-19, ITTPN Global, a professional network of Information Technology (IT) teachers in Trinidad and Tobago (www.ittpnglobal.com), felt urged to support peers in online pedagogies and technologies. While professional learning has always been a crucial mandate for ITTPN Global, the corona crisis presented an opportunity to transform teacher professional development from its traditional form via in-person workshops, and unlock a new, online pedagogical toolkit for teachers. When pandemic struck, in March 2020 in Trinidad and Tobago, schools were immediately closed to control spread of the virus. Teachers made a hurried shift to remote teaching and learning (Hodges et al., 2020) and realised that they needed to upskill themselves technologically and pedagogically. It was found that teachers were struggling to cope with multiple demands for achieving emergency remote teaching and learning and found their teacher preparation inadequate.

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The rapid movement to online platforms triggered multiple conversations about technology and student learning while highlighting the digital divide. Issues of internet access, device acquisition and appropriate modalities dominated conversation and research (Selwyn et al., 2020). But most critical to teachers was the need for pedagogical tools and practices (Carillo & Assuncao, 2020) that would allow them to successfully transition from in-person to online modes of teaching. Teachers quickly realised that their prior use of technology tools in the classroom did not work the same way in an online environment (Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, & Suman, 2022). However, there were no institutionalised responses as in courses or workshops available to support that transition. Teachers reached out to us (ITTPN Global) and asked us for help. We responded by immediately designing and implementing a free workshop series over a three month period May–July 2020. As such we became education "first responders" in the pandemic (Abramenka-Lachheb et al., 2020).

ITTPN Global was well positioned to offer a virtual professional development series called, "Bridging the digital divide—ICT tools for the 21st century educator". The network had already comprised teachers who were competent in ICT and taught using ICT in courses at the university and to peers. Additionally, as leader of the group and a teacher educator, I was familiar with the landscape of needs of teachers and a range of instructional strategies. We crafted a team of 20 persons to teach more than 400 teachers in a participatory way. These sessions in online pedagogies aimed to augment and enhance the basket of pedagogical strategies that teachers knew. We focused on student engagement, assessment, collaboration and communication and differentiated instruction. Teachers across early childhood, primary, and secondary levels became exposed to new tools and pedagogies including assistive technologies for students with mild disability. This reflective paper presents insights on how the teacher network provided a new opportunity for professional learning to hundreds of teachers and how transformative pandemic practices could be relevant in a post-pandemic era.

## Teacher Networks and Online Teacher Professional Development

Teacher learning networks allow teachers to cross the professional spaces of school and even district and potentially allow access to expertise and knowledge from teachers whom they may not otherwise meet or interact with. While few would debate that schools naturally include a group of teachers working together, others would argue that teachers often feel isolated during their daily practice (Darling Hammond et al., 2017). It is the idea of belonging to a community and fostering ties beyond the school walls (Stoll & Louis, 2007) that is appealing to teachers. Additionally, access to experts and knowledge sharing bring potential benefits to participants (Borko et al., 2009; Kamalodeen & Jameson-Charles, 2016). Professional learning networks range in definition, but a useful one for this paper is "a system of interpersonal connections and resources that support informal learning" (Trust, 2012, p. 133). In some countries like Singapore, these learning communities are lauded for their ability to develop and sustain a culture of teacher-led professional development, and improve quality of pedagogy in classrooms (Hairon & Goh, 2017). Teacher professional learning networks are predicated on the notion that teachers are the best providers of professional development for themselves (Philpott, 2017).

Professional development that utilises a top-down approach by telling teachers what and how to do can often be counterproductive and reduce learner engagement and achievement. Scalable solutions (Whitehouse, 2011) such as online teacher networks have been suggested to be helpful to teachers as spaces for collaboration and connection (Coutinho & Lisboa, 2013; Horn et al., 2020). Notable benefits of social networks for professional development are flexibility, connectivity and support (Greenhow et al., 2018; Kamalodeen & Jameson-Charles, 2016). Professional learning networks are built upon shared interest, collaborative endeavour, and collective responsibility (Philpott, 2017) and the rich, open exchange of ideas, experiences, and resources in trustful environments (Booth, 2012).

ITTPN Global was conceptualised as a space for teachers in Trinidad and Tobago to connect with peers and engage in continuous learning. Networking allows teachers to bridge isolation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), have conversations and share ideas and resources easily (Greenhow, 2009; Lefebvre et al., 2016), regardless of content area. Virtual and online professional learning have been playing increasingly significant roles in teacher learning and Kamalodeen (2014) noted several successes with an online social networking site for teachers in Trinidad and Tobago as teachers with shared interests connected and learnt from one another with the flexibility of time (day or night) and space (at work, home, or café). Successful teacher networks can cause positive change if they have members with strong ties, are well-organised, have high levels of expertise and facilitate quality interactions (Booth, 2012; Datnow, 2012). In contrast with top-down approaches, the learning community provides the type of enabling environment for teachers to provide just in time support to each other. The capacity to respond to diverse needs and interests and support professional growth (Trust et al., 2017) that is self-directed gives the learning network its greatest power.

Successful professional development features a number of key characteristics and components including modeling best practice and opportunities to collaborate. Research shows that empowered teachers can achieve higher learner outcomes through creative and indigenous solutions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). But what it does not adequately show is how that empowerment takes place, especially in schools in low socio-economic neighborhoods, nor the effects of successful teacher practices in diverse contexts. These characteristics of the workshop series offered by ITTPN Global are listed hereunder.

***Content-focused Activities.*** All activities were aligned to the existing national curricula.

***Learning Ecosystem.*** This has been a key characteristic across the board for ITTPN Global's professional learning sessions. There is cross pollination of ideas resulting in active learning for facilitators and participants via several nodes, such as facilitator to facilitator, facilitator to participants, participants to facilitator and participant to participant via peer learning.

***Collaborative Networks.*** ITTPN Global has an empowering and supportive climate for building trusting relationships among facilitators and enhancing their professional learning capacities.

***Culturally Responsive Programme*** with a focus on high quality education, i.e.: access, equity, justice and harmony, and culturally responsive goals tailored to national culture and context. Workshop materials are constructed locally and instructional strategies follow global best practices that emphasize participant engagement and interactivity with support for all learners to achieve their personal goals and targets.

***Local Experts*.** ITTPN Global volunteers took on the role of coaches and mentors with the humility to recognize that we are all constantly learning. They were skilled, empathetic, and linked learning to practice.

***Evidence Driven*.** Research on professional development for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), integrating ICT's into the classroom (Ertmer et al., 2012), online learning (Griffin et al., 2018) and networking (Horn et al., 2020; Kamalodeen, 2014) supported this initiative.

## The Virtual Professional Development for Teachers

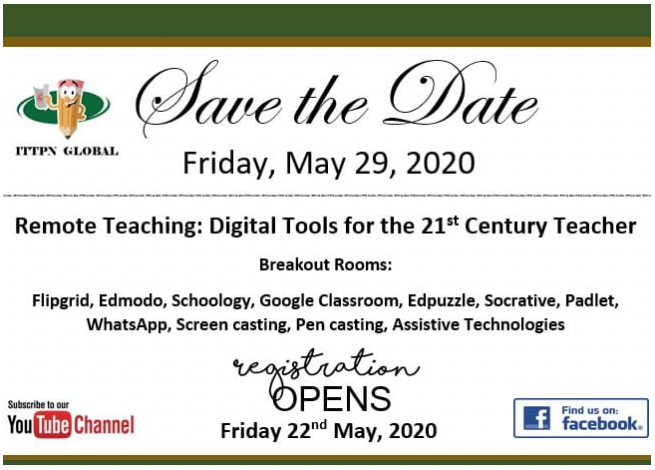
ITTPN Global offered three opportunities to learn under the umbrella of "Bridging the digital divide, ICT tools for the 21st century educator". The first series of workshops were several one-day virtual sessions in May 2020 to introduce teachers to basic ICT tools. Next, we offered virtual professional development sessions for teachers over a 5-day period to deepen understandings and enhance skillsets. Thirdly, we connected with parents through a parent support group to develop a more connected community of leadership by reaching out and involving key stakeholders. As such we designed a triage framework for teacher professional learning that was just in time and responsive during pandemic.

Our first workshop, "Remote teaching: Digital tools for the 21st century", was held virtually on May 1, 2020 via Zoom. We focused on fundamentals of online learning and setting up an online learning environment. The workshop targeted primary teachers, upon request. Due to the overwhelming response, we repeated the workshop on May 7, 2020. In the third one-day workshop—May 29, 2020—we hosted 270 participants across all education levels—early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary. We offered a selection of ten tools for an immersive experience. The options were WhatsApp, Screencasting, Pen Casting, Google Classroom, Socrative, Schoology, Edmodo, Edpuzzle, Flipgrid, Padlet, and Assistive Technologies (see Figure 1). *Zoom.com* was utilized to offer the virtual PD with breakout rooms used to manage highly interactive small group tasks. We harnessed a participatory approach to professional learning through a model that empowers teachers to help each other with knowledge sharing and skill building. We now provide you with selected feedback from participants and facilitators.

> Y'all are inspiring. (Participant)
>
> I wanna join your team please. Y'all are fantastic! (Participant)
>
> Thank you so much for the opportunity to join the ITTPN Global. I really appreciate it. Learnt so many new things. (Participant)
>
> Great. With your team, anything is possible. The teamwork was obvious. (Participant)
>
> I feel great having made a difference. Most of the participants in Socrative indicated that they were not familiar with the tool, so just the exposure made it worthwhile. Thank you for the opportunity. (Presenter)
>
> I think it was well structured. The dry runs really helped in my preparation. Also, it was informative, and I think the participants appreciated that they were able to learn 2 online tools that they were interest in. (Presenter)
>
> It was my pleasure and thanks to the ITTPN team as well for the support given to me in order to have a successful session today. (Presenter)

**Figure 1**

*Flyer Advertising one of the Workshops Disseminated Through Social Media*




We then sought to further enhance teacher skill sets and competencies in certain ICT tools. We developed a workshop series under the same theme, "Remote teaching: Digital Tools for the 21st Century" and attracted 406 primary school teachers. Over the month of July 2020, participants were exposed to online learning concepts, learning platforms, tools for assessment and engagement and tools for inclusive online classrooms. These 20-hour, weekly training sessions in 5 cohorts represented a learning ecosystem as participants brought their own experiences into their practice. Some teachers who were new to technology integration felt that they gained the motivation to learn how to use and apply the ICT tools, once given support resources at the end of the workshop. An interesting observation was the interest of some participants in switching from the learning platform they were using to another, due to its introduction at the workshop and their perceived benefits, e.g., being more appropriate for younger learners, more accountability of work done, maintaining contact, foster self-learning, allowing student creativity and self-expression and assisting learners with challenges. Participants' comments included: "We had accessibility to personnel for continued learning"; "We were able to better plan and deliver our curriculum during COVID-19

and beyond"; "This is an avenue to maintain and supply individual support to students depending on their needs [and] assist students with learning challenges."

In the third workshop, we partnered with a NGO called Moms for Literacy to support parents and caregivers in the new pandemic era. With schools fully closed, all students were expected to learn at home, making parents more directly responsible for their child's learning. The 2-day workshop entitled, "A New Vision for Education Leadership" took place virtually via Zoom on Saturday, October 24, 2020 and Saturday, November 7, 2020. Based on conversations with parents, they felt the sessions were useful and they were extremely happy to have attended.

We selected the synchronous platform *zoom.us* for all our virtual workshops as it allowed us to have large numbers of attendees, privacy features of pre-registration, waiting room, and audio management. It also is easy to use and allowed breakout rooms (Rucker et al., 2020) to manage smaller groups very easily for enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing. Additionally, zoom allowed polls, live transcript, recording video, and screen sharing without being formally trained (Kohnke & Morehouse, 2020). We believe the technology platform also enhanced the teacher learning experience and contributed to the success of the virtual professional development.

## Implications for Teacher Professional Development in a Post-Pandemic Era: How was Practice Transformed?

Networked learning and teacher communities of learning can play an important role in teacher professional development (Booth, 2012; Coutinho & Lisboa, 2013; Greenhow et al., 2018). Being connected to peers and those considered to be experts can support teachers' instructional practice and confidence levels. This is an important emphasis for teachers (Horn et al., 2020). We have an opportunity to change pre-pandemic ways of doing things to post-pandemic pedagogy that situates the learner more prominently. Based on positive responses to the virtual workshops during COVID-19, teachers seem to embrace the flexibility of learning, the direct application to their classroom and the supportive learning environment created by the facilitators. We support McCarty's (2020) stance that "the resources and resourcefulness drawn upon in this crisis could serve to widen the relevance of education in society. It is up to the global community of educators to innovate and share expertise to realize this urgent mission" (para. 16).

Initial workshop evaluation data indicated a preference for Google Classroom as an accessible and easy to use learning platform, and zoom.com's audio, video and inbuilt features accessibility features such as transcription and closed captioning. Teachers also cited other tools that they preferred, especially those that allowed for inbuilt parental communication such as Seesaw (for young students) and Edmodo. Kahoot! was a popular tool for gamification and Google Docs was useful for collaborative work. Teachers also highlighted the prolific use of YouTube! videos for teaching and learning and WhatsApp for wide-scale communication with students and parents alike. We learnt informally that there was a lack of awareness of assistive technology tools to support students with special needs. Adopting technologies in the classroom has always depended upon teachers' beliefs about technologies (Ertmer et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2013).

It is important to help teachers to strengthen bonds and ties with each other and this can help novice teachers feel welcome (Lane & Sweeney, 2019). Ongoing professional development opportunities and conversations with teachers within networks (Coutinho & Lisboa, 2013) can help strengthen bonds. We obtained teacher narratives about the reality of classrooms and the difficulties in engaging students meaningfully online. However, since the facilitators were teachers themselves and considered as experts, they shared their best practices and selected tools that worked in their classrooms. As such the networked environment allowed knowledge sharing built on trust (Booth, 2012) and established reputation and practice. Learning took place through participation in designed activities and allowed for a different

type of leadership to emerge (Kamalodeen & Jameson-Charles, 2016). This leadership may be considered transformational (Giejsel et al., 2009) as the teachers who were designers and planners of the learning activities grew to understand and satisfy the participants' concerns and needs. They modeled best practices, coached other teachers, and helped to elevate others' skill sets. Since we were all new to online professional development, these transformational teachers demonstrated commitment, patience, and persistence in solving even the largest of problems. Their self-efficacy and collective responsibility made the team work. As such, transformational leadership at ITTPN Global helped teachers attain their own learning goals and to act as agents of change.

The pandemic era has highlighted the need to be able to pivot between in-person and online formats, and that hybrid formats that combine in person with virtual environments should remain in focus for better models. Thus teaching relies on pandemic pedagogy that is leveraged through digital technologies. Teachers demonstrated agency and initiative in sourcing help from experts and their peers when they needed it (Datnow, 2012). Teachers acted purposefully to seek knowledge outside of their institutional structures. Meanwhile, teachers in the professional learning network responded quicky and decidedly to a completely new teaching and learning environment. This action allowed them to build new social ties and strengthen existing ones (Lane & Sweeny, 2019) thus making them change agents. Thus, transformational leadership emerged in the teachers' network and that seemed to have a role in teachers' ongoing professional learning and in helping them to be lifelong learners (Mentis & Kearney, 2017), thus making these networks important educational spaces. As we move into the endemic or post-pandemic era, 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. This can only lead to enhanced teacher pedagogy and improved school quality.

## Conclusion

While research abounds about teacher professional learning communities and networks, this work helps to showcase how teachers forged and strengthened social ties outside of their institutional structures. Such an understanding can help us address various issues that teachers in Trinidad and Tobago and beyond encounter such as combatting teachers' isolation. The model of professional development presented here highlights the thinking that teachers are resourceful and can transform their practice when and as needed, even in crisis. Teacher agency (Lane & Sweeny, 2019) and transformational leadership in professional learning networks (Hairon & Goh, 2017) are concepts that need to continue to be researched for enhanced school success.

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# Caribbean Society and Organisation: Change and Transformation

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## Abstract

Established and strongly embedded forms of inclusion and exclusion, tension and dynamic between the formal and the informal exists within Caribbean organisations. A study of organisational change was undertaken in two Jamaican organisations of 22 participants each, and questions raised about this transformational problematic of organisation/development and change. The study, set against the backdrop of structural-psycho-socio-cultural dynamics, investigated the way that employees cognitively appraised organisational change. A comparative multi-dimensional systems approach was employed and also an examination and discussion of different levels of organisational embeddedness, with intersecting levels involving interstitial margins. The findings confirmed the importance of focused leadership, communication and high levels of disruption, uncertainty and expectancy associated with prolonged change efforts and the role of status and power. The study is the first of its kind, however, further research is needed to better understand the interactions of structural and psycho-socio-cultural demands on organisational change in diverse organisational settings.

*Keywords*: organisational change, cognitive appraisal, cognition, emotion, post-colonial, organisations, institutions

## Introduction

A society is an assembly of organisations of various types interacting with each other, within which there are tensions and conflict among the different elements of the system. In the Caribbean, with historically established and strongly embedded forms of inclusion and exclusion, there is an obvious tension and dynamic between the "formal" and the "informal" across and within organisations. In such a context, to pursue and ask for developmental organisational change that goes beyond this dynamic of exclusion, the conversation has to be about transformational organisational change, with significant internal and external articulation. The distinction between the formal and informal has been widely applied in social and economic analysis in

a. contrasting traditional and modern societies;
b. contrasting economic/community sectors within societies; and
c. contrasting types of organisations and actions within organisations.

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In our analysis, the formal and informal distinction is established in terms of forms and activities within or outside of an ongoing explicit regulatory framework. The formal is within and the informal is outside of the regulatory framework. Although this has been contextualized first at the micro level in the Caribbean, by reference to "state" processes of inclusion and exclusion historically, the distinction can be and is applied across many domains, both outside and inside of formal bureaucracies. This distinction still remains fluid, in that it does not create pure types and it can also be applied to psychological and behavioural forms and activities.

Informality is at variance with formality in that it is "an alternative system of regulation that operates below and beyond the framework of state regulation" (Meagher, 2008). State institutions (which are primarily bureaucratic in nature) are generally formal institutions recognized by their explicitly stated policies, laws, rules, and regulations. However, within formal institutions, Ofori (2012) advances the concept of bureaucratic informalism, which Meagher (2008) argues is not a new concept. It is where the state bureaucracy is transformed by the norms, values, expectations, and practices associated with relational "goodwill" — which intervenes and reconfigures the way that formal practices are undertaken. In his notion of the informal and the formal, Hart (2008) posits that "both the bureaucracy and its antithesis contain the formal and informal dialectic within themselves as well as between them" (p. 12). Depending on circumstances, the formal and the informal can be both negative and positive in varying ways. How then, in mediating the formal and informal in Caribbean society and organisations, can positive developmental results be produced? Table 1 further elucidates the characteristics of the formal and informal at the macro and the micro levels within society. It highlights the tension within and between the formal and informal systems, thus suggesting that each is intricately supported by positive and negative elements.

**Table 1**

*Schematic Distinctions*

| Formal (State, Economy Foundations) Positive and Negative | Informal (Personal, community foundations) Positive and Negative |
|---|---|
| 1. Hierarchy | 1. Non-contractual |
| 2. Articulated command and control systems | 2. Voluntaristic participation |
| 3. Contractual relations | 3. Fluidity |
| 4. Task-orientation | 4. Family, socialization, emotional, care-centred support |
| 5. Standardized rule-invoked performances | 5. Forms of civility |
| 6. Relatively stable resource acquisition and deployment | 6. Expansive psycho-relational dynamics |
| 7. Restrictive psycho-relational dynamics | |

## Caribbean Organisation Scholarship

Stryker and Burke (2000, p. 285) see society "as a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organized and embedded in an array of groups, organisations, communities and institutions and intersected by cross-cutting boundaries of clan, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and other variables". Organisation theory is often a

part of sociological theory and it starts with a conception of society consistent with the above. The form is an institutional process—on the relationship between structure and action; on the psycho-socio-cultural; on organisations; and on organizing. A sociological framework is used here, in that it places organisations as embedded (internal and external) networks of power (agency) characterized by multi-level, intersecting, and overlapping transgressive spaces.

