

History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago: The survival of “plantation pedagogy”

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Walk down memory lane....



...looking at 'things pedagogical'

“Things Pedagogical” like

1. High Stakes Testing

- ▶ c.19th College Exhibitions (CE)
- ▶ 1960s Common Entrance Examination (CEE)
- ▶ 2001 Secondary Education Assessment (SEA)

What is ‘plantation-like’ or colonial about this?


▶ Access has opened up but ...what has changed?

- A small segment of schools still receives the most academically able students as well as those of high SES
- Everybody competes fiercely to get in to these schools
- Same model used to allocate students to secondary schools from the 19th century – performance on a test
- We don’t need a test anymore, we have enough school places.

[Research clearly shows that children of the poor do not do well on traditional tests]:-

- **Socio-economic stratification** of schools result
- Under colonial rule, race and ethnicity were tied to SES – today we see whites, near whites, Chinese, Syrian-Lebanese only in these schools (and not others)
- The larger, or alternative system has mainly Africans and Indians - so, there is **ethnic segregation** as well

Only a few are successful → ‘a colonial model’ of society



As a people, we still continue to **value** education as transmitted by the long-established grammar schools noted for high academic achievement.

As a result, we continue to endure the excesses of the SEA.

The other side of this **valuing** is that the state system is looked at dubiously.

[Why can't we get the state /alternative system to work?]

'Things Pedagogical' like

2. The Curriculum

c.19th The Classics [European] – Maths, Latin, Greek, French, German, Eng. Lang, Eng. Lit, History, Geography]. **No scientific, artistic, practical or technical subjects.**

c.1960s The Disciplines

- some business schools
- Technical Colleges/Trade Schools

c. 1970s onwards (in schools)

- The Disciplines/Academic
- Business Subjects
- Technical-Vocational

What is 'plantation-like' or colonial about this?

- **White, Western, Male knowledge still valued to the exclusion of all else** – e.g.
 - Not **Interdisciplinary approaches** which focus on **human problems** rather than on content knowledge
 - Not **Integrated knowledge** – H&S Biology, Social Studies, Technology Education
 - Not even **Thematic approaches** which engage with several disciplines at the same time (**Multi-disciplinary**)
- **Abstract content knowledge** – the need in the country/region for persons with a deep knowledge and understanding of local contexts, local problems/issues and indigenous solutions; e.g. need for an entrepreneurship ethos; technological competence; → the '**disciplined curriculum**' leads to high-status careers (SES)
- **Traditional Pedagogies**: Caribbean content now, but we do so in age-old ways. [e.g. history studied from the past]; [politics is inescapable in the study of many topics → adopt an antiseptic and neutral stance]; [uncovering of "Eurocentric world picturing" e.g. bias in textbooks; the globe; mass media;]

The Academy is struggling to determine its 'relevance', and experimenting with 'new' methodologies.

The Postcolonial Method (Raghuram and Madge, 2006)

...the need to explore methods that will make **our questions themselves more dialogic**. This dialogue does not mean giving up your own position entirely, but starting from your own acknowledged position with an openness to other positions.

To challenge the 'master-narrative' of northern research would be an ultimate goal. The simple act of establishing research questions through dialogue means that from the outset, the project is embedded within those being researched and is not delimited by preordained concepts.

It's all about **escaping the northern bias**, which, in the position of a dissertation student who is not necessarily trying to conform to any academic priorities, I am at liberty to attempt. I do not have to manipulate my work so that it appeals to a particular journal – I simply have to research it how I think it should be researched, analyse it how I think it should be analysed, and then write it how I think it should be written. Collaboratively.

'Things Pedagogical' like

3. Schooling

Historically, the Schooling experience was an immersion into **British culture and values**. The combination of the High Stakes Tests and the Curriculum served to create and re-create Caribbean citizens who did not seem to find it problematic that the education system -

- Did not have deep and meaningful exposure to Amerindian, African and Indian history, geography and culture.... [empowerment?]
- Did not put priority on helping persons to develop as critical thinkers [challenge the status quo?]
- Was perpetuating a syndrome of '*Black Skins and White Masks*' (Frantz Fanon – feelings of superiority in being close to the metropolis)
- Has never given us the tools to deconstruct our predicament – people with homelands in other places who find it irritating, troubling and even vexatious, when voices are raised from time to time about this absence in our lives.
 - **Issues of identity** tend to be deeply buried – Mother Africa, Mother India vs. Mother T&T? Do we prefer a foster mother – a Western Mother?

All the above characteristics, being 'plantation-like' and colonial....

Plantation Pedagogy ...

- ▶ ... although gains have been made through political independence in many former colonies, the concept of the plantation resides within – at individual and institutional levels, and cultural practices of education are complicit in the process of reinforcing what Kamau Brathwaite (1973) called ‘**the inner plantation**’. The ‘inner plantation’ therefore refers to a deeply pervasive ethos of internalised oppression.