In sociological and organisational analyses, from Weber (1922) to Morgan (2006), the metaphor has been an important feature in developing analysis, explanation, and understanding of complex socio-cultural phenomena. One dominant and classic metaphor used in the Caribbean is that of the plantation, which is conceptualized both as a type of society and an organisational type. Essentially, the plantation metaphor has to do with over-determination. It first represents the total institution, yet is a paradoxical metaphor because over-determination survives because of under-determination. In these interstitial under-determined margins there are "provision grounds" — another metaphor referring to the under-determined and the excluded. The challenge then is that of re-evaluating the total institution and its untapped potentials in these "provision grounds". In a full psycho-socio-cultural sense, how do we establish a positive dialectic in this plantation, society, organisation, self, and identity?

In the last fifteen years, there has been a growing body of organisational scholarship in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Over a dozen PhD theses have been produced on Caribbean organisational processes. In varying degrees, this scholarship has had:

a. historical and developmental focus;
b. focus on a wide variety of organisational forms;
c. formal and informal contrasts;
d. a societal location (extending to inter-societal relations), examining the implications of interactions in organisational fields and between organisational types;
e. attention to positive and negative dialectics (internal and external) of interacting organisations and organisational types; and,
f. a psycho-socio-cultural emphasis focusing on organizing and processes, and raising questions about individual, organisational, and societal transformation (transcendence) and development.

E. Jones (2015) attempts a societal and historical developmental interaction framework impacting organisational structure and processes, stating:

> Together then, these institutional regimes —the colonial and plantation systems, family-owned firms and community-based organisations, the international institutions of aid and advice, as well as a body of descriptive and applied public administration scholarship – imparted significant influence on the emerging administrative culture. Put another way, these forces constituted a compelling source of the formation of the current organisational culture. They also shaped the national culture, influencing the orientations and behaviours of the organisations' leaders, the nature of the organisations' business, as well as their resultant social interactions. We are interested in possible implications and legacies of the foregoing account.
>
> E. Jones (2015, p. 18)

In the Caribbean, as elsewhere, organisational change and development is linked to societal dynamics; and likewise, societal development is linked to organisational change and development. Given the historical and developmental status of the Jamaican society, substantial transformational change at the societal level is required for sustainable development. Organisational change, as is the practice in most organisations, "is the process by which organisations move from their present state to some desired future state to increase their effectiveness" (G. R. Jones, 2013, p. 295). Organisational transformation, on the other hand, while improving the operations and efficiency of the organisation, is primarily focused on radically changing the mind-sets (perceptions, thoughts, and behaviours) of those within the organisation (Cummings & Worley, 2005, p. 480).

Transformation questions the assumptions held by organisational members and promotes cognitive reorientation.

In order, therefore, to accomplish transformational change, society must be examined as an assemblage of organisations, while at the same time identifying separate organisational types. Each type must be examined within fields that are influencing and constraining, but with some capacity and potential to go beyond current consolidations and to establish new modes and levels of transcendence. This examination should focus on the internal dynamics of organisation and their transformational potential. How do we identify and limit the negative dynamics in the field of interacting elements and establish the means for promoting more positive dialectics? In exploring this, we must look at the character of "formation" and "information" in the inter-organisational, societal field and in the intra-organisational context. In doing this, insights and conclusions are provided from an indepth study of organisational change across different organisations in Jamaica.

## Statement of the Problem

Within the global environment, Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, are subject to economic and social challenges. Jamaica has vicious circles of high inflation, high-interest rates, low growth, high fiscal deficits and rising debt levels paired with high crime rates, low levels of literacy, low employment, and low productivity. These factors provide a challenging context for organisations — one requiring not only change, but transformational initiatives.

In instances where organisations determine that change is critical for survival, a drastic approach to the implementation of change is a quick response solution. Based on the complexity of change and the factors associated with it, components that can be more easily controlled or demand fewer resources are invariably ahead of human resource factors (Bartunek, 1984). The result is often inadequate preparation of employees for the impending change.

Successful change in organisations depends on commitment (Jaros, 2010), communication (Elving, 2005), and buy-in from all members (Armenakis et al., 2007). Most Caribbean organisations struggle with issues of trust, work ethics, performance and interpersonal relationships (Jamaica Business Development Corporation, 2016). Thus, change may further exacerbate an already fractious work environment. This is especially the case, since organisational change can be stressful, disruptive, and unpredictable; tensions that already exist point to further upheavals and are indicative of an emotionally charged environment.

## Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the effects of organisational change features on employees' emotions, perceptions, and behaviours. It investigated the dynamics of cognitive-emotional appraisal of lower-level/lower-status employees in organisations with embedded power relations that were attempting planned change processes. Specific focus was placed on the psycho-social impact of change protocols, communication, participation, and other aspects of the change process. Of primary importance were individuals' cognitive-emotional appraisal of the change process. The epistemic value of the study was an examination and emphasis on the evolving cognitive-emotional appraisals of participants, who were expected to embody and implement the change objectives in their relations and work performances.

This study constituted a comparative multi-dimensional systems approach to organisational analysis across two organisations, and examined organisational change within an elaborated Caribbean social theory framework which was complemented by psycho-social theory. The study was set against the backdrop of structural-psycho-socio-cultural dynamics and their influences on employees' cognitive appraisal of change.

The following six research questions guided indepth face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and the interrogation of archival records—as illustrated below:

1. What are the characteristics of change that lower-level employees (not involved in the decision-making process)will be most concerned about?
2. What are some of the contextual features of the organisational environment that will influence employees' cognitive appraisal of the change?
3. What are some of the emotions that lower-level employees experience during the change?
4. What perceptions do lower-level employees hold in relation to the change?
5. Given the socio-cultural context, how do lower-level employees respond to the change based on how they experience and interpret it?
6. What are the behavioural patterns that are associated with lower-level employees' interpretation of the change?

## Caribbean Social Theory: Postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory (Said, 1993) has its origins in Caribbean history and was primarily focused in its early years on the extremes of domination and exploitation. It is also referred to as a continuing history of deprivation and catastrophe (M. G. Smith, 1965; Brathwaite, 1971; Beckford, 1972; R. T. Smith, 1988). Postcolonial theory argues that postcolonial societies have not overcome the original colonizing sins of domination, racism, and exploitation, and so the majority of their populations are still excluded from the full benefits of development — even in 21st Century Caribbean societies. Two sets of theories are implicated under the umbrella of structure: (a) Caribbean social theory as postcolonial theory and as a theory of marginalization, of inclusion and exclusion, and of interstitial margins, and (b) organisational theory of bureaucratic structures, of tensions between formal and informal, and of the social and the psychological.

Caribbean social theory emphasises the impact of structures of power from the socio-cultural to the psychological, with resistance mainly in interstitial margins which, according to Mann (2013, p. 315), concerns resistance and power. Power, he articulates, plays an important role in creating unexpected or unintended and widespread problems for societies at all levels. The history of domination continues to produce struggles — not only between the oppressors and the oppressed, but also within groups of oppressed peoples. In Mann's theory, power plays an important role in the preservation of inequality and lack of inclusion. However, Mann notes that power is not totalizing—that is, it does not represent all that is considered unfavourable in organisations, as institutions create both zones of exclusion and of resistance. It is therefore essential to understand and incorporate these zones in analysis at the societal and organisational levels. In the analysis of social life and social organisation, one often has to adopt a perspective that looks at how power relations implicate inclusion and exclusion, and incorporate levels of analysis involving the socio-cultural and psychological.

Caribbean postcolonial theories constitute a number of sociological models, each serving as a guide to the historical, sociological, cultural, and psychological landscapes of plantation society (Beckford, 1972); plural society (M. G. Smith, 1965); creole society (Brathwaite, 1971); class society (R. T. Smith, 1988); and the informal system. Each model approaches colonialism from a different perspective, while explaining the interactions and exchanges between racial and cultural groups that developed from the foundations of slavery and colonialism. The models also provide insights into the intricacies, inconsistencies, and complexities that have shaped composite societal structures, and more importantly the individual.

Historical depictions by Caribbean sociologists illustrate the constellation of influences on the lives of what came to be the Jamaican population. The period of emancipation from slavery and subsequently Jamaica's independence, should have signalled a time of rebirth, renewal, and restoration. This time should have marked a moment in the lives of Jamaicans where they could freely occupy and transform the space for which they had violently fought. It was also a time

for them to consciously construct an acceptable image and identity of themselves based on the diverse experiences and image of the future they envisioned. On the contrary, due to the ongoing practices toward maintaining the status quo, as proffered by R. T. Smith (1988) — the class system prevailed. Despite the fierce opposition from many Jamaicans and the departure from colonial rule, emancipated Jamaicans did not feel empowered to transform and personalize what had now become their legacy. Consequently, those who emerged as the ruling class and who were keen to maintain and preserve the institutions of power and domination continued to reproduce the familiar.

## Psycho-Social Theories — The Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotion

The process of judging the personal significance of a situation or event as good or unpleasant defines the nature of the Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotion (Cornelius, 1996). This theory posits that individuals will assess events based on their interpretation of its implications for their well-being (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Thus, individuals focusing on the same event may have different interpretations depending on personal significance (Smith & Kirby, 2001). For example, some individuals may interpret a change event as a positive one, while others may view it negatively and ultimately feel threatened (Lazarus, 1991b). Two key assumptions underpin the Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotion: (a) an individual may experience an emotion based on their evaluation of a situation and its meaning and implications for personal well-being; and, (b) depending on the situation, each evaluation may evoke different emotions (Smith & Kirby, 2001).

Cognitive appraisal operates in three stages. The first stage refers to an input, event, or stimulus to which an individual is exposed. The second stage is an iterative process of evaluation, which alternates between assessment and various types of emotions. This stage is known as the cognitive appraisal process, as the individual seeks to make sense of the situation. Fugate et al. (2010) assert that when an individual identifies a situation and internalizes its meaning, they first of all evaluate the situation to determine its personal significance. If they believe it has positive implications, they may seek further information and may, thereafter, commit to working with the situation. Alternatively, if perceived to be negative (i.e. the situation is not likely to be of personal benefit), they may decide to do just enough to get by, or they may withdraw psychologically or physically. The individual's reaction to the situation represents the final stage of the process, where certain overt, erratic, or covert actions or behaviours may manifest in response to their understanding of events (Fugate, 2013; Scherer, 2001).

## The Organisations & Contexts

Change generally unfolds in stages. Lewin (1951)—referred to as the father of change—argues that change occurs in three stages: (a) unfreezing the organisation from its current state; (b) implementing the change; and (c) refreezing the organisation in its new and desired state. According to Lewins' Change Theory, refreezing is an important part of the process, because if managers do not undertake this final step, resistance to change will be evident as employees revert to their original behaviour (G. R. Jones, 2013).

This study revealed that organisations must first of all enter a preparation mode (unfreezing), wherein all employees are fully aware of events and are trained to operate in and with new processes and systems; therefore being able to think and behave differently. Case One illustrates aspects of the change process, suggesting that the change was planned, led, and managed to some extent. On the contrary, Case Two did not appear to have instituted a plan of action: although employees were aware of the proposed change, they were in no way prepared psychologically for it.

The study entities were two large organisations operating in different sectors within a post-colonial developmental context. Case One operated in the financial sector and Case Two in

the educational sector. Both organisations span national, regional, and international dimensions and constitute multiple organisational sectors, departments, and sections. The depth and breadth of these organisations were quite extensive, and their actions structured. The latter due primarily to their highly bureaucratic nature.

Case One transitioned from a building society to a commercial bank, requiring employees to cognitively re-orientate as they attempted to adjust to the new context and commercial banking environment (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2013). A building society differs significantly from a bank, in that the former is a mutual organisation designed to benefit its members. Members have voting rights and consequently a greater say in the management of the building society. Additionally, the law limits building societies' offerings to mortgages and savings accounts. Commercial banks, on the other hand, trade on the stock market and are owned by shareholders. They are given greater latitude by the regulatory body for financial institutions to offer various financial products to customers, from chequing and savings accounts to certificates of deposit, among many others. The commercial banking industry is highly lucrative and competitive.

Archival records showed that the history of Case One dated back to the late 1800s when private citizens wanted to find practical low-cost housing solutions for disenfranchised Jamaicans by encouraging them to save (Walvin, n. d.). Slavery had created divisions within society and many black citizens were deprived of opportunities to advance in society. Using the British model for creating building societies, the decision to cater to this group was twofold — it would encourage people to save by establishing mutual organisations, while giving them the opportunity to own their own homes.

From the early beginnings of a small building society, the organisation grew consistently by merging and acquiring a number of smaller mutual organisations. Preparation of its human and technological resources, customers, and business practices to make the transition to the commercial banking environment took a number of years (Gordon, 2015). Official communication by senior organisation executives suggested that the transition had been on the institution's radar for close to 10 years prior to the change.

Employees described the context and the culture of Case One as family/employee/customer-oriented, trustworthy, and supportive. While many felt that communication could be better, they also admitted that they were kept informed of all change-related plans and so did not feel they were operating in the dark at any time. This made them feel valued and as a result were excited about the proposed change of which they were a part. They were also excited to transition to the commercial banking environment as in their estimation, it had greater status and was a more attractive option. The understanding that there would be no job losses garnered more support and enthusiasm.

In the beginning of the change process (referred to as Stage 1) communication and leadership stood out as two very important variables of which employees were highly appreciative; and although events occurred very slowly, they understood the reasons because they were kept informed. Employees also expressed satisfaction for the time and effort leadership devoted to ensuring that all members of staff were included in various change-related events where questions were answered and doubts and fears allayed. Two years prior to the actual change, the level of communication and training were heightened in order to accommodate the implementation of the change (Stage II).

Stage II of the process began as expected, and as employees already appraised the situation and knew there was nothing to fear personally, they approached the implementation of the change with excitement, vigour, and pride. However, months after implementation, employees did not perceive that leadership and communication were consistent with their expectations. In addition, challenges that emerged because of the change were unresolved, expectations of financial rewards were unrealised, and the workload for which there was no prior discussion, grew exponentially. According to theorists, in

this period (Stage III), there should be close monitoring of the implementation programme by change agents to ensure that employees do not inadvertently revert to the previous stage, and that they remain engaged.

Case Two represented the first faculty of a university that was established in Jamaica. Several years after its opening, the European model that was adopted (which was primarily focused on promoting higher education, learning, and research) was reconfigured to also embody current trends in its specific areas of training. Although efforts were made to adapt the programmes being offered to local needs and limitations, the institution still managed to maintain much of its European ideals. Overall, the curriculum modelled those offered in overseas universities (Branday & Carpenter, 2008).

Since the early 1990s, many countries and organisations around the world have embarked on various projects to facilitate the building and development of knowledge economies. This trend resulted in immense pressure on higher education institutions to offer courses aligned with the needs of these new and growing economies. Globalization acted as a catalyst for technological growth, and this trend resulted in tertiary institutions being forced to identify creative ways to be competitive (Rust & Kim, 2012; Gordon, 2015). Additionally, global, structural, and fiscal crises forced governments to institute severe funding cuts to tertiary institutions. Consequently, it was expedient for these institutions to identify innovative ways to meet the growing economic challenges by identifying new income streams.

Case Two proposed and implemented many new strategies as they sought to rationalize their educational systems. One decision taken was to expand its facilities and resources in order to accommodate the increase in student numbers which the institution had been experiencing for a number of years. This would require merging employees from disparate departments and teams from a variety of locations to operate under one roof. The institution, therefore, constructed a tailor-made state-of-the-art, multi-purpose and multi-functional facility which would serve as a comprehensive educational setting for its students. The move would also serve to consolidate human, physical, technological, and financial resources while increasing its competitive advantage.

The context and culture of this faculty were characterized as weak communication, weak leadership, and toxic relationships. Respondents reported that although they were informed of the change (over a span of approximately 10 years) they were not prepared for it. They were advised that a state-of-the-art, multi-purpose, multi-functional building would be constructed for them; and were also advised of how the building would be designed and organized. The understanding by employees was that they would be allowed to select and occupy specific spaces in the building for their teams and departments, thus implying that once in the building their spaces would already have been prepared and ready for the specific needs of each group.

One factor that gave prominence to the relocation activity was that although senior members of the team recognized that the new space would be a welcome change, they were reluctant to move. To demonstrate their loyalty to their senior leaders, many team members also resisted the move, until they felt they had no choice. Many employees believed the reluctance to relocate by some senior managers was because of the perceived reduced power status that would result in teams and departments no longer being in charge of their own resources: all resources would be shared, except for human resources. Thus, strong sentiments, poor communication, toxic relations, and weak leadership accompanied employees to the new location.

Once in the building, respondents reported being met by another group of employees who were not previously part of the planned change. They were in the building at the invitation of the CEO, who did not advise anyone of the change of plan and more importantly, once all were in the building, he did not attempt to communicate with, or intergate the different groups.

## Methodology

In light of the different ontologies, epistemologies, and models of human nature, social scientists are inclined to employ different methodological approaches in their study of social phenomena (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Social science researchers (including these researchers), recognize that the study of social phenomena cannot be approached from a state of tabula rasa. We are aware that our worldviews and beliefs inform our chosen approach, while recognizing that it is the actual approach to these studies that contributes to the distinct research styles (Creswell, 2007).

The ontological views that guided this study are, therefore, based on the personal and contextual nature of the experiences of those that are being studied; also recognizing that their individual responses to shared or unique realities are not absolutes. Therefore, these experiences and contexts cannot be generalised to other situations or contexts. In addition, the context in which the emotions and realities of individuals are constructed is of extreme importance, in that they not only refer to the nature of the environment but also have implications for the wider society from which individuals are associated. Epistemological views were based on "interpretivism", which suggests that it is important to understand the social world and explore its parameters from the perspective of those who experience it. In that sense, the chosen qualitative methodological approach is predicated on the belief that knowledge of participants and their environments can only be acquired and learned through close interaction. Thus, in these cases, it was important to understand the extent to which the planned events, relationships, and behaviours within the studied contexts impacted individuals.

The research design specifically employed a multiple-case study approach in its investigation of how some employees cognitively appraised organisational change, and their attendant emotions and behaviours. Qualitative research was chosen, as it has the ability to produce "thick description" of participants' experiences, emotions, and perceptions (Geertz, 1973, p. 27).

McGrath and Johnson (2003) states that there has been an ongoing tension between the use of qualitative versus quantitative research methods. Many have trivialized it as the difference between numbers and opinions. However, McGrath and Johnson (2003) also argue that the difference is much more involved than that; it is essentially a matter of the researcher's choice of paradigm. The practice of qualitative research demands a representation of voices and issues that are relevant to those voices. It is unfortunate that the use of these voices continues to preserve the belief that qualitative research lacks rigour and robustness. However, this belief is countered by research proponents who are as emphatic in their beliefs that qualitative research is just as rigorous and robust as the widely used quantitative methods. These views are supported by Stake (2010, p. 15) who purports that the following five qualities lend credence to the argument of employing qualitative research: it is interpretive, empirical, situational, intuitive, and credible. Yin (2014) also reminds scientists that there are numerous empirical research strategies available, thus their presence should be viewed more as pluralistic than competitive.

The justification for employing a case study approach is also supported by:

a. Crabtree & Miller (1999), who argue that case studies allow for a better understanding of individuals' actions due to the opportunity for interactional exchange between researcher and participants. They also assert that it allows individuals to: (1) express their thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon of organisational change; (2) explore the context in which it occurs; (3) give their interpretation of the nature of it, and (4) state how they believe they have been impacted. The case study approach allows researchers to probe beyond the initial questions and identify underlying issues respondents might not have fully articulated.

b. Creswell (2007, p. 73) also argues that a case study or a multiple-case-study approach is an opportunity to explore a

particular issue in a bounded or multiple bounded system; that is, the system is connected, albeit lines are sometimes blurred.

c. Yin (2014, p. 56) further argues that multiple-case studies are compelling and robust, as they (1) allow for the study of indepth, contemporary, and contextual real-world research and; (2) are useful when there is an unclear demarcation between the phenomenon being studied and the context.

## Selection of Organisations

The two organisations selected for this study qualified because they were identified as having gone through change at least two years prior to the study. Initially, the aim was to identify two private sector organisations from which participants would be drawn. However, owing to the difficulties presented with access, the researchers found access instead in one financial organisation from the private sector (Case One) and another from the faculty of an educational institution (Case Two).