Lavia, J. (2012) *Resisting the inner plantation: Decolonisation and the practice of education in the work of Eric Williams*

Plantation Pedagogy ...

“ ...resisting the inner plantation, confronting the colonisation of the mind and undermining the legacy of dependence were decolonising projects in which education was to play a decisive role. Indeed as Williams stated ‘*a great responsibility rests on the educational system. Its role should be that of a midwife to the emerging social order. Instead, it is the chamber maid of the existing social order*’ (1946, p.10).”

Lavia, J. (2012) *Resisting the inner plantation: Decolonisation and the practice of education in the work of Eric Williams*

Underestimating the power of colonial conditioning

- ▶ We learned it like a syllabus
- ▶ The **Overt** and the **Hidden Curriculum**
- ▶ The education system alone did not concretize the colonial mind set. The hidden curriculum people internalised everyday was that getting a secondary education in one of the denominational schools could set you well on your way to a better quality life.
- ▶ **Social mobility was the energizer**; not necessarily that black people thought that whites were superior but coming close to 'a white way of life' meant success – social, financial etc.
- ▶ After a while, maintaining fine boundaries could not be sustained and adoption of Western outlooks, mannerisms, ways of thinking and being became automatic.

Austin Clarke's **Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: Imperialist Education**

Because education is central to one's advancement, those sitting atop the educational hierarchy have a special kind of authority, and in Clarke's account, it is clear that though slavery had been abolished from the British colonies over a century before, it still cast a shadow on the education system. Students who misbehaved, for instance, were "sent to [the headmaster] for a flogging" (8).

Clarke alludes to a pattern of abuse, recalling "flogging orgies" (8), and noting how a strap soaked in urine, which Clarke calls a "pee-soaked black snake", was used to whip a child "six times across [his]back" (10),

He also describes a teacher who "held a boy's ear and looked inside... like an approved piece of merchandise" (12), a practice that would have been common on the auction block at a slave auction when potential buyers were inspecting the 'products'.

The term '**headmaster**' seems borrowed from the institution of slavery as the teachers and principals were not referred to as teachers or principals, but rather as 'masters' and 'headmasters' (18). The authority of the headmaster was also reinforced by the fact that he "always wore white", and did so, as Clarke observes, "as if it meant something" (11), likely linking himself with white authority.

Austin Clarke's **Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: Imperialist Education**

Language –

- Aspiring for jobs as 'public *servants*'
- The 'Christian' values of the Anglo-Saxon culture also shaped their familial relationships through language. Because Clarke was born out of wedlock, he had a different name than his mother, and in order to protect him from ridicule, his teachers referred to his mother as a guardian that other youths might not tease him for being 'illegitimate' (107).

This framing of Clarke as somehow being illegitimate is an extension of the Anglo-Saxon/Judeo-Christian culture, but the framing of his own mother as a guardian exacerbates this as it discredits her efforts as a mother and encourages Clarke to look at his mother through the lens of the **Anglo-Saxon value system** rather than allowing their familial bonds to define their relationships. Through the system of language, the 'white' system is constantly being uplifted, people of colour are perpetually being taught to view themselves in terms of **servitude**, and the authority of 'white' society seeks to take precedent over familial bonds, showing how language reinforces this **colonization of the mind**.

In summary: What is Plantation Pedagogy?

- Essentially it is an education system which *re-creates the status quo* –
 - a dependence on *high stakes examinations*,
 - the organization of schooling so that *only a few are successful*
 - teaching and learning tied to the test – *instrumental view of education*
 - low priority paid to empowering persons, helping them to develop as critical thinkers knowledgeable about their past and the mindsets bequeathed by colonialism
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Plantation [as Metaphor] – most held in subjugation; knowledge for liberation and empowerment restricted; knowledge of one's past, one's culture ignored and that of another group promoted; one's own history, customs, religion denigrated; being made to accept what is considered a superior culture



Reflective Thinking

The Secondary System

Given the massive layout of public funds to reform the system – largely directed at the new sector. ...why in 30 odd years has there been no or only minimal improvement in achievement, literacy/numeracy, discipline and status?

References

1. Carl Campbell . (Trilogy)

- Colony and Nation
- The Young Colonials
- Endless Education

2. Williams. E. (1946). *Education in the British West Indies*. Port of Spain: Teachers' Economic and Cultural Association Ltd.

3. Lavia, J. (2012). *Resisting the inner plantation: Decolonisation and the practice of education in the work of Eric Williams*. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 1(1), pp. 9-30, 2012. (internet)

4. Why Teach with an Interdisciplinary Approach?

<https://serc.carleton.edu/econ/interdisciplinary/why.html>