## Selection of Participants

Participants for this study were selected from a list of employees obtained from the human resources departments of each organisation. Twenty-two employees in each organisation were selected by the researchers based on three specific criteria: (a) participants could be characterised as lower-level employees because they were not involved in the decision-making process; (b) they were 24–65 years old; and (c) they were employed with the organisation for at least two years prior to the change initiative.

## Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

Data was collected over a 6-month period by way of documentary evidence, observations, individual indepth face-to-face interviews, and focus groups. The cases were comparatively analysed using a mix of qualitative data analysis and correspondence analysis or mixed methods analysis.

Respondents were interviewed by way of a face-to-face, indepth, and unstructured interview protocol. Interviews were recorded with the permission of each respondent. Questionnaires were assigned a special numerical identifier obtained from each participant which facilitated member checking, further anonymity, and confidentiality of participants. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and field notes were transcribed and uploaded to the Qualitative Data Analysis software (QDA Miner) as text files. Each file was identified as one unit and each organisation was identified as one case. Familiarization with each unit and each case was done in QDA Miner.

By way of analysis, the data was coded, which helped to better understand respondents' feedback. Codes were identified based on themes frequently referred to by individuals. The rules of analysis involved organizing relevant themes into colour-coded categories. Initially, seven categories were identified: change, emotions, behaviours, perceptions, organisational contextual factors, leadership, cultural and societal factors. Leadership (which respondents repeatedly referred to as part of the context) was later merged with organisational contextual factors; thereby resulting in six major categories (change, emotions, perceptions, behaviours, organisational contextual factors, and cultural/societal factors), each with a number of dimensions/variables. The analysis captured individuals' articulation about their organisational context, the change, the way they understood the change, the emotions experienced, their perceptions, and possible behaviours. Using the data already uploaded to QDA Miner, the categories were subjected to a mixed-methods analysis consisting of qualitative data analysis and quantitative correspondence analysis. Correspondence analysis is a multivariate exploratory technique used to analyse large quantities of categorical data. It allowed for a closer examination of the themes within their respective categories. The result was a correlation of the categorical data, which was represented by the creation of multidimensional graphical or perceptual maps.

## Ethical Issues

Based on the nature of the study, minimal risks to participants were anticipated. Participants were advised that they might experience some emotional discomfort when asked to recall specific emotional experiences and behaviours during the change event. Where this occurred, the researcher allowed the participant time to recover, while providing a supporting presence. Participants were asked whether they wanted to continue or withdraw, and advised of the availability of experienced counsellors. No participant expressed a desire for the interview to be terminated or requested access to counselling. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they would grant a second interview should the need arise.

## Limitations

It was understood that the study may have been impeded based on its subjective nature. Potential subjectivity arose from the study's strong reliance on participants' ability to recall some of the nuances of the change that took place in their organisation and how they experienced it. However, due to the significance of the change that participants experienced, they did not appear to have had a problem with recall in relation to either the change or the emotions that many appeared to still be experiencing.

Because of the interrogative nature and length of most interviews, it was anticipated that participants would experience fatigue; however, this was not the case when asked by the researchers. A few respondents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak about their experience, which, as they reported, proved cathartic.

Researcher bias posed a threat to the credibility of this study; however, these researchers were aware that connecting with respondents was important in order to avoid preconceptions and personal biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While it was difficult to leave all such considerations behind, awareness of personal biases was a strong point of focus before and during each interview. It was important to mitigate any influence this could have had on the overall study.

## Findings

Both organisations demonstrated challenges with the change they experienced. Although respondents in both cases were psychologically prepared for the change and there was significant management of the change in Case One; unknown outcomes, perceived expectations, and the inability of staff to make sense of their experiences resulted in emotions and behaviours that were counter-productive.

In Case One, having not realised their expectations during the change, the excitement, optimism, and pride that many employees experienced were exchanged for resentment, ambivalence, and discouragement. One employee indicated that in the early stages of the change she was very happy and proud that they were changing and that they were going to be in the same league as their main competitors. Another employee stated, "I am also very excited for what it might mean for me; I foresee growth and opportunity." However, two years after the change, negative emotions were high for many, as the level of stress due to the heavy workloads continued unabated.

"I need this job, but in the back of my mind, I'm thinking that I'm just gonna do what I need to do and get out of here because I am just a means to an end".

Another stated, "I feel stressed and sometimes I feel like they don't recognize our efforts…."

Case One was known for its excellent customer service, and while many respondents continued to experience stressful days, they were also mindful that they must continue to provide customers with the service for which the organisation prides itself. Emotional labour, referred to as the forced expression of emotions for the economic benefit of an organisation (Pinder, 2008, pp. 136–139), and specifically surface acting, was prevalent among many respondents. Surface acting refers to when the employee pretends to be the character as specfied by the employer for the benefit of the customers. For example, they are expected to smile with the customer when they do not feel that emotion (Hochschild, 1983). The expectation that they must display emotions they did not feel added

to their stress levels, thus resulting in increased absenteeism and psychological withdrawal as many respondents were of the opinion that their well-being was threatened. Paul said, "It's all about the image—whatever image they want you to portray; you have to smile even if you're not feeling well … they say it's all about the customer, so we have to be upbeat all the time."

Employees also believed that their relationship with the leadership had changed, signalling that they were no longer valued by the organisation. The takeaway for many was that leadership no longer valued them and that the culture of the organisation had changed to focus more on sales and less on their well-being.

"I don't think my organisation has my best interest at heart … no, no, no, emphatically no!"

Case Two highlighted the socio-structural features of the organisation as fundamental to the cognition and behaviours of respondents prior to their relocation to the new building, and after occupation.

"We started packing up and I was so very excited to come up here because of this nice pretty building", one respondent indicated. Several elements of the context, however, stood out as having greater significance in the new building—the importance of the physical environment, the role of power, the role of leadership and communication, and inclusion and group integration. Janice said, "The moment we got here, we realised we were not being accommodated … all the spaces that were assigned to us were given to [the other groups]".

Many respondents reported that the events in the building left them feeling helpless, as they realised they had lost control of what they previously thought was their building. "No one told us that other departments other than us would be occupying the building, they just turned up; and they were now in charge."

The distress many felt resulted in them being highly vocal with their leaders/managers in the hope that they would lobby on their behalf in order to get the justice they believed they deserved. Although some respondents reported that their managers made attempts to seek redress, their concerns were overridden by the senior leadership. Others felt they could not trust the actions of their leaders and managers, either because they did not believe they cared enough to act or because they thought the decisions were already made and nothing would change the course of events. This led one respondent to say,

"… our heads go to a meeting and the issues in the building are discussed but once they leave the meeting, they do nothing with it, they end up doing whatever they want to do". Feelings of injustice prevailed, which resulted in aggressive and passive-aggressive behaviours directed toward those considered as intruders, and vice versa. "You hear a lot of quarrelling among members of staff sometimes … the fight/resistance is essentially about territory, because the building was designed for us."

Reprisals also led to conflicts and hostility which were not seriously addressed by leaders and managers, so any hope of integrating the groups was lost. This led to one respondent noting,

"… every section has a head and nobody wants to feel as if they are not in control of their area, so everybody is protective of their area. We can't just go into an area."

The way that matters were handled by the senior leadership left employees feeling angry, frustrated, and defeated—further diminishing any vestiges of trust and support that might have been present in the environment. With a big sigh, Jon said, "… I have passed that point of waiting for something to change that would make me feel better about coming to work."

## Discussion

Change is inevitable, and evidence in the Jamaican post-colonial society suggests the arrival at a strategic pivot point; where pressure is being applied by civil society, religious, and human rights groups on public and private sector organisations and the society to change and transform. Based primarily on the post-colonial context, organisational change might not produce the effects intended by the change process. The effectiveness of the change that is necessary

requires the creation of a new way of thinking to achieve transformation. For the change to be effective, it requires a complete overhaul of processes, structure, human cognition, and a strong focus on removing profound and enduring colonial legacies, primarily, exclusionary tendencies.

In addition to the nature of the organisational contexts, both organisations confirmed a myriad of factors that are encapsulated in change. Many of these factors point to enduring organisational characteristics that predispose the organisations to behaviours which inevitably make them averse to change (see Figure 1). The added problem is that when paired with the complexities of human actions, the likelihood of successful change outcomes proves challenging. This study revealed a uniquely blended psycho-socio-cultural framework that is embedded in the Caribbean context, which further contributes to the change-averse nature of these post-colonial organisations (McDonald, 2020).

The following highlights some of the findings and interpretations of the contextual and change-related environments that could act as a guide for other organisations attempting change, namely,

a. The process of change has many dimensions. Change is more open-ended than it is closed. Therefore, many emerging conditions are produced that impact the way employees cognitively appraise events.

b. Time is a critical factor during the change process, as it also allows for the reconsolidation of embedded organisational practices, wherein any achievements and expectations in relation to change are often reversed.

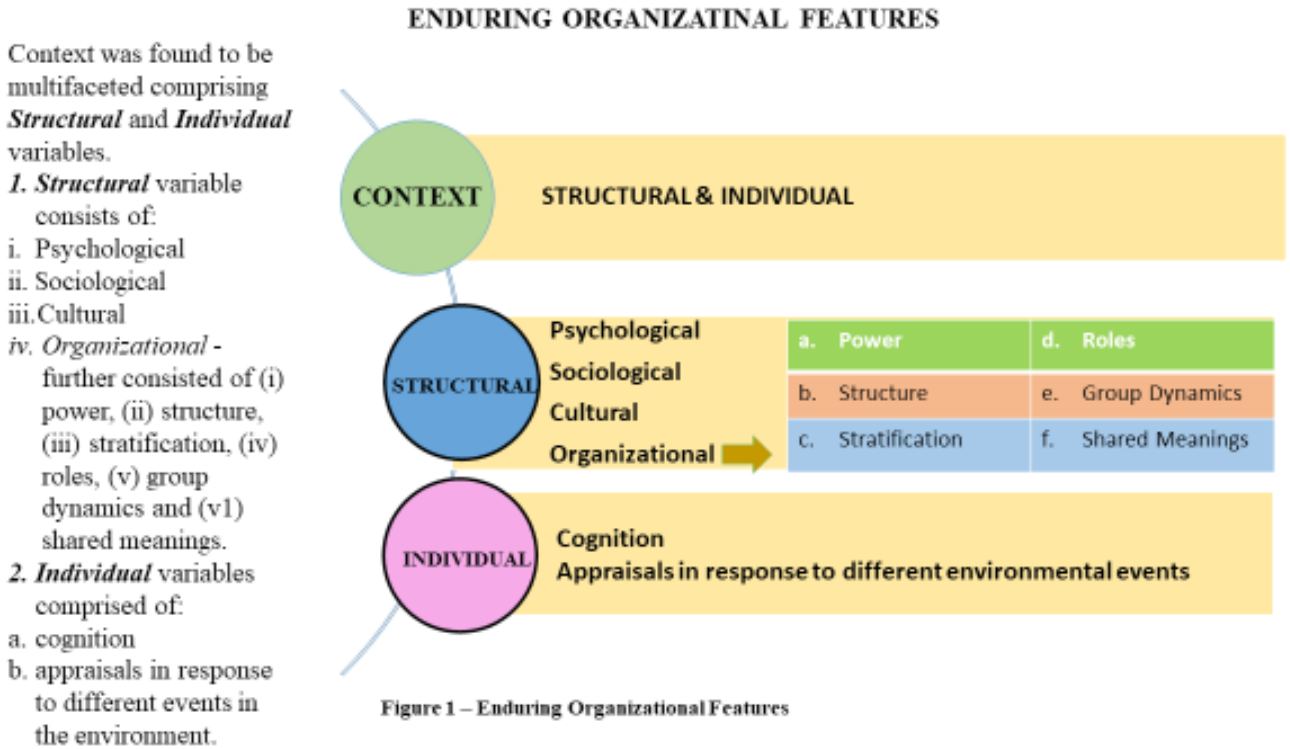

Figure 1 – Enduring Organizational Features

c. There are weaknesses of systems of continuous monitoring that are employed to sustain the change momentum and to meaningfully respond to the emerging challenges that previously existed — for example, monitoring without an understanding of what is being monitored, results in inconsequential findings. Long and unmanaged change processes further exacerbate the process.

d. Sustaining change requires structural and participatory adjustments that, in these contexts, are difficult to concede and not usually intended to be up for debate in the top-down initiated change process.

e. Finally, the change process generally yields minimalist change, with continued alienation and disillusionment added to the defensive cognitive-emotional maintenance of appraisal systems.

In light of these revelations, the following recommendations are proposed:

a. Leadership and communication should be built into all change-related plans and specifically at all stages of the change process. Those in leadership should demonstrate their commitment to the change and ensure that communication across the organisation is ongoing.

b. For transformation to occur, leadership must also understand the role of cognition and its benefits to the overall success of the organisation. This also requires that leadership challenges prevailing assumptions, including what it means to be a leader.

c. In addition to strong and convincing leadership and communication, change and transformation require a strong and convincing employee-centered approach in order to meet the impending challenges. Employees are the backbone of any change initiative, it is important that they: (1) understand the nature of the change—what the change is about and how it is likely to affect them; (2) fully understand the various change-related messages, and (3) are aware of historical influences on self and organisation, for e.g., the role of power, trust and respect.

d. Organisations must embrace the full participation and empowerment of employees in order to avoid marginalization and defensiveness. Enduring exclusionary practices, for example, excluding levels of employees from relevant areas of decision making are counterintuitive to this strategy.

e. Even before change is considered, time should be spent in understanding existing organisational issues and a decision taken to mitigate their potential effects.

f. Deliberate and consistent actions, that is, actions that are seen to be thoughtful and stable must be maintained across all phases of the change, to ensure that it becomes part of the organisational culture.

## Conclusion

Change produces a number of unwanted conditions, particularly when due consideration is not given to factors such as those found (demonstrable disrespect, and failure to communicate important information) in these case studies. It is imperative that organisations become mindful of such occurrences so that they can continue to respond to the variables as they emerge. Building a culture of leadership, communication, participation, feedback, regular evaluation, and revision, allows for greater learning and respect, and drives creativity. In addition, inviting input from various levels within the organisation (individuals and groups) further engenders growth and encourages systemic change and transformation.

Complex systems with multiple embedded parts (such as a university) invariably struggle to change and transform — as one element changes, other parts of the system are highlighted for change. Change largely appears to occur without the experience of change and as such, the system

quickly reverts to the status quo. Difficult issues such as psycho-socio-cultural challenges with which most Caribbean cultures struggle, namely; trust, leadership, communication, respect, power, and stratification can prove to be insurmountable or are ignored when addressing change in these organisations.

Failure to address such issues continues to perpetuate the psychology of the Caribbean people who are still struggling to overcome the colonial mindset, thus resulting in major hindrances to change and transformation (McDonald, 2020). Ironically, organisations, and specifically, institutions of learning that are expected to be proponents of change and transformation and from which the rest of society learns and transforms, appear to make themselves redundant in this regard due to their inability to achieve transcendence.

These two case studies raise questions regarding (a) the possibilities for development and the future of universities and businesses in the Caribbean (specifically Jamaica), and (b) the features of the change dynamics and the interactions between the organisation and society. Each of these entities, however, has a different function. Universities are communities of learning and personal development. They are perceived as experts in their fields as they create opportunities for new knowledge through research and as such contribute to the development of the society. Organisations are diverse in their activities and in relation to their internal and external interactions. However, they are primarily social systems, with the aim of satisfying varying personal and societal needs. Are these entities actually using the opportunities afforded them in an efficient way to show internally and externally how change could be managed?

Despite the challenges, both case studies are somewhat promising, at the conceptual and at the implementation level. Both, however, have limitations. If these limitations are addressed, beginning with the acceptance that: (1) colonial influences continue to thwart our development, (2) long and enduring assumptions that preserve the colonial legacies (including exclusionary tendencies) do not serve the greater good, (3) relevant and strong leadership both at the organisational and national levels are needed for strategic direction, and (4) a healthy appreciation of the importance of leadership and communication at all levels of the organisation and society should be a matter of course.

While, on their own, these factors do not guarantee transformation, they will, however, position organisations and society on the path toward cognitive re-orientation and transformation/transcendence.

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# The Social Cults of Cinematic Gendered Violence: A Challenge and Transformation

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## Abstract

The modern female rape–revenge cinema polarizes gender relations as it endorses a misandrist logic and brutal forms of reprisal. Wilson Harris, the British/Guyanese fiction writer and theorist, argues that these hypnotic forms of female-revenge media are social cults of violence that generate a conflict of gender. Using the film, I Spit on your Grave and Rihanna's music video Man Down, this research demonstrates that the female-revenge mediascape is prime corollary to the promotion of misandry and violent vigilante justice. The film theories of Claire Henry, Hilary Neroni, and Jean Baudrillard will undergird the arguments of this research. The research methodology for this study employs a narrative analysis intersected with the lens of Wilson Harris's shamanistic ontology of gender. The findings of this paper reveal that a shamanic vision of gender could therapeutically convert the psychical imprisonment of cinematic rape-revenge violence.

*Keywords*: female-revenge cinema, social cults of violence, misandry, shamanistic ontology of gender

## Introduction

### Rape-revenge Mediascape: Visual Narratives of Misandry

Contemporary female-revenge cinema, where there is only a narrative trajectory of brutal rape and physical abuse accompanied by a climax of revenge and retribution, has understandably become a socially accepted form of misandry and violent vigilantism. Nathanson and Young (2012) define misandry as an intense hatred toward men which is a culturally propagated way of thinking. According to the authors, the prevalence of misandrist logic is due to commercial opportunism in the contexts of both entertainment and advertising (Nathanson & Young, 2012). Significantly, the authors claim that misandry is much more sinister and destructive since it can generate a perverted ideology of justice which makes it synonymous with revenge (Nathanson & Young, 2012).

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Studies have shown that 21st century rape-revenge media impacts societies' understanding of gendered violence and misandry (Ebert, 2010; Hess, 2017). Consequently, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness and opinion on the issue as well as of female victims and male perpetrators. Looking at cinematic representations in general, we can observe that the commercial glorification of female victimhood and rape-revenge depicts rather similar visual narratives of misandry and a morally deceptive form of brutal vigilantism (Billson, 2018; Hahner & Varda, 2017). The female rape-revenge narrative constitutes a discursive practice in the media that perpetuates the rhetoric of violence overall. However, since these images of violent women are desensitized and disinhibited, they are constructed to signify masculinized female avengers and ultimately legitimize an artificial reality of shocking and gruesome restorative justice and misandrist logic (Minowa et al., 2014).

In fact, one merely has to look at the banality of the female revenge syndrome portrayed in films to think that gendered violence is equated with vigilante justice. Individuals who are immersed within the charismatic cinematic space of the avenging female are frequently engaged with violent vigilante images; which become catalysts to a heightened sense of "moral vigilantism" that apes real-life forms of restorative justice. Vigilantism and misandry in the female revenge mediascape are thus fallacies that resemble true justice. The present study discusses how the rape-revenge media promotes misandry and a morally deceptive form of brutal vigilantism through subtle patterns of violent female portrayals. Moreover, the study addresses the attempts at transforming such misandry and horrific vigilante justice through a narrative analysis method intersected with Wilson Harris's shamanistic ontology of gender.

A great deal of scholarly attention focuses on portrayals of the violent female in rape-revenge media. However, an indepth exploration of scholarly texts reveals that scant literature exists on explorations of transforming the violent female rhetoric in rape-revenge media. Arguably, there seems to be a precedence among scholars not to discuss the value of transforming the deceptive misandrist logic and vigilante justice of the rape-revenge cinema. Few critics have approached the subject, with minimal discussion about the convertibility of such misandry and deceptive justice (Heller-Nicholas, 2011).

Writing about transforming the rhetoric of rape-revenge may be a formidable task, considering the deeply enshrined feminist support for the topic (Projanski, 2001). Anne Billson's, "How the rape-revenge movie became a feminist weapon for the #MeToo generation", is essential reading on the issue as it is dedicated to providing a solution to this visual discourse of misandry and vigilante justice. Billson aims to rescue mainstream female-revenge mediascape from this status by positioning her argument as a response to the tolerant and heightened sense of deceptive moral vigilantism and misandry in the midst of the celebrated cinematic female avenger. Billson (2018) claims that a redefinition of the rape-revenge cinema can be accomplished through the replacement of the male gaze (which stimulates a palatable misandry) with the female one. She further claims that this camera shift subverts the conventional paradigm that the cinematography of rape-revenge historically exploits.

Hence considering the lack of research that investigates methods to counteract and eradicate the embattled gendered relations found in the dark psychology of the female revenge media aesthetic, it is important to explore alternative solutions to the brutal rape-revenge films for instance the shamanistic dimension of gender proposed by the British/Guyanese fiction writer and theorist, Wilson Harris. Harris's decision to turn away from simply examining the vicious and exploitative examples of rape-revenge films and provide a therapeutic solution is commendable and significant. Harris's shamanistic ontology of gender provides strong precedence for a valuable solution to the horrific instances of the rape-revenge film.

The following research question is proposed given the review of literature on the ability of the rape revenge mediascape to encourage a morally deceptive ideology of brutal vigilantism

and misandrist logic among spectators: Does a shamanistic ontology of gender actively challenge the ideologies of brutal sanctioned retribution and misandrist logic that are promoted by Hollywood rape revenge media?

## Methodology

Very little discourse and research exist to illuminate a solution for the ideological conditioning of the moral vigilantism and misandrist logic conveyed in the rape-revenge films. As such, the application of narrative criticism intersected with the lens of Wilson Harris's shamanistic ontology of gender is a significant method to subvert the socialization of contemporary violent female rhetoric of the rape-revenge cinema. By employing the theoretical insights of narrative criticism, this study investigates the common themes of brutal female rape-revenge observed in the media and identifies the extent to which these forms of media create empathy for the victims of sexual violence and the morally accepted ideology of vigilante justice. Wilson Harris's shamanistic ontology of gender will also provide the framework to reveal that a convertibility of the female-revenge cinema maybe possible. In so doing, this research highlights the ways in which adopting a shamanistic approach to cinematic gendered violence reveals new areas of counteracting the conditioned spectatorial appetite of vigilantism and misandry.

In this research, narrative analysis converges with Wilson Harris's shamanistic view of gender and is applied to two types of female-revenge media: a film, and a music video. Narrative analysis and shamanistic ontology of gender excavates an understanding of the extent to which brutal rape-revenge in these media creates a deceptive form of moral vigilantism and misandrist logic with the aim of transforming such ideology. Narrative criticism is used in this research to evaluate the shrouded subtleties and mechanisms of the female-revenge cinema that promotes a complacency of forms of brutal reprisals, and a shamanistic perspective of gender provides a significant component to deconstruct the ideology of a sanctioned retribution and misandry that have been deeply embedded in media portrayals of violent female rhetoric.

### Narrative Analysis

Narrative criticism involves placing emphasis on various discourses that individuals engage with in order to understand conscious experiences (Rodden, 2008). The narrative paradigm was developed by the Communication Studies scholar Walter Fisher. Fisher (1984) affirms that narrative analysis was introduced to understand how communication is constructed and how the approach of engaging with various discourses informs the nature of rhetoric. Miller (2005) argues that various genres exist for the study of narrative criticism such as media, non-fiction, fiction, prose, poetry, myth, history, legend and even ancient beliefs. Therefore, due to this inclusion of myth and ancient belief, narrative theory can address the research question proposed in this study. Through investigations of the film "I Spit on your Grave" and the music video "Man Down", the goal of using the narrative paradigm is to understand to what extent it can offer a transformative approach given its focus on identifying the rhetoric of the female rape-revenge media.

### The Lens of Wilson Harris's Shamanistic Ontology of Gender

The Caribbean theorist, Wilson Harris, is informed by a shamanistic ontology of gender. His shamanistic perspective of gender is a non-violent means of bringing social change to the violent female revenge genre of cinematography. His shamanic concept of gender is derived from the mythical Aztec androgynous deity Ometeotl. According to Harris (1981) in "The Making of Tradition", this god in pre-Columbian lore subsists on indeterminacy and diversity and was revered as the "formidable duality of … male and female" (p. 95). This pre-Columbian myth is undoubtedly one of the diverse categories within narrative criticism and does indeed provide a signal for resolving the crisis in the female-revenge cinematic tradition. Harris (1999a) states that "The womb … in shamanic lore transgresses the boundaries of individual gender" ("Apprenticeship to the Furies", p. 227). In line with a fluid notion of gender-and this is Harris's achievement-gender is not to be identified with separate male and female individuals locked into resolute

structures of masculinity and femininity but with elusive traces of all animate and inanimate parts of nature. As Harris (1999a) notes in "Apprenticeship to the Furies":

> We need … to see women-when portrayed as embodiments of the Furies-*not* as individual characters in the psychology of the novel or the cinema, but as human vessels inhabited by spectralities and concretions, by a cellular chemistry pertinent to the body of the womb in shamanic lore, the womb of nature and of civilization. Think of the human vessel in the genius of the Imagination symbolizing ingredients within itself and beyond itself which are richer and stranger than individual gender. When one looks deep into its cellular fabric-into the vessel of the womb in space and time in shamanic lore-one visualizes oceanic parables littered with stars and constellations, one visualizes the spring of rivers and veined leaves of forests that have cradled cultures since time began. (p. 227)

This cosmic sensation of gender seems remarkably difficult to grasp by our confines of a static binary gender paradigm, but it becomes genuinely meaningful when one comprehends and visualizes the interconnectedness of the human "cellular fabric". And it certainly is: "human vessels" all contain the same "cellular chemistry" or "ingredients." Such a perception creates a visual dissolution of individual male or female gender and simply reveals that the purity of gender duality is a masquerading social construct.

In short, Harris's shamanistic womb of nature informs the spiritual roots of social activism. We are dominated by this homogenous construct of gender, and therefore, we fail to see that this social imperative very often masks or shrouds from us the indeterminate and fluid roots of gender. Harris therefore unravels this gender masquerade, in some degree, by subverting its fixed frame, to lay bare an indeterminate and inconclusive cosmic unfathomable male/female — that *cannot* be polarized. This implies that dualisms between us/them, male/female or any other hierarchy that spiritually separates people is a trap.

It is significant to note that Wilson Harris formulated his shamanistic ontology of gender as a response to his profound interest in the ancient Greek mythical Furies or avenging females. The female revenge syndrome of the Furies led him to question and relate the myth's brutal polarization of gender to the equally manufactured Hollywood aesthetic of female-revenge violence. One of his prime assertions is that the "portrayal of women" in the modern female-revenge cinema is "archetypally consistent with the Furies whose vocation it was in classical myth to pursue the doers of unavenged crimes" ("Apprenticeship to the Furies", 1999a, p. 230). The "revenge-syndromes" of the mythical Furies — Tisophone, Magaera and Alecto — according to Harris are "lifted into populist entertainment [to] create a money-making industry", but significantly "polarizes gender as it endorses the 'killing goddesses'" ("Apprenticeship to the Furies", 1999a, p. 230).

This cinematic conception of the Furies and its capacity to boost the logic of misandry and gender polarization is a problematic issue which is explicitly suggested in Harris's fictional novels, *The Carnival Trilogy*. The "hypnotic" sensation of female-revenge films, according to Harris, in *The Carnival Trilogy*, reduces individuals to pawns operating within "social cults of violence that feed on sex" (Harris, 1999b, p. 84). It is within such premises that Harris's film theory, offers much scope for authentic engagement and dialogue with the moral crisis of misandry associated with the historical problematic and the politics of the female vigilante cinema.

Significant literature has emerged discussing spirituality in the context of restorative justice. Several scholars define indigenous spiritual practice as credible solutions to crises within communities. These scholars also connect their definitions of spirituality and create them within the framework of equity, social justice and anti-oppression. Wane and Waterfall (2005) argue that "Spirituality is often culturally specific, meaning that its principles and practices were developed in response to the needs of a certain people in a specific environment (p.51). Similarly, Tisdell (1999) claims that, "for many, spirituality

is a grounding place for working for justice in the world" (p. 92). Stanczak and Miller (2002) also noted that engaged spirituality focuses on the therapeutic dimension. A framework that is in rapport with Harris's shamanic womb of nature. Stanczak and Miller (2002) claim that the therapeutic dimension of engaged spirituality is calming and provides a relief from a chaotic world or sense of peace in times of crisis. These perspectives of spirituality that are community-oriented and social-justice driven, therefore, substantiate the shamanistic praxis of Harris's womb of nature. But while there is a body of literature connecting spirituality and social change, there is a scarcity of research studies that focuses on the use of spiritual or shamanistic practices to convert the misandry and deceptive moral vigilantism of the rape-revenge mediascape. Therefore, this research addresses this gap.

## Deceptive Rhetoric of Rape-revenge Violence

It is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which empathy is constructed for female victims and avengers of sexual abuse in media as well as the implications for cultivating messages of misandry and violent vigilantism. The female revenge films particularly with its often-explicit visual depictions of rape and violence may subconsciously, if not consciously, place spectators within a psychical prison of gendered violence. It becomes sealed stereotypes of female victimhood that inform an appetite for brutal forms of reprisals among unsuspecting consumers. In *Visual Representations of Violent Women,* the film critics, Minowa et al. (2014) contend that although the woman avenger kills the predatory male character, they are in fact both engulfed in voluntary crime. The woman avenger's violent reprisal, according to Minowa et al. (2014), is also a glaring form of "aestheticized" vigilantism that becomes a deceptive reality of free agency and feminist liberation.

The commanding yet subtle cinematic mechanisms of the female revenge media are capable of lodging a vigilante fixation into the minds of spectators. The galvanic momentum of brutal and "justified" revenge that tends to seize the spectator, is established by camera mechanics. The film theorist Claire Henry (2014) states that the gripping realistic portraiture of revenge, explicitly revealed in some films reflects a different framing and function of the violence. According to Henry (2014), the camera work, for instance, in rape-revenge scenes repels the male gaze by placing the viewer in a fixed gravity of desexualization. This clever instrumentality, therefore, amplifies only the violent (instead of the sexual nature of sexual violence). There is a consequence to this, an unveiling of distorted reality in a warning Jean Baudrillard, the postmodern theorist, advances in his assessments of simulated images. In "Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality" Baudrillard (2002) notes that:

> The image is not related to the truth. It is related to appearances. Hence its magical affiliation with the illusion of the world-as-is – an affiliation which reminds us that, whatever its content, the real (like the worst) is never a certainty and that, perhaps the world may do without the real and the principle of reality. I believe that images affect us immediately…. So you can see there is a blur in the real. Reality is not focused. (p. 11)

By subtle degrees, unsuspecting viewers perceive that such rape-revenge narratives are justified dramatizations of sexual humiliations endured. The rape-revenge film becomes a commodification of the avenging female's suffering and survival as it positions the viewer to empathize with the victim and support her actions. Once the viewer, "trusts" the morality of this brutal reprisal, he or she may succumb to an inner powerlessness and disposition to discard the deceptive cinematic illusion of gendered violence. Rape-revenge films can therefore, in line with the argument of Minowa et al. (2014), endorse violent rape as both morally repugnant and a form of sanctioned retribution.

## Avengers of Sexual Abuse: Messengers of Misandry

The Hollywood film *I Spit on Your Grave* (Monroe, 2010), contributes to the social understanding of the female revenge syndrome. The commercialized brutal forms of reprisals in

this film seem designed to fetishize the avenging female as an embodiment of the ideal female vigilante; an ideology of vigilantism that seeks to both resist and dismantle patriarchal oppression.

In this rape-revenge film, the avenging female becomes more of a vigilante fetish and less of a rape-survivor. There is no deviation from the deliberately ideological theme of the film's story—misandry and systematic violence against men. The protagonist's desexualized aesthetic deliberately counters toxic masculinity and is meant to repel the male gaze and male desire. The repulsive male gaze-oriented appeal favours the protagonist's masculine expressions of violence. Through this, the film promotes the vigilante ideology; an ideology that is meant to serve the shackled consumer appetite of brutal retributive justice. By shifting its focus to the avenging female's violence rather than the affection of the male gaze, the film objectifies, fetishizes, and desexualizes the violent female. As such, the film's commercial desexualization consequently triggers a misandrist logic rather than a feminist critique.

This capacity for dramatic visualization of brutal reprisal solidifies the iron-clad female-revenge syndrome, a complacent and egocentric code of vigilante justice. According to the Hollywood critic Roger Ebert (2010), the film, *I Spit on Your Grave*, endorsed an unwanted vigilante sensibility of "moral equivalency [or] getting even…. If I rape you, I have committed a crime. If you kill me, you have committed another one." Ebert's answer suggests that rape-revenge films may leave the audience angry, sad or nauseous, but nevertheless delivers satisfying retribution to all viewers. In other words, unsuspecting viewers, both male and female, may subconsciously support the same kinds of violence. This depiction of horrific reprisal killings exercised in the name of moral retribution is nevertheless, a moral deception. The woman avenger is a cinematic tool governed by absolute ruling images of retribution that serves to sustain a meaning of glorified and applauded violence. Such cinematic construction may apparently simplify, in the words of Roger Ebert, a structure of "moral equivalency" (2010). It therefore voids all other restorative perspectives but its clarity of retribution and misandry at the same time ironically becomes an illusory form of lawful justice.

This illusion of moral equivalency pervades Rihanna's music video "Man Down" (Rihanna, 2011). In this Caribbean rape-revenge scenario, the aesthetic of female victimhood and rape survival is only simulated to enhance the psychology of brutal vigilantism that is extolled in the confession "Mama I just shot a man down" (Rihanna, 2011). Such language may only serve to destabilize the notion of the woman avenger as a feminist symbol. The fundamental ideology of the avenging woman therefore continues to be problematic within the context of feminist resistance. Instead of confronting patriarchal values, revenge consolidates them. Rather than exemplifying feminist challenge to male violence, the female becomes a symmetrical reflection of masculine aggression.

The mass media and its obsession with the female-revenge syndrome has assisted in terms of its breach in traditional ideals of femininity and deepened our inquiry into the ideological model of female vigilante violence. Such continuous and institutionalized frame not only seeks to cement together the intricacies of masculinity and femininity into a coherent singular social reality but also subverts dialogue that could signal an alternative to the complacent acceptance of the avenging female's sense of violent retribution. The danger here has been explicitly depicted by media theorist, Hilary Neroni in *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*. Neroni (2005) argues that the femme fatale character on screen fissures the hubristic and uniform function of a predictable complementarity of the sexes:

> Violence functions primarily within ideas of complementarity insofar as men are violent and women are spectators and guarantors of violence. When women react with violence … they do not regain their femininity, but instead position themselves even further from that complementary relationship with masculinity…. Fictional violent women in film similarly disrupt a sense of complementarity and unsettle not

> only the narrative (in its trajectory towards a romantic union) but also all the cultural nuances and gender definitions that film normally relies on. Violent women create a moment in which the trauma of sexual antagonism is revealed, and provoke a rash of "meaning making" that is trying to redefine gender (pp. 929–3).

The discontinuity of the stable binary between masculine violence/feminized victimhood of which Neroni speaks in tandem with her negation of enshrined institutional bias of male dominance is, however, ambiguous. The twenty-first century cinematic construction of violence, in some degree, galvanizes the crisis of gender polarization. Yet, there is also a crisis of responding to the transfigurative capacity of gendered violence that lie buried within the biased conditions of a patriarchal ideology. And it is such ideology, that may ultimately flatten the prospect of a challenge and transformation of the psychical imprisonment of gender violence. The ideological collision between a subversion of patriarchal logic and a violent heroine who refuses to abide by the stable binary of masculine violence/feminized victimhood is further articulated by Neroni (2005):

> The femme fatale is an ambiguous character who varies dramatically from film to film…. She seems to be society's fantasy screen and, on the other hand, she seems to be hard rock of the real that threatens the stability of patriarchy. She is both a manifestation of society's fantasy of the underside of femininity (and thus in the service of ideology) and also something more elusive (and thus undeniably threatening to society) (p. 22).

Is it possible to convert such endemic deprivation through and beyond protest films of gendered violence into communities of hope and into abrupt alteration of enshrined sensibilities of vigilante behaviour? Such a question raises implications that are both realistic and troubling. The cinematic tool of a commanding female-revenge aesthetic may be difficult to challenge. It exercises itself as the ideally natural violent retribution. One that is also configured within the heteronormative confines of a capitalist cultural imperative. This entrenched value within complying societies consequently builds itself into an equation of massive ideological strength. Such territorial power-structure was manifest in the largely ignored call for Rihanna's music video "Man Down" not to be aired on the BET television network (RAPUP, 2011).

This is the frontier of a Western capitalist agenda and stultified narrative tool that societies may never cross. The despair of gendered violence in the female revenge films may definitely become more and more marked in this millennium and the inner psychological conditioning of the vengeful vigilante will persist in a world that remains consistently a pawn to ideologies of division. Indeed, this seductive female-revenge narrative tool and medium of mind control, continues to arouse gender prejudices and misgivings. One is reminded of Rihanna's (2011) rape-victim "Man Down" video. The rape victim's portrayal resembles a realistic situation of victimization and rape survival, but it significantly engages with equally violent retribution in the senses Ebert (2010) implies in his review of *I Spit on Your Grave*.

## A Shamanistic Ontology of Gender: Transformative Potential

In the context of Harris's mythical Furies, the female victim/vigilante 'dies' and yet she 'lives' in these films. She is half-alive, half-dead in the psyche of the spectator. This, however, is a false reality of rape-revenge that is shrouded by the female avenger's costume of immortality. It is a masquerade of revenge that reminds the viewer of the real-life atrocities committed against women solely by men. The costume of female vigilantism therefore excavates a collective memory of female victimhood and patriarchal oppression. The female avenger would seem to be the sine qua non of misandry and psychological persuasion of sanctioned retribution. This hypnotic costume gives her a central place in the blind consumption of female revenge. It is a centrality that is cemented and which deceptively supports a complete psychic institutionalization of vigilante killings.

Such reinforcement of the vengeful fury also casts a structured misconception of justice in the minds of women. Real women may choose to masquerade as agents of the 'Furies' for instance

a victim of domestic violence, another a rape-victim, another a victim of gender discrimination. Such 'hypnotized' women may assume they are above the law and they are the embodiments of the Furies who trade in 'moral equivalency.' Every vengeful act that counters toxic masculinity, in the female revenge film, is a debt repaid for past humiliations and deprivations.

Harris's film perspective is an imaginative yet critical approach that shares a correspondence, in some degree, with Neroni's theoretical constructs of the female-revenge cinema. Harris, and Neroni, different as they are from one another, magnify an awareness, in their association, to the threat that female-revenge cinema poses to vulnerable men and women. Yet there is a significant difference between Harris and Neroni. The female-revenge cinematic plot in Harris's theory and fiction is less submerged by the pathology of sanctioned gendered violence and more by regenerative desire profoundly rooted in a shamanistic therapeutic dimension. In Harris's shamanistic view of gender, the conversion of morally diseased cinematic gendered violence into restorative equilibrium of genders is implicit, in some degree. This is pertinent to the therapeutic shape that lies in Harris's theory, and it is what separates him from Neroni's pessimistic outlook towards a psychic imprisonment by the social cults of gendered violence.

The 'womb of nature' that 'transgresses the boundaries of individual gender', as Harris implies, may provide a subtle fissure within the gender polarization which comes to reside within the dark clutches of the female-revenge cinema. An alteration of gender perception comes into that fissure and as a consequence, generates a challenge within a deceptive pop culture of female vigilantism. Significantly, his 'womb of nature that transgresses individual gender' suspends such violence and offers a response to the fallacy of cinematic female vigilante justice that only resembles real and lawful justice. Therefore, Harris is committed to combining social justice with a shamanic perspective.

The strength and value of Harris's shamanic view of gender may be marginalized by our addiction to a complacent scientific logic of gender binaries. In spite of the fact that the 'womb of nature' resides within a context of primitive cosmic belief and symbol, it nevertheless offers a vision of positive gender relations. It is a far-reaching perspective but inscribes a degree of resistance to the hypnotic apparatus of female-revenge films.

Remarkably, it is this resistance towards the female victim nemesis that can imbue the individual with the militancy of a self-critical and self-confessional sensation. By engaging with such self-critical reflections, individuals can begin to logically judge for themselves the moral deception associated with female revenge films. The arousal of such self-confession and self-judgement is the beginning of a conversion of simulated reality into the real world. It is a movement of vigilantism into restorative justice. One that challenges the spectres of the 'Furies' who reside at the heart of a commanding cinematic force. This is the frontier that must be crossed for every individual who seeks to break with a psyche of social cults of violence. And it is this heightened awareness of such deceptive film mechanisms that can also increase one's capacity to embrace Harris's shamanic approach to gender relations in the modern world. Such acceptance constitutes the first illumination of a conversion of simulated misandrist logic into the cosmic and therapeutic dimension of male and female gender. This transformative nature of Harris's womb of nature offers much scope for future investigations in the correlation between spirituality and social transformation. Therefore, in Harris's terms, the female revenge cinema with its immortalized 'Furies', even if in its potency for terror, paradoxically entertains the possible regeneration of cosmic love ("Apprenticeship to the Furies", 1999a, p. 227).

## Final Insights

Historically, women have experienced male violence in every culture around the globe. These real-life narratives of brutal exploitation are mirrored in the female-revenge cinema that dominated the 21st century. That domination continues to evolve into further explicit

forms of female vigilante films. In order to preserve the stability of moral equivalency, the female-revenge cinema of the 21st century skillfully promotes that violence inflicted on women can only be vanquished by a higher authority of violence.

The deceptive cinematic strategies breed a sensibility of gendered violence and consequently places vulnerable males and females in the clutches of an absolute form of vigilantism. This is a type of simulated reality that ultimately apes therapeutic insight into the apparently real-life crisis of polarized gender relations. The images of sanctioned retribution summons a viewer's active participation and may encourage a pursuit of such behavior in real-life situations. This could also be mentally damaging for societies plagued by gendered violence. In the militarized cinematic world of divisive gender relations, the vengeful "furies" are hallowed. However, their deception of terror can be fissured until self-critical men and women visualize a cosmic sensation of gender. A visualization that releases the transformative capacity of shamanic wisdom to liberate themselves from the hypnotic snare of the female revenge film and its psyche of social cults of violence.

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# "Just Because I'm Different!": The Call for Socio-Cultural Transformation of Covert Bullying Practices in Jamaican High Schools

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## Abstract

With the growth of technology and social media, many forms of bullying in Jamaican high schools have intensified and remained covert, while promoting a climate of socio-cultural differences and relational aggression. The purpose of this article is to use the insights and implications garnered from a covert bullying study to share recommended transformational approaches and strategies that will reduce bullying practices and negative socio-cultural differences within local school communities, while also engendering a culture of equality and social justice.

*Keywords*: bullying, socio-cultural, differences, transformation, social justice, equity

## Introduction

School bullying is a socio-cultural phenomenon that has transcended diverse societies and cultures within both developed and developing communities throughout the years, and has presented persistent mitigation challenges for educators, policy makers and school administrators (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Lipman, 2003; Mishna, 2008; Rigby, 2011). School bullying has also evolved from a focus on physical forms to greater acknowledgement of indirect and relational forms and the negative impact that they have on students. These forms are promulgated by differences among peers that often operate on the premise of physical, cultural, social, and economic factors within school communities (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). The main outcomes are rejection and exclusion that not only compromise students' health, self-esteem and efficacy but also have sustained "left over effects" on victims (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Williams (2008) asserts that exposure to bullying forms such as "negative verbal taunts" and being "demeaned and ridiculed" leads to the self being compromised (p. 228) and, among other things, students can lose their desire for school (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Rigby, 2003). Cyber technology and media systems have also intensified these indirect and relational forms of aggression and widened the sphere of

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bullying within and across school communities. While schools persistently struggle with trying to mitigate this ever-growing problem, the literature shows that many intervention studies have had mediocre success rates and there is need for deeper understanding of the constructs and facilitators of the bullying regime.

This article draws on findings and implications from Hunt-Anderson's (2021) qualitative thesis of covert bullying among adolescent students, to argue that socio-cultural differences that pervade local schools and peer groups facilitate mechanisms that promote a culture of bullying practices within these learning communities. However, the term covert bullying must first be clarified. The original definition that guided the study was developed by Cross et al. (2009) who define covert bullying as:

> any form of aggressive behaviour that is repeated, intended to cause harm and characterised by an imbalance of power, and is "hidden", out of sight of, or unacknowledged by adults. Covert bullying includes behaviours linked to social aggression, relational aggression or indirect aggression including bullying by means of technology where the bullying behaviour is either unwitnessed, or not addressed, by an adult. (Cross et al., 2009, p. 22).

Further, based on the findings in Hunt-Anderson's (2021) study, covert bullying can also be defined as bullying that people do not pay attention to or that is insufficiently addressed by adults or the status quo. Bullying in this context may involve any persistent mix of offences or form of aggression (physical, social, psychological), with or without intention towards another that elicits negative emotions (e.g., "feeling bad", "feeling sad") and negative outcomes — more commonly low self-esteem and anxiety.

The main purpose of this article is to use the insights and implications garnered from the study's findings and theoretical underpinnings to provide a framework of recommendations and transformational strategies to not only curb the practices of bullying and socio-cultural differences among youth; but also, engender a culture of equality and social justice in Jamaican school communities.

## Background and Rationale

### The Jamaican Context and Culture

Caribbean societies such as Jamaica are entrenched in a history of plantocracy and colonialism that have established cultural divisions and differences attached to symbols and norms of money, socio-economic status (SES), race and colour (Chevannes, 2006; Miller, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). These historic-sociocultural systems are further encrusted by popular local sub-cultures and the dynamic modern society, and promulgated through homes, schools, and communities.

Dancehall for instance, plays a central role in establishing our national identity (Research for Development, 2011). According to Stanley Niaah (Research for Development, 2011), dancehall is an amalgamation of plantocracy and post-colonial cultures, heightened by the dynamic themes that modern societal cultures and music impose. These include themes related to male dominance, gendered norms, sexual promiscuity, and violence that appeal to the youth (Hope, 2006a, 2006b). The dancehall culture is also embellished with dance hype creators, music promoters, entertainers, and other members of the industry who are either idolized or become role models for young people (Hope, 2006a).

Heavy engagement in social media and video viewing is another practice that resonates with youngsters and adolescents across all echelons of local and larger societies. These media platforms provide shared communal social spaces for establishing autonomy and adopting new and hype trends and cultures related to sex, fashion, and gaining in-group status on the social scene (Forbes, 2010). Nonetheless, Forbes (2010) contends that the intervention of adults, especially parents and family, can provide significant mediation in how youngsters make meaning of messages on social media – including their orientations to sex and sexuality.

### The Jamaican School System

Jamaica's Ministry of Education (MOE) has persevered in its efforts to provide greater educational support systems and national

assessments to meet the international mandate for children's right to access equality of educational opportunity for all (UNESCO, 2007). This has resulted in greater numbers of students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds matriculating into average and higher performing high schools. Average and higher performing high schools are determined based on students' performances in national school-based assessments. Concurrently, bullying-related school violence continues to rise despite the MOE's implementation of anti-violence policies and programs (Soyibo & Lee, 2000; UNESCO, 2007). Hence, the need for Jamaica's educational system to protect its children from "bullyism" (Hunt-Anderson (2021; Thomas, 2010); which in part calls for a cultural makeover that addresses teacher reform and the status quo (Thompson, 2009). To this end, Thompson (2009) proposes a highly responsive customer/student-oriented culture and climate that will prioritize students' concerns; address indiscipline with both concern and respect for students; and is inclined towards listening rather than being listened to, in order to effect quality leadership whilst nurturing relations with students. Additionally, teachers should adopt a sense of commitment towards action that will promote positive change.

The main source of inspiration for the study of covert bullying among local high school students was the many bullying reports from children in Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) circle of family and friends in Jamaica. While social media reports of bullying incidents were increasing, the literature revealed very few topical studies on bullying focussed on covert bullying or adolescent narratives. Hence the need for this study.

The purpose of the study reported in this article was to explore the covert bullying experiences of adolescents attending different types of Jamaican high schools. The study also aimed to give students, especially the marginalized, opportunities to have a voice by sharing their own perspectives; and to provide advocacy for students' "rights to safety, social justice and quality education" (UNESCO, 2007, p. 4). The main question used to guide the study was:

How do students describe their experiences of bullying in Jamaican high schools?

## Literature Review

### The Nature and Impact of "Difference"

Phoenix (1998) defines difference as anything that sets a student apart from their peers, and students who appear different to others are often predisposed to being bullied. Connotations of difference are often expressed in students' victimization repertoires in bullying studies (e.g., Khosropour & Walsh, 2001). For instance, various combinations of race or ethnicity; physical size (height or weight); clothing; exceptionality; special education needs; smartness/academic prowess; sexual preference (real or perceived); accent; religious affiliation or moral stance, may communicate being different. Several of these factors were exposited in Williams' (2008) survey of college freshmen's K-12 experiences in Virginia, and Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) studies of bullying among high school students in Jamaica. Hunt-Anderson's (2021) study elaborates that differences are often constructs of the historic-sociocultural and modern symbols and norms adopted from Jamaican society. This position is supported by Miller et al. (2013) and other researchers in various ways (see Horton, 2011; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Kruger, 2011; Phoenix, 1998; Reid et al., 2004; Ter*ä*sahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Olweus's (1996) position is, however, that bullying is the outcome of individual pathologies and contextual factors such as a bully's need for dominance and power, the victim's response patterns, and parenting styles. Olweus (2003) does not necessarily attribute bullying to factors such as class size, academic prowess, or externals such as overweight, red-hair, glasses, accent, dress code, or even low self-esteem or insecurity.

Ter*ä*sahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) findings provide evidence that bullying repertoires are the outcomes of social discourses and relations that are espoused in the larger societal culture and manifested in the classroom. Furthermore,

within the confines of a diverse, pluralized school community, historic-sociocultural differences are intensified (Horton, 2011) while they serve adolescents' needs to establish a sense of self-identity, popularity, and place (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Local researcher, M. G. Smith describes post-independence Jamaica as a plural society that has cultivated many, deep "divisions and differences" (as cited in Sherlock and Bennett, 1998, p. 390). Similarly, Chevannes (2006) supports the unchanging nature of our compromised social relations. Consequently, historic, socio-cultural differences also dictate the quality of teacher and peer behaviours that manifest in power relations (Horton, 2011; Phoenix, 1998) and outcomes of rejection or acceptance and inclusion or exclusion (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Teräsahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) interviews with 74 Finnish students revealed that bullying repertoires of "odd" and "deserving" victims (p. 146) that are construed as "unproblematic and justified" (p. 134) may be underestimated. Teräsahjo and Salmivalli (p. 153) also report that bullied victims are often problematized as deviants; being "different" or "odd" and "guided by demands for conformity". As such, subsequent manifestations are either open or more subtle forms of hostility that do not coincide with the anti-bullying attitudes articulated in surveys and other research.

The impact of covert forms of bullying on children includes, but is not limited to, low self-esteem; anxiety; depression; fear of school; suicidal ideation; and issues with trust, anger, and social relations, among other things (Cross et al., 2009; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Thompson, 2009). Researchers (e.g., Cross et al., 2009; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Williams, 2008) also accentuate the underestimation of covertly deemed, bullying behaviours that are often normalized, and/or go unnoticed by adults or the status quo. Many of these negative behaviours are underlined by socio-cultural and physical differences among students (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). They may in effect be precursors that incite larger forms of violence in school and the society at large (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Williams, 2008). Educators are therefore challenged to ensure students' rights to safety and a nurturing learning environment (Cross et al., 2009; Dunne et al., 2010; Spears et al., 2008; Williams, 2008).

## Intervention and Prevention

Baldry and Farringdon (2000) suggest that intervention efforts to mitigate bullying in schools warrant more evidence-based research for success. Possible explanations for this relate to the difficulty in detecting quiet forms of intimidation and exclusion; and subsequent effects of these forms being underestimated, exacerbated by the passive nature of victims' responses, and lack of teacher sensitivity to and cognizance of its nature and adverse impact (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

Ttofi et al. (2008) conducted meta-analyses of 59 evaluation reports of 30 intervention programs in 25 developed countries. The results revealed that school-based programs in experimental schools resulted in bullying reduction rates of 17–23%. The meta-analyses showed that anti-bullying programs with older children and small groups that have been more effective often involve "parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences, information for parents, classroom rules, classroom management, and videos" (p. 6). Of these, the most successful programs have been those that adopt Olweus' approach (Ttofi et al., 2008). As such, Olweus (2003) places great importance on the individual, peer support, and school context, and reports up to 50% reduction in bullying-related activities. However, despite limited research, other researchers emphasize the need for greater focus on addressing the peer group processes, power tiers, and dynamics that facilitate bullying (see Salmivalli, 2010; Craig & Pepler, 1995, 2003; Baldry & Farringdon, 2000; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker, 2023). This includes, among other strategies, intercepting the power-seeking status of group leaders who incite bullying; and providing the necessary peer mediation and support, especially from trained bystanders. (Bullock, 2002; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Salmivalli, 2010). Cowie et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study involving 34 teachers, 413 students (13–16

years old), and 80 peer supporters showed that peer support systems are very effective, despite any macho gender-related issues that might arise (Smith & Brain, 2000). Strategies may also include "befriending, conflict resolution, counselling-based schemes" according to Smith and Brain (2000, p. 6). Dunne et al. (2010) and Hunt-Anderson (2021) elaborate that, although peer friendships and support may curtail bullying practices, the negative emotional impact on bullying targets may be sustained, particularly for girls.

In addition to intervention programs, prevention is another approach that Olweus (2003) advocates. Olweus and Limber's (2010) longitudinal prevention studies conducted across 42 schools between 1983 and 1985 and repeated in another 30 schools between 1997 and 1998, reported reductions of 21–50% in antisocial and bullying behaviours. Contrarily, the review of literature carried out by Swearer et al. (2010) suggests that bullying prevention programs have had little success in mitigating the bullying impact in schools.

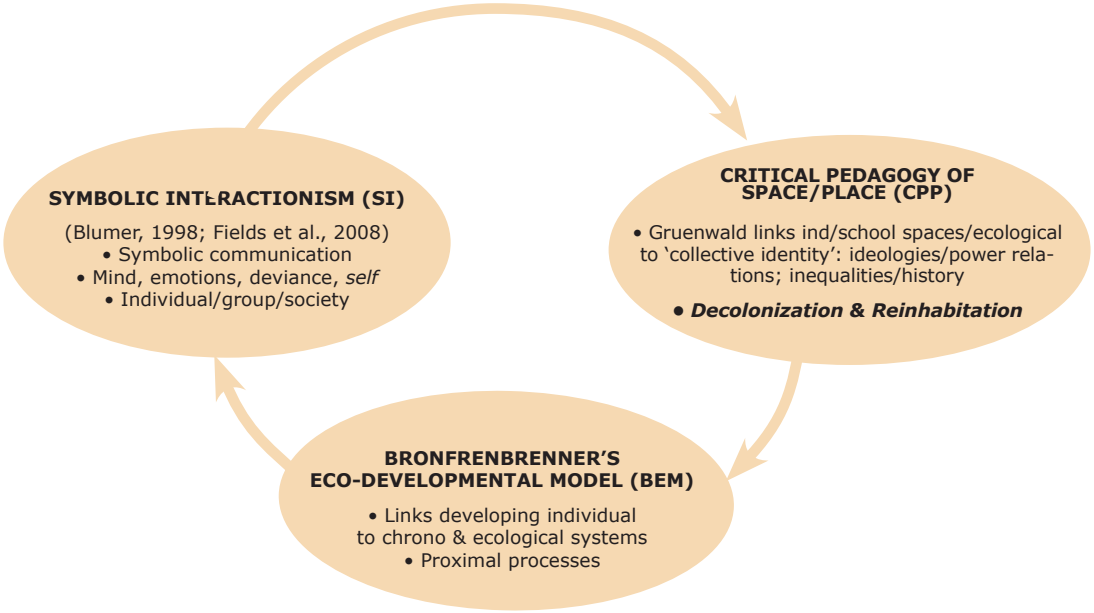
Although intervention and prevention methods have no doubt had some levels of success in reducing the bullying impact in schools across the globe, the literature highlights that the more preferred approach to bullying reduction in schools is a whole-school (ecological) intervention program. This type of anti-bullying program incorporates all the ecological factors into consideration, including the individual, peers, family, school, and community — although programs may have different emphases (Bullock 2002; Swearer et al., 2010; Kruger, 2011). For instance, Swearer et al. (2010) stipulate the need to pay attention to methodological approaches in actioning the program, while Bullock (2002) accentuates the need for special focus on the individual and classroom, and engaging children in the development of explicit anti-bullying policies and strategies. Bullock (2002) suggests anti-bullying strategies that include mentoring, mediation exercises, role play exercise "buddy" systems (p. 3) and counselling that would lend support while nurturing children's self-esteem and efficacy. Smith and Brain (2000) further highlight mitigation approaches that call for non-punitive bullying sanctions (e.g., the No Blame and Pikas models); teacher training at both pre-service and in-service levels; training of interpersonal skills to enhance the general school climate and ethos; and the involvement of parents, teachers, and school boards in helping to develop anti-bullying initiatives and policies.

Several countries have also taken the holistic or whole-school approach to the national level to ensure greater access to resources and support systems that will aid the change process (McGuckin & Minton, 2013; Rigby, 2011; Smith & Brain, 2000). As an example, McGuckin & Minton (2013) share a holistic program that incorporates Bronfenbrenner's ecological developmental model (BEM) into the structural model of Bildung-Psychology (Spiel et al., 2008). The holistic program addresses five areas of functionality — research (program design); instruction/training (train the trainers, trainers train teachers & parents, teachers train students); assessment (ongoing evaluation of program); pastoral care; and professional development (all within the organization/ system). Simultaneously, the program also takes into consideration the developmental stages of the students. This is guided by both Erik Erikson and Bronfenbrenner's models. Bronfenbrenner sets out ecological factors that impose on the child's development at all levels of the society — micro, meso, eco, and macro; and Erik Erikson proposes 8 stages of human development. These are basic trust vs. basic mistrust (infancy); autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddlerhood); initiative vs. guilt (early childhood); industry vs. inferiority (middle childhood); identity vs. role confusion (adolescence); intimacy vs. isolation (early adulthood); generativity vs. stagnation (middle adulthood); and ego integrity vs. despair (late adulthood) (McGuckin & Minton, 2013, pp. 7-8). The synthesized program was piloted by Spiel et al. (2008) in 42 schools in Ireland from 1998–2000; and a subsequent bully-victim survey that showed a significant reduction of 50–69% in bullying activity.

## The Theoretical Framework

**Figure 1**

*The Theoretical Framework adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)*




In order for all aspects of bullying and its appendaged differences to be examined and adequately addressed, a tri-model theoretical framework (see Figure 1) was incorporated — Symbolic Interactionism (SI), Critical Pedagogy of Place (CPP), and Bronfenbrenner's eco-developmental model (BEM).

Bullying should be examined as a psycho-social problem that operates within a historical and sociocultural framework of social forces (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021; Martocci, 2015) or aggressive mechanisms such as gossip, cruel teasing, rejection, social exclusion, stereotyping, personal exposure, sexual aggression and competition. These mechanisms attach symbolic labels and norms that convey non-conformity and difference, and control emotions of shame and humiliation in others. Communication and language therefore play a large role in the conveyance of norms; beliefs and behaviour systems; power and popularity motives; and the establishment of both unity and divisions (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Martocci, 2015). In accordance, the SI purports that reality is actively created through language and symbols that resonate with one's emotions, sense of identity and the self (Fields et al., 2006; Blumer, 1986). SI also speaks to the social, symbolic interactions, and meaning-making of both individual and group (collective) behaviours that underline deviance and social inequality (Mazzotta & Myers, 2008). Noteworthy however, is that "meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

The CPP theory stipulates that community or school spaces are adapted structures of the overarching ecological and historical institutions, symbols, and norms of society that create situations of difference, social inclusion, and exclusion (Gruenewald, 2003). Further, the BEM "provides a conceptual framework to investigate the combined impacts of social contexts and influences on [adolescents] behavioural development" (Swearer et al., 2010, p. 42). BEM articulates 5 sub-systems in society — the micro,

meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems that interact with each other over time to influence behaviours and changes in the developing individual [adolescent] (e.g., technology). The microsystem constitutes close connections to the individual such as family, school peers, and teachers. The quality of proximal processes within this layer (e.g., teachers' behaviours) therefore play an impactful role in influencing the individual's emotions, meaning-making, and behaviours. The mesosystem encompasses the cross linkages in the adolescent's microsystem that are directly influential—for instance, decision-making between teachers and parents; while the exo-system involves occurrences that have indirect influence on the adolescent. For instance, a parent's change in job stressors or divorce could indirectly influence their child's moods or behaviours. Finally, the macrosystem refers to the larger societal systems and cultural institutions that impose on the adolescent's microsystem, such as national assessments that might impose extra stressors on the child and manifest in their behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40).

## Methodology

In conducting this study, all ethical protocols designated by the affiliate university were adhered to in the data collection process. This included participants' informed permission and anonymity to ensure their protection, and confidentiality. The approach was qualitative with a case study design (Yin, 2009) underlined by the Transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2012). This paradigm alludes to multiple realities in the construction of knowledge and promotes an agenda of social justice and equality within community settings (Mertens, 2012). It further emphasizes cultural and contextual sensitivity to the community being studied; and by extension, the interactive process between the participant and researcher and the nature of the problem. Hence, varied or combined research approaches (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) may be used. Qualitative case studies imbued with multiple research methods—student interviews, group discussions, informal conversations and observations, and doodling — (defined as free expressions on paper in Hunt-Anderson and Shannon-Baker, 2023) were both suitable and justified for this study because these methods facilitated the voice of marginalized students in school communities; the covert and culturally-sensitive nature of this form of bullying; and trustworthiness of findings (Yin, 2009). Student narratives also helped to fill a gap in bullying literature. The methodological approach also underlines Mertens' (2020) transformational agenda, which stipulates that prior to any effective intervention, the researcher must first strive "to contribute to better understandings of what is needed in communities and in the use of data" (p. 24).

### Participants

The main participants in this study were a diverse group of 27 students identified across 9 traditional and private schools within Jamaican urban high schools, and representing different socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. This level of diversity allowed for fairness and equality of voice represented in the data collection process. Participants were identified through convenience sampling, their willingness to join the study, and signed informed assent and consent from parents. The 27 male and female students were organized into four case studies according to their school type. Except for the private school case, the other three case studies were organized into low-performing (LP), average-performing (AP), and high-performing (HP) schools, established by the outcomes of the then local General School-based Assessment Tests (GSAT).

Three professional adolescent counsellors or experts, having no direct affiliation with the school system or the student participants in this study, also participated in semi-structured interviews. These were conducted subsequent to the student interviews and focus group sessions. This additional layer of expert adult data provided advocacy for participant students' voices.

## Qualitative Data Collection and Analyses

Qualitative data collection and analyses used a grounded theory approach. Student data were gathered through open-ended individual interviews, focused group discussions, doodling, informal observations conducted during interview sessions, and informal observations and conversations carried out in student participants' schools. Student participants, with the exception of three students, were not interviewed in their schools. Participants were given the choice of interview venues (e.g., YMCA, my home, student's home), places where they might feel safe and comfortable, and avoid intimidation from teachers or other students. Before interviews, students were adequately informed about the researcher's role and the purpose of the study, including their right to confidentiality and withdrawal at any time during the interview or group discussion. Permission was also garnered from each participant before recording the interview. Interviews were conducted with great sensitivity to the subject of bullying. Transcripts were later sent to each participant for member checking.

Student transcripts provided the main source of data and analyses. Using a thematic analysis approach, the transcripts were coded based on the research questions, but also allowed for open coding. Codes were organized into categories aided by NVivo software and developed into broader themes through triangulation of the data. Data triangulation was achieved by converging students' transcripts with student doodles and researcher field notes and memos gathered in informal conversations and observations. This process helped with interpreting the data, making inferences, and validating the findings.

Experts' transcripts were also analyzed and then compared with the students' themes and findings. This extra step in the research design provided triangulation of findings (Finlay, 2006) across different stakeholders that enhanced the credibility of student narratives and enriched the findings (Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

## Findings

The main question that guided the study was: *How do students describe their experiences of bullying in their schools?* The qualitative findings were organized around 6 sub-questions that supported the main question. These questions and the 4 main themes that evolved from the data analysis—Bullying Situations, Profiles and Explanations, Bullying Impact, and Coping and Mitigation (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021) — are addressed below. Given the confines of this article, only key findings are highlighted here. More detailed findings may be found in Hunt-Anderson (2017). In the following excerpts, several abbreviations are used. These include, Gr(grade) level; Co-ed (coeducational school); GP/AP (good/average performing school); HP (high performing school); LP (low performing school); HS (focus group includes a mix of students of upper middle & high socioeconomic backgrounds); LS (focus group includes students of working class & low socioeconomic backgrounds).

### *What is the nature of bullying and how is it facilitated based on students' experiences?*

**Bullying Situations.** Bullying is largely perceived as a normal cultural practice or as joking, exacerbated by the sensitive nature of developing adolescents seeking self-affirmation; and the insensitivities of teachers and the administration in school communities. See the extracts below adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017 & 2021).

Minnie (HP, Gr. 13) a tall, lean figure, talking through a perpetual smile with braces, voiced:

> I personally, to me, it's bullying if that person seriously has a problem with it because, I don't know, I can't think of it as bullying**...** Wingz expounded while the others turned to listen, "It's a common thing, like a joke! I don't think it would be seen as bullying; it would be more like you personally have an issue with it… it's more a self-type of thing. You [the target] pull yourself down even if the person had no intention of doing it. They [the aggressor] are doing it out of just the way of the culture…

(Extract from Minnie, Peppa, Wingz, in HS group discussion).

Kayla (GP/Coed & HP, Gr. 9) participated in both interview and the HS group discussion. She changed schools from GP to HP because of constant jeering from peers that targeted her because of her SES and skin tone. She posited that:

> Yeah, people don't know that it hurts and people just don't know that they are doing it…so if they knew how people felt that it was actually this big of a problem…Then maybe they would realize, you know, I need to stop…
>
> (Kayla in extract of HS group discussion)

Bullying situations are facilitated by the popular in-group peer structures (both on the ground and virtually) in school communities. Tamara (AP/Girls, Gr. 10), shares her thoughts on sexual coercion:

> With the promoter guys nowadays promoting parties and so forth, they have a really wide group… sometimes girls find themselves wanting to be popular and probably have to have sex with one or more of the guys into the group to become a part of that group. Yes, so they want to be popular.
>
> If you don't do it, you have to go stay by yourself. You're an outsider and people will look at you different, the new girl.
>
> (Extract from Tamara's interview)

The in-groups adopt various historic, socio-cultural, and modern symbols and norms from the larger society to establish popularity and power; and, determine differences for inclusion and rejection among peers. In narratives, Silas (Gr. 12) expressed strongly that, "the main reason people get bullied is from differences". Difference is defined by non-conformity to societal symbols and norms related to money, social class, colour, race/ethnicity, gendered norms, appearance, residential location, among other things.

Sariana (GP/Coed, Gr. 10) shared, "For me, at my school, colour means class… It goes together. Once you have colour, you have class!"

Insensitivities and discrimination displayed by teachers reinforce the bullying regime in schools. Wingz (2AP & PS) changed schools because of SES (socio-economic status), bullying from school peers, teachers, and the administration. She claimed that:

> They all thought I thought I was better than everybody, even the teachers. Teachers would make it seem like, if I would try and answer a question, like even if it's right, they would look at me and be like, "okay let's give somebody else a chance", even if it's the first time I'm saying something, or if it's wrong they would make a big deal out of it and say like people like you have money, you don't need to be in school cause your parents will help you out and, it got to the point where even the Dean started behaving like that towards me… I was the only student who would get called out.
>
> (Extract from Wingz in HS group discussion)

Wingz shared her experience of the group dynamic and being *different* in her school:

> I think it was like a collective thing just because I was different and it was obvious, so different. I'm not sure if they felt threatened by an outsider so they were uncomfortable by somebody who wasn't like them around them, but they also made sure that I was feeling uncomfortable as well… I was just different in colour, they were more dark, I was considered upper class and they were considered lower class and they always used to, first it just started with like calling me out like "white rich girl" and stuff like that, and then as I got older and tried to ignore it's more like, they'd do more things like pull me around or like girls who were selling stuff in school, which they were not allowed to, they would always come to me and just bother me until I buy something from them. It was just things like that continuously.
>
> (Extract from Wingz's interview, Girls AP & PS)

## How do students describe a bully and victim?

## Why do students bully each other?

**Profiles and Explanations.** The findings establish that in Jamaican schools, students engage in bullying mainly as a way of gaining popularity and status; defining the self; and

asserting leadership, power, and control among peers. There is no stereotype for victims or targets of bullying. Even well-adjusted students may become targets of bullying, as long as there is some perception of difference or non-conformity. Sariana explains sexual coercion and the repercussions of non-conformity:

> He asked her if he can get sexual favours from her, and he said it raw. That's what he said on Whats App. And then she's like, "Hell no! That's not going to happen. You know what, come offa ma [off of my] What's App". Then he said it openly 'bout [about] how him only waan (about how he only wants to) talk to pretty girls, he was bashing her, 'bout how him only waan (about how he only wants to) talk to light skinned girls and the girl I'm talking about is dark skinned. She has nice dark skin, and he only wants to talk to skinny girls and the girl I'm talking about is very curvy. And then he told his friends what's happening and they started plastering her as well, but he switched it, he said that she was begging him sexual favors and him turn har [he turned her] down, say him doh [he said he doesn't] want no nasty gyal [girl] a touch him [touching him] or whatever.
>
> (Extract from Sariana in LS group discussion, February 2014)

Students' narratives established connections between the historical and socio-cultural symbols and norms to the larger society. See Adonai's (Gr. 11) doodle below in Figure 2. Several students described bullies as leaders. Adonai perceived bullying as a natural cultural tool for overcoming fear and establishing one's authority.

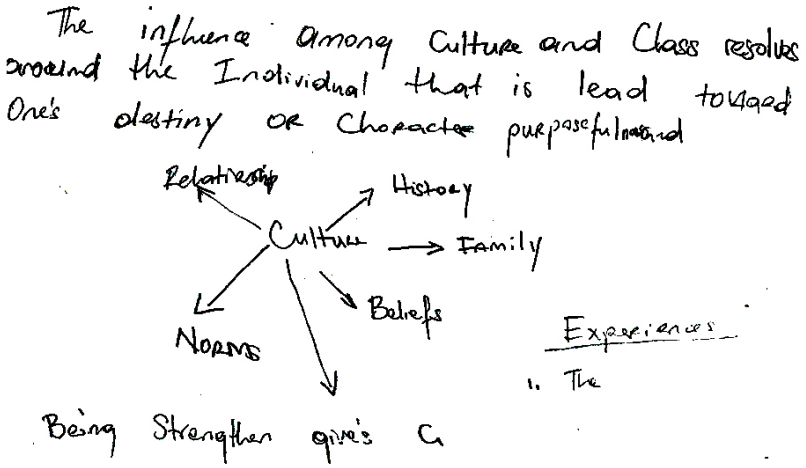
Adonai (GP, Grade 11) depicts culture as the central theme and its connections to history and other elements within the society (Adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017 & 2021); Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker, 2023)

Sariana further asserts the connections between bullying and the influence of the society's historical and socio-cultural imperatives. In an interview with Tiana and her sister, Sariana explains below,

> What I see and based on what my friends see because we talk about it a lot. As a literature and history student… I think that as much as it might sound crazy, we are travelling back from slavery days. If you think about the image of the planter over the slave and the colour prejudice at that time, the racism the fact that you were poor and I was rich because I'm white and you are black. It has travelled. We try to push it out of our country but it has stayed… you can actually feel the hatred coming from the black side to know that this person who just have a different colour is teasing me.
>
> Words are what affect most students, words, cyber bullying, you know always being called a certain thing but here it's not just words. We are formed by our society in this thing we have anger in us. Sometimes it's fighting, hearing the constant fighting in bus park over simple things. We are very aggressive. (Extracts from Tiana & Sariana's interview).

**Figure 2**

*Adonai's (Gr. 11) doodle. Adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021) & Hunt-Anderson and Shannon-Baker (2023)*



## How are students impacted by covert bullying in their schools?

**Bullying Impact.** Personal exposure on social media, exclusion, and rejection are the most pervasive mechanisms used to connote difference in the bullying paradigm. The findings also showed that students experience low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (among other things), and are subject to even holding grudges as a result of bullying.

> She had low self-esteem…she could do her work and all, but you know, when you're going to high school, your hormones and all of that. An incident happened…teenagers are insensitive bad because they don't think, they pulled up pictures, other pictures that they got off the internet.
>
> (Extract from Sariana in Tiana & Sariana's interview)

## How do students cope with bullying?

## What do students suggest for mitigating bullying in their schools?

**Coping and Mitigation.** Adolescents prefer a sense of autonomy, and lean heavily on friendships and group support to help them cope with personal victimization or bullying at school (rather than family or teachers). However, many friendships are not grounded and may backfire due to non-conformity or cliquing of some kind. An instance of friendship support was conveyed by Peppa (HP, Gr. 10), who shared in group discussion how she relied heavily on her friends in managing students' perception that she was gay.

> I could be in a real slump right now…and they (friends) really helped me with that, saying that…I know you're not, and at the end of the day even if you were anyway, I wouldn't think of you any less you know… but then they (friends) went away so it kind a got bad again, but then it got fine. Like suppose a person didn't decide to be friends with me, I could be in a real slump right now and I could just let it affect me. And I wouldn't have any friends and I wouldn't talk to anybody 'cause I would just think "Oh God. They think I am gay!"
>
> (Extract from Peppa in HS group discussion).

While some participants voiced that bullying is an inevitable part of school life, they also communicated the need for strong peer group support systems, raising awareness and re-education of teachers, and general sensitization of the status quo as important in helping to redefine and control the bullying culture in local schools.

> I think more schools need to have more peer counsellors and better trained peer counsellors; so, somebody who is in the age group who is friends with this person, friends with that person can see what's happening and because I'm…so I'm not going to talk to you from this point of authority where I feel like I'm being spoken down to. I'm gonna speak to you on your level and relate to you and help you to relate, cause I'm your age and I'm around you.
>
> (Extract from Wingz' individual interview).

## Discussion

The key findings from Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) study convey that, somewhat in agreement with Horton (2011) and Thomas (2010), within the diverse and confined school spaces in Jamaica, socio-cultural differences are exacerbated as adolescents strive to realize their sense of identity, popularity, power, and place (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021). In tandem with Horton (2011), culturally bound peer differences complicate the quality of peer relations which are promulgated through the social inequities and injustices assigned by in- and -out peer groups that incorporate post-colonial, popular and modern symbols and codes from the larger society (Horton, 2011; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Kruger, 2011; Phoenix, 1998; Reid et al., 2004; Ter*ä*sahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Aligned with other studies, these historic, socio-cultural symbols and codes are commonly related to SES; race; colour (Miller, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Sherlock & Bennett, 1998); gender or sexual prowess (Stein, 1995); and religion, appearance, and residential location (Williams, 2008). The group processing of socio-cultural peer differences ultimately results in outcomes of rejection, exclusion, or some form of aggression

(Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021). Hunt-Anderson's findings also support those of Pottinger and Gordon Stair (2009) that the most common and adverse impact on victims are low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression; and fear or disinterest in school (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021; Rigby, 2003). Student narratives also underline the connections between bullying and the local context of systemic or ecological systems outlined in Bronfenbrenner's eco-developmental model (BEM). The implications from these findings clearly show the need for developing a holistic ecological school program (with national support) that is not only sensitized to the psycho-social needs of developing adolescents throughout the high school years, but will simultaneously mediate the bullying culture through the process of decolonization and reculturization (CPP Model) of symbols and norms (SI) and transformation of the school state.

## Recommendations

### Promoting Anti-Bullying Socio-Cultural Transformation

Guided by the findings in the qualitative narratives in Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021), Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker (2023), and varied contexts of Jamaican schools, the implications and recommendations highlighted below propose a combined multi-faceted framework of possible strategies, policies, and programs to re-culturize and mitigate the covert bullying regime in local high school communities. The implications also propose ways of enhancing the self-esteem and efficacy requirements of developing adolescents as individuals while also enacting a transformational agenda to promote equality, social justice, and positive cultural change in these school communities. The recommendations here reflect the voice of students, including those who felt victimized as observers.

Guided by the theoretical framework, the implications based on the BEM also focus attention on the physical and psycho-social needs of the developing adolescent and mediation within the interactive layers of the ecological systems (meso, exo, macro, and chrono), with stakeholders that influence adolescents during their tenure of high school. Simultaneously, the implications incorporate the CPP theory that focuses on the reculturization and re-colonization of the school context and spaces (i.e., peer groups, classrooms, and administration) that influence behaviours and inter-relations. The overarching SI theory also provides considerations related to the individual adolescent's emotions and behaviours as well as group structures, school culture, and curriculum. Findings with implications and recommendations are summarized in Table 1.

### Macro Level

**National Support Systems and Anti-bullying Campaigns**. The larger society and its historical and sociocultural factors and influences are a prominent part of the findings. The findings showed that bullying is perceived as a cultural norm; and, to a lesser extent as just "joking", despite its negative impact on victims. The theme, "Bullying situations in schools" is underpinned by peer groups' adaptation of the overarching society's historic socio-cultural and popular symbols, norms and values that prescribe differences among themselves. The consequence is acceptance or non-acceptance of others. These discriminating symbols and values are commonly related to money, social class, hair type, hair length, skin tone, residential location, morality, physical appearance, and genderization. Genderization was pervasive in the study and refers to what is perceived as acceptable male and female identities and their roles thereof. This includes expectations of female sexual conformity and male sexual prowess/machoism. Sexual orientations that challenge those normed identities and behaviours in any way are therefore deemed non-conforming and unacceptable (e.g., gay, homosexuality, refusal to comply) and warrant rejection, exclusion, cruel labelling, and sexual aggression.

Since school communities and bullying practices are influenced by the socio-cultural norms, symbols, and values of the larger society, preventative measures and cultural transformational programs are strongly implicated at the national level. These may

## Table 1

*Implications for Socio-Cultural Transformation in Schools*

- Promotes equity, social justice and socio-cultural transformation (Transformational Paradigm/TP)
- Promotes positive self-esteem, efficacy & welfare of developing adolescents
- (Symbolic Interactionism/SI & Bronfenbrenner's Eco-Developmental Model/BEM)
- Re-culturalization & de-colonization of school community spaces & symbols (Critical Pedagogy of Place/CPP & SI)

| **QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**<br>*Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)*<br>**MACRO LEVEL** | **PREVENTION & INTERVENTION** | **CRONO LEVEL** |
|---|---|---|
| Bullying is perceived as a cultural norm and to a lesser extent as just "joking" despite its negative impact.<br><br>Bullying situations in schools are undergirded by students' adaptation of the larger society's historic, socio-cultural and modern symbols, norms and values that dictate "acceptance" or "non-acceptance" of persons.<br><br>Bullying facilitating socio-cultural symbols are tied to money, social class, hair type, hair length, skin tone, residential location, physical appearance, and genderized behaviors and images such as sexual orientation (homosexuality) and female sexual conformity and male sexual prowess/machoism and aggression. | Harness intervention & prevention measures and support systems via the society and government and relevant communities and churches:<br><br>Nationwide anti-bullying campaigns -vocal and visual support bringing public awareness of how bullying is defined and its negative outcomes on targets.<br><br>Promote the national diversity & inclusion motto "Out of many, one people" - government and ministries of education & justice via e.g., billboards, interviews, publications, social media messages.<br><br>Societal-school partnerships to provide socio-emotional support, conflict management training, and resource persons to promote social justice restorative processes (e.g., police force) and spiritual counsel that promote positive value systems and provide regular support (e.g., church support). | **(Crono)**<br>**High School Years**<br>**Developing Adolescent:**<br>**Identity vs Confusion**<br>**(Erik Erikson, BEM)** |
| **ECO & MESO LEVELS** | | **CRONO LEVEL** |
| Student narratives also exposed teacher bullying (e.g., racial bias and discrimination), as well as teacher and administrative neglect and normalization of bullying incidents.<br><br>Students voiced lack of confidence in parental involvement in bullying situations due to lack of sensitization and understanding of the consequences for the victim.<br><br>Students further voiced their lack of confidence in the school administration, school counselors and teachers' ability to handle situations and lack of awareness. They consequently called for greater awareness and training to be implemented in schools. | Focus on teacher/parent/student sensitization via relationship-building & open cross-communication channels with students and their parents/guardians and communities<br>• Teacher-parent-student meetings<br>• Family "get to know" socials<br>• Provide support as needed for parents/ caregivers/family<br>• Sensitize parents/caregivers and community & church leaders/members via bullying awareness seminars<br>• Provide training workshops for parents/ caregivers in development of emotional intelligence and affective skills<br><br>Sensitize the written & hidden curriculum, & classroom environs and practices with positive socio-cultural symbols and practices tied to respect, inclusion and diversity that will help to re-culturize the school community.<br><br>Install school-wide support through audible no-tolerance declarations and visible and focused awareness banners. | **(Chrono)**<br>**High School Years**<br>**Developing Adolescent:**<br>**Identity vs Confusion**<br>**(Erik Erikson, BEM)** |

**Table 1 continued**

| **QUALITATIVE FINDINGS** *Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)* | **PREVENTION & INTERVENTION** | |
|---|---|---|
| **MICRO LEVEL** | | **CRONO LEVEL** |
| Students perceive bullying as a cultural norm/practice adapted from the larger society and to a lesser extent as just "joking". | Students must be fully engaged in information seminars and discussions and planning that aid the process of redefining bullying and its constructs before moving forward. | |
| The victimized "left over effect" from bullying experiences left unaddressed in students' previous schools further intensifies the negative outcomes on victims. | New students and transitioning students into the school should be subject to psycho-social needs assessments to identify areas for support and counselling. | |
| The most prevailing negative outcomes of bullying among adolescents are low self-esteem and struggles with depression and "feeling bad" about themselves. These are also associated with feelings of anxiety and fear of school, anger, and holding grudges. | Address issues related to social injustices and inequities via strategic restorative justice forums involving students and teachers. | |
| To a lesser extent, bystanders are also negatively affected by bullying incidents with peers. | Strengthen adolescent self-efficacy & esteem through psycho-social training programs. | **(Crono) High School Years Developing Adolescent: Identity vs Confusion (Erik Erikson, BEM)** |
| Students' narratives showed that the most common and effective coping mechanisms include peer friendships and strong peer support systems. | Train and install strong trained peer group systems & role models to intercept negative peer groups, lend peer support, and peer counseling. | |
| Student participants voiced the lack of support from the school system and teachers and felt the need for raising awareness among teachers and the school in general. | Instill emotional intelligence seminars/ workshops to sensitize & train (e.g., conflict management) teachers, guidance counselors, & principals. Provide ongoing psychological support for teachers e.g., stress and conflict management. | |
| | Raise awareness & student-led support via discrete (e.g., anonymous support phonelines) & "blatant" systems, clubs, & events (student-led). | |
| | Administer teacher psychometric assessments and ongoing evaluations of teachers from both supervisors and students. | |

involve devising educational policies, programs, events, and movements that raise awareness nationally and mobilize positive changes throughout the educational system and country at large. The literature shows that whole school efforts (e.g., the Bildung-Psychology model) that include national support have had the greatest success (McGuckin & Minton, 2013). National support systems would include, but are not limited to, forming partnerships with the Ministry of Education, child advocacy organizations and groups, anti-violence programs and personnel, and soliciting government aid where necessary. As an example, a multi-pronged information program with different resource personnel disseminating information across multiple sites (e.g., schools, communities, community centres, churches) could be taken to inform students of their rights to safety and the consequences of bullying, especially cyber-bullying.

## Meso Level

Student narratives exposed teacher bullying (e.g., racial bias and discrimination), as well as teacher and administrative neglect and normalization of bullying incidents. Students expressed lack of confidence in the school administration and highlighted the lack of awareness and inability to handle situations displayed by school counsellors and teachers. Students consequently called for greater awareness, sensitivity training, and support systems to be implemented in their schools. Further, students were also insecure about "telling" and involving parents in bullying situations, mainly because of parents' lack of understanding of the after-consequences on the victim. Therefore, incorporating parental programs that sensitize and give parents guidance on how to handle bullying situations involving their children is necessary. Relationship-building

between teachers, students, and their parents is also implicated since lack of trust and confidence are part of students' concerns.

**Relationship-building**. Schools will need to focus on ongoing nurturing cross-exchanges and relationship-building with persons who might have direct influence on the adolescent's life. In addition to regular parent-teacher-student seminars, teacher-teacher consults are important in getting to know a student. Family-oriented "get to know us" school socials also facilitate relaxed interactions between a student's teachers, parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, and close friends. Open lines of positive cross-communication with influential persons in a student's life will engender a sense of support and trust for the developing adolescent. Teachers and counsellors, where necessary, should ensure that parents or caregivers are given access to the support they need. Some school contexts may also require that school leaders form relationships with community and church leaders (meso level) to garner insights about students and obtain adequate support.

**Sensitization and Training.** Sensitization seminars to inform parents, family, caregivers, community leaders, and church leaders about bullying are important. Students should be active participants in developing and delivering these seminars, since narratives explicated that adolescents prefer to solicit the aid of other students of the same age group who they can relate to. Training workshops for parents and caregivers (similar to those for teachers and principals) are important in helping to develop emotional intelligence and affective skills. The Insights into Children's Temperament program/ INSIGHTS (Cook & Lipps, 2020) is instructive. This program focuses on helping adults to identify and understand how to appreciate each child's unique disposition, while nurturing their self-esteem and efficacy and enhancing the parent-child relationship and climate at home. Seminars and workshops will further provide insights into parental needs, to ensure the necessary support, guidance, and training for parents and caregivers. Where possible, parents and caregivers should also be encouraged to meet (without hovering) the friends and key persons in their children's lives outside of the home, such as church or youth mentors, community leaders or members, and neighbours.

## Eco Level

**Sensitization, Training, and Relationship-building**. Indirect influences such as changes in an adolescent's home life (e.g., parental separation, death of a loved one, change of home, or church baptism) or school life (exam, change of classroom, or position in class) may also affect their emotional state and functionality. Relationship-building with students, parents, and caregivers will help to uncover situations and gain insight into adolescents' situations so that support or understanding may be actively given. Teachers will therefore need to be cognizant of students' attitudes and behaviours. Teacher sensitization and training in adolescent development will help in this regard.

## Micro Level

All key influential persons within the adolescent's space must be properly informed and trained where necessary (such as family, school peers, and teachers). The quality of proximal processes at this level (e.g., mentors, teachers' behaviours) plays an important role in influencing the individual's emotions, meaning-making, and behaviours.

**Re-defining Bullying and Raising Awareness.** Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) findings showed that covert bullying forms are normal cultural practices despite students' awareness of the negative impact. For instance, students in the study perceived bullying as a cultural prosocial tool derived from the larger society for gaining leadership, popularity, and power. Participants suggested programs to raise awareness and sensitize teachers. However, Williams (2008, p. 7) stipulates that the problem must first, "be defined and understood in the same way by all parties" for it to be addressed effectively. This suggests that the sociocultural symbols, norms, and features of covert and normalized bullying and its impact will need to be discussed and clarified by students,

teachers, administrators, and parents so as to reach common understandings. This re-defining process will require interactive seminars and discussions that include the voice of students who have been exposed as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

**Teacher Sensitization and Training.** The findings illuminated teachers' and administrators' displays of insensitivity, along with different forms of bullying accommodation, discrimination, and aggression towards students in the classroom. Students also expressed a general lack of confidence in their teachers, guidance counsellors, and their school. Student participants suggested training teachers to sensitize and guide them in how to adequately address bullying situations. Workshops, monitoring, and support systems for teachers would need to be incorporated at school level. Training workshops and seminars should focus on raising awareness of the covert bullying dynamics and its impact on victims, in relation to both teacher and peer bullying (definition, constructs, displays, and impact on students). This is in keeping with the finding that teachers and students have normalized many forms of bullying as cultural practices and are sensitive to the adverse, long-term psychological impact that these forms may have on victims. Workshops, for instance, would also need to sensitize teachers about what is regarded as bias and discrimination (which is demeaning and inappropriate in a classroom setting), and further establish new positive inclusive practices, norms, and values. Additionally, pre-service teacher education should incorporate bullying and mitigation training.

The implications from student narratives are also that teachers should have regular psychometric evaluations to determine their attitudes and beliefs. The findings also suggest that teachers and administrators should be subject to regular student evaluation. This would help to detect teachers' tendencies towards insensitivity, discrimination, or aggression. Furthermore, in order to enhance and sustain the improvements made through the in-service programs, psychometric evaluations could be a pre-requisite for acceptance to teacher training programs.

Improving the teaching atmosphere and promoting transformation requires ongoing training focussed on building teachers' emotional intelligence, affective skills, and conflict management skills. The emotional and affective aspects include cultivating strong moral, psychological, and social codes such as extending kindness, compassion, listening, respect, tolerance and fairness in teachers' behaviours and attitudes; and promoting a sense of inclusion and national unity in support of Jamaica's motto, "Out of many, one people". Student narratives strongly imply that high school teachers should be sensitized to the adolescent stages of development to fully appreciate the physical, and psycho-social changes that they experience.

**Individual Psychosocial Support**. Hunt-Anderson's findings (2017, 2021) revealed that anyone is susceptible to bullying and victimization as long as, difference or non-conformity is perceived in peer groups and interactions. There is no specific victim profile, although resilience is a factor in helping victims to cope. Low self-esteem, anxiety and depression are the most common outcomes of victimization, despite resilience. The findings also revealed that adolescents' stage of development (identity vs confusion, based on Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development) drives their need for self-affirmation and popularity (SI) and subsequent affiliation with popularized leaders and peer groups that engage in bullying activities. In addition, despite student victims' resilience, the "left over effect" derived from former, unresolved bullying incidents, increases sensitivity to similar subsequent incidents; exacerbated by lack of trust in teachers and the status quo (Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

Psychological needs assessments for students should therefore be an important part of matriculation into high schools, followed by regular evaluations throughout the high school years. Great attention needs to be paid to ensure that marginalized individuals are given the necessary professional support and counselling needed. Simultaneously, psychological experts, trained teachers and counsellors should run workshops to train and develop students'

psychosocial skills in extending support for their peers and handling bullying situations and their impact.

On the other hand, teachers and parents (Meso level) will also need to be sensitized and trained to develop their emotional intelligence and affective skills (e.g., the INSIGHTS program (Cook & Lipps, 2020) is instructive) that ultimately will nurture students' sense of self-esteem and efficacy. These measures will help to enhance the quality of proximal processes and climate at both school and home (Meso Level) (e.g., inculcating trust, caring, listening, and respect).

**Peer Support Systems.** Hunt-Anderson's (2021) findings showed that in local school contexts, peer groups that facilitate bullying mirror a blend of historical, post-colonial, and modern cultures of the larger society. Peer groups inculcate symbols and norms from the larger society to appropriate meaning-making and differences that influence their aggressions and social relations. Williams and Dingwall (2014) and Blumer (1986) propose that, if symbolic structures and symbols among interacting actors can be identified, then the prospect of modification to reconstruct meanings and actions can be examined. Strategies will therefore need to focus on simultaneously dismantling or intercepting negative peer group structures and processes to mediate symbols and norms related to deviance, rejection, exclusion, and genderized norms; while inculcating symbols of acceptance of diversity, tolerance, inclusion, and respect. Students should play a large role in devising and implementing effective strategies to de-colonize (CPP model) these peer groups. Student narratives revealed that strong peer support systems are needed in schools. Students voiced that peer groups in their schools are usually political, untrained, and more image-invested than supportive.

Peer support systems should therefore be subject to a formal democratic process of careful screening and selection, with subsequent on-going training and monitoring in resolving conflict, maintaining peace-keeping, and deploying social justice symbols and norms such as engendering equal voice, acceptance, fairness, inclusion, and respect. The Jamaican Change from Within program would be helpful in this effort. Strong, positive, peer support systems and role models could strategically intercept and mitigate the power of group leaders and group processes (Salmivalli, 2010). Students also suggested that friends and bystanders could be trained to lend support and mediate bullying situations. Positive role models, mentors, and student leaders must also be able to invoke positive symbols for popularity and inclusion, and lead the development of positive socio-cultural trends for other youth.

**School Curricular, Culture, and Climate.** Schools will need to focus on a program of reculturizing and decolonizing the school community, classroom, and climate (based on the CPP model). This would involve, among other things, inculcating positive symbols and behaviours that convey equity and fairness, inclusion, tolerance, and respect. In addition to teachers' and administrators' indiscretions, narratives implicated the general lack of awareness, rigor, and policies to effectively address bullying in schools and impart a culture of trust, support, and security. Support will therefore be necessary through both the written and hidden curricula and culture.

Strong anti-bullying policies should, however, be developed with the input of students and teachers in a handbook that is made available to all staff and students for reference and guidance about what is acceptable. The curriculum of positive norms and values such as respect, listening to others, and inclusion should be conveyed through classroom interactions and teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards students who would normally be targeted as different. The hope is that, by raising awareness and sensitizing and training teachers towards inculcating and conveying positive symbols in their daily classroom operations, the gap in these differences will eventually be minimized.

Given the sensitive nature of bullying and the adolescent stages of development, however, support systems should also be made both strategically subtle and strong/blatant. Subtle systems may give students access to anonymous

hot phone lines that offer discrete emotional outlets and support; while strong support is blatant and visible. Blatant antibullying campaigns may include regular vocalizations of antibullying policies by principals or school leaders in school assemblies, student councils or gatherings; anti-bullying posters signed by students; statements and banners displayed on the school campus; the establishment of diversity and equity clubs; and hosting of school events that promote the same — all designed, organized, and promoted by students to inculcate a climate of diversity and acceptance.

**School Leadership.** No cultural change effort can be mobilized and effective without the blessings and quality leadership of school leaders — principals in particular at this level. Although the ultimate aims may differ, partnering with organisations such as the Jamaican Change from Within (CFW) program can provide insights and support, particularly as it relates to addressing anti-social and violence-related behaviors and the incorporation of restorative justice strategies for conflict resolution (Ferguson, 2019; Ferguson & Chevannes, 2018). The CFW's program also takes a whole school approach that focuses on promoting the positive development of students' self-esteem and nurturing the environment through strong leadership that includes principals and students (Chevannes, 2006). Many of the victimized in this research were high performers despite their low self-esteem and efficacy. This article has adapted the BEM model with a whole-school, ecological approach aimed at mediating the bullying regimen while promoting social justice and transformation within high school communities. The hope is to simultaneously nurture adolescents' sense of place and self-esteem by reculturizing school spaces and environs.

## The Chrono System

For purposes of this study, it is intended that throughout the span of an adolescent's life in high school (Chrono), the systemic socio-cultural strategies instituted across the 4 systems (micro, meso, eco, and macro) will interact with each other and cultivate positive developmental and socio-cultural changes and behaviours in both the individual and school state.

## Conclusion

This article highlighted the findings from a qualitative thesis of covert bullying among Jamaican high school students. Supported by the CPP theory, the findings showed that socio-cultural differences were amplified within diverse school spaces and promoted a culture of bullying practices across various peer group structures. Implications based on the findings and theoretical framework were subsequently used to provide a framework of recommendations for the development of anti-bullying policies and programs to drive the enactment of decolonization and reculturization of school curriculums and spaces. Guided by the BEM and SI model, the recommendations also considered ways of establishing positive symbols and practices at the various ecological levels to forge a greater sense of inclusion, equity, and social justice within school communities while mitigating socio-cultural differences.

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# Mondragon, Humanity at Work

**Ander Etxeberria-Otadui**
Mondragon Corporation

"It has been said that cooperativism is an economic movement that uses the methods of education. This definition can also be modified to affirm that cooperativism is an educational movement that uses the methods of economics." - *José María Arizmendiarrieta*

## Introduction

Mondragon[1] is a corporation made up of 81 cooperatives located in the Basque Country (in the northern of the Spanish State). The Corporation also includes 104 noncooperative subsidiaries abroad that are wholly or partly owned by its member cooperatives and 23 superstructure and support organizations[2]. It works in many different fields: industry, finance, distribution, agri-food, education, research, services, etc. In total, Mondragon employs approximately 70,500 people and has gross revenues of around 11,000 million euros per year.

The corporation's cooperatives are autonomous in that they are members of the Mondragon association of their own free will. The cooperative principle of free membership is applicable to them in that, after meeting certain requirements, they can join or leave the association, although the general understanding at Mondragon is that cooperatives have a greater present and future in solidarity.

## Why Mondragon? Tracing its Beginning

The Mondragon Cooperative Experience began in 1941[3], two years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, when the diocesan priest José María Arizmendiarrieta arrived in the municipality of Arrasate/Mondragón. His view and practices reflected four central ideas: the dignity of the human person, solidarity, education, and work.

Arizmendiarrieta used to say that the human being is more human through education than through birth and that the only patrimony and value that does not tend to devalue itself is that of skills acquisition, training, and formation.

For Arizmendiarrieta, work was a positive expression of the human experience and a means of self-realization. Through work, the person develops his or her skills and, through that process, their full humanity. At the same time, Arizmendiarrieta viewed work as the means to improve society: God made the world, but the world is not finished, people have to collaborate with God in the formation of the world, and work is the way to do this.

[1] https://www.mondragon-corporation.com
[2] Non-production units that provide services to the Corporation.

[3] Based on:
Azurmendi, Joxe. *El hombre cooperativo: pensamiento de Arizmendiarrieta.* Caja Laboral Euskadiko Kutxa, 1984.
Molina, Fernando. *Arizmendiarrieta (1915-1976). Biografia.* Caja Laboral Euskadiko Kutxa, 2005.
Ormaetxea, José María. *Orígenes y claves del cooperativismo de Mondragón.* Caja Laboral Euskadiko Kutxa-Saiolan, 1997.

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Arizmendiarrieta viewed education and work as tools for improving society from the bottom up: change individuals in order to transform society.

Arrasate/Mondragón was socially damaged by the war: quarrels, revenge, and executions were not uncommon. Apart from a small elite, the society was poor and social class boundaries were clearly marked. A common saying in those days was "the engineer's son must be an engineer and the laborer's son a laborer"[4]. Arizmendiarrieta was a practical man: "there is always one more step to be taken"[5] without waiting for the solution to come from outside. He would act by mobilizing youth (initially in cultural, sports and social activities), bringing together the young whose parents had fought on contending sides during the war.

In 1943, due to the lack of opportunities for training that existed in Spain, he promoted the creation of a vocational level school open to all (Escuela Profesional), which was the antecedent of the present-day Mondragon University. There was already a vocational school in the town, but it was very limited in size and was only for the children of those who had been on the side that won the war.

Years of activism and education followed, including daily talks on social issues by Arizmendiarrieta to the people in the vocational school. He also convinced several young people to study Engineering at the university (University of Zaragoza, located in the Northeast of Spain), which, due to lack of resources, they did remotely, while living and working in Arrasate/Mondragón and studying at the Escuela Profesional.

Arizmendiarrieta continued to work on social development and Arrasate/Mondragón improved significantly: there were new educational opportunities and new cultural and sports activities. However, in the conventional companies where people worked, capital interests prevailed. Arizmendiarrieta wanted to humanize companies, for which he undertook a program of awareness-raising. For years he gave conferences in Arrasate/Mondragón and the surrounding municipalities, but none of the companies changed.

In 1956, frustrated by the intransigence of the local corporate leaders, he decided to create a new enterprise with five of the young men who had studied Engineering and who had spent years organizing activities and participating in dialogues with him. This new company, in which the owners were the workers at the same time, was called ULGOR, an acronym based on the surnames of the founders: Usatorre, Larrañaga, Gorroñogoitia, Ormaetxea, and Ortubai.

After they had formed ULGOR they continued to form new cooperatives to improve society. At Mondragon it is understood that there is a real and practical way to achieve this mission: the creation of quality work[6].

## What is Mondragon? Some Main Features[7]

Whereas most global cooperatives are formed by producers of a particular product, Mondragon's cooperatives are worker-owned. In the Mondragon cooperatives, what the members own in common is not a product, as they do in producer cooperatives, but their labor: that is, every member works in the cooperative. In turn, as will be explained later, the new member has to contribute an amount of money.

Until the economic slowdown brought on by the oil price shock of the 1970s, all the cooperative's workers were members. The crisis was intense and Mondragon concluded that it would have to relax this rule to continue its mission. Thus, since the early 1980s, cooperatives have employed temporary non-member workers. Today about 80% of the workers in the industrial cooperatives are members, while 20% are non-members with temporary contracts. The members are the owners of their cooperative; not the government, not the Mondragon Corporation or any other third party. The members alone own their cooperatives.

[4] Molina, Fernando. Arizmendiarrieta (1915-1976). Biografia. Caja Laboral-Euskadiko Kutxa, 2005. p.317.

[5] Azurmendi, Joxe. *El hombre cooperativo: Pensamiento de Arizmendiarrieta*. Caja Laboral Euskadiko Kutxa, 1984. p.575.

[6] Mondragon's mission explains the following: "create wealth and transform the society through entrepreneurial development and job creation, preferably membership-jobs in co-operatives".

[7] Based on: Altuna, Larraitz (coord.). La experiencia cooperativa de Mondragon. Una síntesis general. Lanki, 2008; and Ormaetxea, José María. Personal interview with José María Ormaetxea.

Since the 1980s, all Mondragon workers start with temporary contracts. Prior to the end of the contract, the cooperative decides whether or not to offer the possibility of membership to the worker. It decides according to both the suitability of the worker and the expectation of future work to be performed. If the candidate is not offered membership, the relationship ends when the contract expires. On the other hand, if membership is offered and the candidate accepts, they will have to invest an initial amount of money. In most of Mondragon's cooperatives that initial investment is €18,000, to be paid in over a period of time. The relationship between the initial amount of money, the terms of payment, and the remuneration to be received are set at levels calculated to make membership affordable.

Of the €18,000 initial investment, 20% (€3,600) is considered a non-recoverable investment in the cooperative. The remaining 80% (€14,400) is the individual member's money and is called initial capital.

When the cooperative's accounting year ends, a decision must be made about how to distribute the profits or losses. This decision is made in the General Assembly, which is the meeting of all the members. Normally, when profits are positive, 30% of the net profit is distributed among the workers. Workers with a temporary contract receive it in cash (bank account), while worker-members receive it as an addition to their individual capital account. That is, their capital grows. If there are losses, the General Assembly can decide to reduce the capital of the members to cover the losses. Therefore, the member's capital varies over time. It is capital that can be withdrawn only when the member stops working in the cooperative, which may occur for any of several reasons (retirement, voluntary resignation, death, or in rare cases, expulsion for very serious misconduct). The withdrawal of capital is subject to the conditions set by the Governing Council (a body chosen by the General Assembly from among its members) which are intended to ensure the financial strength of the company.

The General Assembly of the cooperative also decides whether to pay interest on the member's capital accounts, reflecting Arizmendiarrieta's understanding that the capital in these accounts is a consequence of work done previously that also deserves to be paid.

Mondragon cooperatives can be characterized by the expression: member = worker = owner. In practice, that ownership is not interpreted to mean that the members have the right to do whatever they want with the cooperative. As has been said, the cooperative exists to provide opportunities for dignified work now and in the future.

General Assembly decisions are made based on a one member, one vote rule. The General Assembly meets at least once a year and decides on the company's most important issues. Routine operational issues are decided by managers, supervisors, and directors.

As indicated earlier, 30% of net profits is distributed among the cooperative's workers. Another 60% goes to the cooperative's reserves and, as required by law, 10% goes to the society at large (e.g., local cultural groups, sports associations, cooperative promotions, etc.). In worker cooperatives remuneration is according to the work provided. While Arizmendiarrieta believed in principle that all members should receive the same pay, he recognized that some pay differences would be necessary to attract and motivate workers. Therefore, they adopted a 1:3 pay scale under which the top manager would receive 3 times more than the worker who contributed the least to the company. Today the difference is 1:6.

As members of the Mondragon Corporation, the individual cooperatives pool 15–40% of their gross profits at the division level before calculating their individual profits. (Mondragon's cooperatives are grouped into divisions according to their industry sectors). Through this mechanism, called "pooling of results", the cooperatives that have good earnings help those that do not. Once this rule has been applied, cooperatives with profits contribute around 14% of their remaining profit to the Corporation, which uses the funds thus generated

in two ways: roughly, half are channeled through an umbrella organization called Mondragon Investments that makes low-interest loans to finance investments in basically new products and services; while the other half is channeled through an umbrella organization called Mondragon Foundation, which makes donations to support non-profit cooperatives (e.g., technology centers and educational establishments), cooperatives facing short-term economic problems, and social endeavors of one sort or another.

Work in a cooperative typically requires some form of training or apprenticeship. This training may be provided on the job by the cooperative itself or at Otalora, the group's management training center. Training may also be provided prior to employment at Mondragon University, which is also a cooperative, the students of which are members[8]. At a still earlier age, students may attend the Arizmendi cooperative school, which is open to everyone[9].

As early as 1943, Mondragon University (then called Escuela Profesional) was created with the possibility of alternating study and work. Classes are held in the morning or in the afternoon so that in the other part of the day students can have practical work experience. Over the years, enrolments increased so much that the companies in the town of Arrasate/Mondragon and the surrounding area had difficulties in accommodating the students. For this reason, Arizmendiarrieta created the industrial cooperative Alecop, of which the students would become school members. The internships meant being able to finance the studies, the immersion in the working environment, and also, with Alecop, the immersion in the cooperative experience.

### Impact

The Basque Country region of northern Spain known as the Alto Deba, where the bulk of Mondragon's cooperative employment is concentrated, normally reports the lowest unemployment levels[10], the highest investment in R&D[11], and the lowest levels of economic inequality[12].

## Mondragon and the Future

The Corporation's strategy for the period 2025-2028[13] was approved during the Congress of Mondragon cooperatives (in effect, the General

[8] https://www.mondragon.edu/en/international-mobility/mondragon-university-cooperative-university

[9] http://www.arizmendi.eus/en/educational-project/

[10] Eustat. Tasas de actividad y paro y coeficiente de ocupación de la población de 16 a 64 años de la C.A. de Euskadi por comarcas (11 comarcas), sexo y edad (%). 2018. EUSTAT, 2019. https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0004500/Tasas_de_actividad_y_paro_y_coeficiente_de_ocupacion_de_la_poblacion_de_16_a_64_anos_de_la_CA_de_Euskadi_por_comarcas_11_comarcas_sexo_y_edad_/tbl0004549_c.html

[11] EUSTAT. Porcentaje y coeficientes de variación de establecimientos de 10 y más empleados que realizan innovación (tecnológica y/o no tecnológica) de la C.A. de Euskadi, por Territorio Histórico, capitales y comarcas. 2006-2017. EUSTAT, 2019. https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0006500/porcentaje-y-coeficientes-de-variacion-de-establecimientos-de-10-y-mas-empleados-que-realizan-innovacion-tecnologica-yo-no-tecnologica-de-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-territorio-historico-capitales-y-comarcas/tbl0006520_c.html
https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0016400/en-2017-alto-deba-se-mantiene-como-la-comarca-lider-en-innovacion-en-la-ca/not0016428_c.html

[12] Gobierno Vasco. Comunidad Autónoma de Euskadi. Encuesta de pobreza y desigualdades sociales EPDS-2016. Gobierno Vasco, 2017. https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/documentacion/informe_epds_2016_2/es_epds2012/adjuntos/Informe%20EPDS%202016_es.pdf
DE LA RICA, S., GORJÓN, L., GONZALO, R., VEGA, A. Pobreza y desigualdad en Euskadi: el papel de la RGI. ISEAK, 2020. https://solidaridadintergeneracional.es/files/biblioteca/documentos/550401.pdf
EUSTAT. Renta personal media de la C. A. de Euskadi por ámbitos territoriales, según tipo de renta (euros). EUSTAT, 2016.

[13] Política Socioempresarial 2025-2028 Mondragon document. July 2024.

Assembly of all Mondragon cooperatives), held on July 17, 2024. It states that Mondragon continues to see itself as a group of innovative and competitive companies, leaders in the sectors in which they operate. To this end, the challenges are: 1) Commitment and cooperative identity (to strengthen the cooperative culture and increase the pride of belonging through training); 2) Companies with a future (to develop activities with greater added value by entering new sectors and always integrating sustainability); 3) Openness and social impact (to be more open and grow by incorporating and collaborating with other entities and to have a greater presence and influence in society); 4) Collaboration (to build structures that facilitate greater internal collaboration, in addition to promoting collaboration with external actors). Mondragon well understands that the foundation for all of this is the technical and social training of its members.

The objective: keep creating work; keep creating wealth.

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**Ander Etxeberria-Otadui** has been the head of Mondragon's cooperative outreach program for the last 8 years. Annually, he serves approximately 2,000 people who want to become acquainted with the Mondragon Cooperative Experience. He also lectures in universities and other fora around the world. Prior to assuming his current post, Etxeberria-Otadui worked as Personnel Manager for 11 years at the Ikerlan Technology Center, another cooperative of the Mondragon Corporation. Before that, he worked in a training position for 7 years at the Mondragon Corporate Center. He studied Technical Engineering at Mondragon University (Arrasate/Mondragón) and Sociology at Deusto University (Bilbao).

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# An Introduction to Operation Save Jamaica

**Bruce A. Fletcher**
Operation Save Jamaica

Operation Save Jamaica (OSJ) is on a mission to bring about transformation to communities and holds the perspective that, in order for Jamaica to realize its 2030 vision; to be the place of choice to live, work, raise a family, do business, and retire, our under-resourced communities, especially those that are called "garrison" communities, must be transformed.

At the end of 2019, Jamaica had 389 criminal gangs in operation, 250 active and the rest dormant. Of the criminal gangs in operation, 323 or 83% were classified as first-generation gangs. The other 66 gangs, or 17%, were classified as second-generation gangs (Scott, 2020).

Jamaica has over 100 vulnerable and volatile communities, some of which are political strongholds rife with crime and violence. The community residents often live in fear as many of their relatives have been fatal victims of violence. In addition, the victims' families frequently retaliate in the short-term or long-term, perpetuating the cycle of violence in the community.

## Our Approach

OSJ is a collaborative entity that inspires and supports existing organizations, creates new ones where necessary, mobilizes and networks with other institutions, builds strategic partnerships, facilitates targeted interventions, advocates, and provides spiritual and resource enablement to address fundamental issues in communities.

## Strategic Partnerships

Building strategic partnerships is critical for transforming communities (see Figure 1). OSJ recognizes that various societal sectors possess specific values and strengths that increase effectiveness and efficiency, reducing the timeframe for accomplishing community transformation. Therefore, OSJ works through multi-sectoral partnerships, such as the public and private sectors, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the diaspora.

We have partnered with PIOJ's Community Renewal Programme (CRP), and they facilitated the brokering of peace in the Majesty Gardens community by engaging a violence interruption organization (Peace Management Initiative, PMI), when we brought to their attention the urgency of the situation there. A few men (about 1-1/2 years later) at our Majesty Gardens men's breakfast meeting, referred to that intervention and stated that it helped them to transition from a negative to a positive lifestyle.

We have also partnered with the PIOJ in seminars and workshops for churches as they have recognized the vital role churches can play in transforming our communities.

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OSJ partnered with Ascension Trust out of the UK, introduced Street Pastors into Jamaica in 2014, and have since patrolled the streets in Half-Way-Tree and later August Town, an inner-city community, in 2016. OSJ's goal is to spread Street Pastors across the 14 parishes and to introduce School Pastors in schools. Street Pastors UK helps to reduce anti-social behaviour, and as a result, different boroughs in the UK have seen a reduction in crime, and thus OSJ expects to see similar results in Jamaican communities and schools.

OSJ has partnered with other stakeholders, and the School of Education at the UWI Mona Campus continues to be another. Together we have conducted training for teachers at Operation Restoration Christian School, an inner-city school; hosted a 2-day symposium in 2013 on *Changing the Landscape of Education in Urban Schools and Communities; and* a 2-day conference in March 2021 entitled *"Moving research beyond academics: Transforming our societies through collaboration and action".* Social and emotional learning is also provided to schools through the INSIGHTS Programme of the School of Education, at the UWI Mona Campus.

## The Church

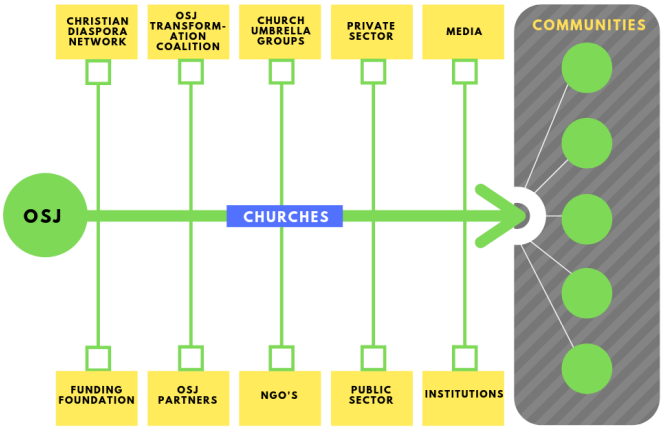
From OSJ's perspective, one of the major stakeholders for this work in Jamaica is the Church. The Church is one of the primary change agents, given its continual service to community residents and high levels of trust. As a prominent volunteer organization, the Church brings a unique mixture of faith and morals, while providing relevant and tangible solutions to personal and social community issues. The Church is in every community, even the most violent ones, and is generally permanently based in the community, which can facilitate ongoing interventions. In addition, churches usually have buildings where members of the community are able to meet.

Historically, the Jamaican Church has addressed national issues such as aiding emancipation, the development of free villages post-emancipation, as well as education and homeownership. OSJ has partnered with different church bodies, but plans to widen the network of churches so that the Church becomes very involved in community transformation.

One of OSJs partner denominations is the New Testament Church of God. They are in 43 of the 100 violent communities. OSJ intends to work with this and other denominations and churches where violence exists to bring about positive change in these communities. Notwithstanding, OSJs mission stands, to encourage churches to work towards transformation for all the vulnerable communities in which they are located, as it is fairly evident that under-resourced communities in Jamaica are at risk of becoming violent.

**Figure 1**

*OSJ Strategic Partnerships*

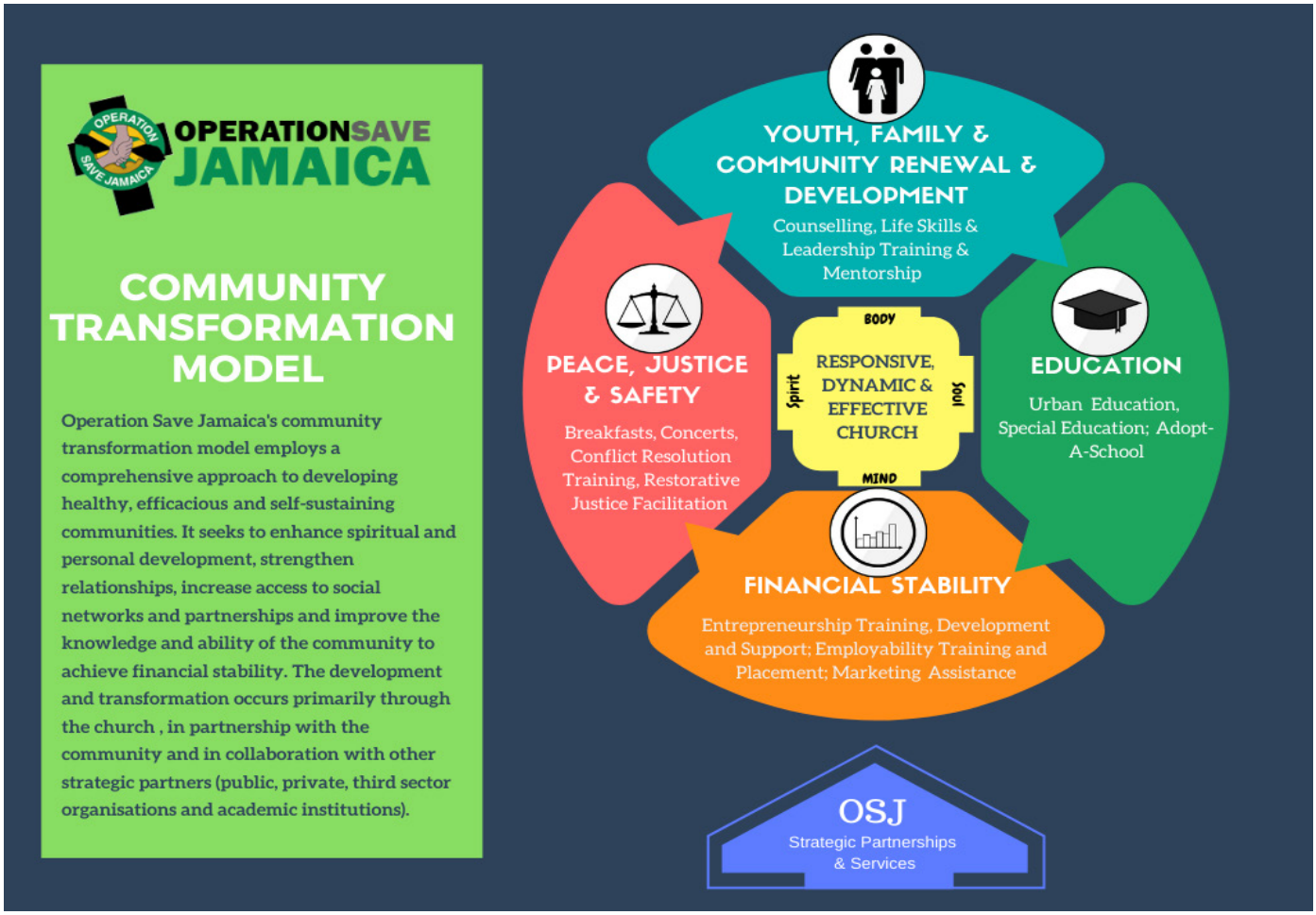



## Community Transformation Model

Based on many years of experience, OSJ has concluded that a comprehensive and collaborative approach is required and has established a prototype community transformation model (see Figure 2). Our model closely aligns with the Community Renewal Programme (CRP) of the Planning Institute of Jamaica's (PIOJ) goals for transforming vulnerable and volatile communities.

**Figure 2**

*OSJ Community Transformation Model*




Although varying aspects of the OSJ Community Transformation Model have begun, OSJ looks forward to greater engagement among churches in their communities, whilst working with other stakeholders, both private and public. In one community where OSJ has been actively involved, the lives of a number of teenaged young men were transformed through the church and its message. OSJ helped to address educational and career needs, exposing them to other cultures in the Caribbean and beyond. They also received mentorship from various male figures, and 15 years later most of them are committed to their families and are mentoring others, continually increasing their earning potential with honest work. These are presently empowered leaders working for the transformation of their communities, including supporting the elderly, increasing in entrepreneurship and exposing and attracting young men to become agents of change.

The various components of the Community Transformation Model were implemented and are still in progress at different points in time:

- 2000–2024: Peace, Juctice and Safety
- 2003–2024: Education
- 2002–2024: Financial Stability
- 2019–2024: Youth, Family and Community Renewal and Development

This has been implemented to varying degrees in the following communities – Trench Town, Maxfield Avenue, Majesty Gardens, August Town, and Payneland.

## References

Scott, R. (2020, 20 May). 389 Gangs identified in Jamaica, 250 Active. *Jamaica Gleaner*. https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20200520/389-gangs-identified-jamaica-250-active

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**Bruce Arthur Fletcher** graduated with a BSc in Civil Engineering (Honours) from The University of the West Indies (UWI) St, Augustine Trinidad and Tobago in 1981. Upon graduation from UWI Bruce served as the junior engineer representative at the Jamaica Institute of Engineers. In the early years following university he worked at the Urban Development Corporation where he was involved in varying projects such as the Fisherman Point development in Ohio Rios, Seabed Carpark downtown Kingston and in the development of Hellshire. From as early as high school Bruce has been involved in leadership roles within the Christian fraternity. Firstly, at Jamaica College and then later at UWI St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad where he served as the president and vice-president of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. In the late 1990s Bruce's passion for Jamaica became stronger and he founded Operation Save Jamaica (OSJ) which was officially established in 1999 with the support of persons from CLF and other churches. OSJ, with the by-line "working together for national revival, reformation and transformation" is an organization called to play a catalytic role in Jamaica to mobilize the church and others, both locally and abroad, into strategic action in order to bring transformation to individuals, communities and the nation. His involvement in communities and the nation has led to him playing key roles in the establishment of a number of organizations and ministries, Pastoral Fraternal in Trench Town, Prayer 2000, Xtreme Impact, and the Jamaica Coalition for a Healthy Society, National Association for the Family, in Jamaica, Street Pastors in the UK which now has 13,000 Street Pastors as well as Street Pastors in Jamaica.