

# POSITIONAL “INFERIORITY”: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF JAMAICAN TEACHERS’ COLLEGE FACULTY

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the attitude towards teacher education in Jamaica particularly in relation to institutions which have their roots in the normal school system established during the immediate post-slavery/classical colonial era. This analysis is based on data from a larger phenomenological study on the experience of 17 teacher educators from 5 of the 6 teachers’ colleges in Jamaica. Using a postcolonial studies theoretical frame, the educators’ experiences were examined for deeper meanings and connections to the country’s history of slavery and colonialism. Based on this examination the researcher concludes that there are profound entrenched colonial impositions and retentions that continue to undermine the status of Jamaican teachers’ colleges as legitimate tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** teacher education; teacher educators; Jamaican education; postcolonial theory; phenomenological research

## Introduction

It is well established that former colonial societies, largely categorized as the Third World, are still affected by negative retentions of their colonial past. The education system in these states is arguably one of the most impacted in this regard. Jamaica provides an important context for this study in light of its dual or two-tiered system of education which evolved from slavery and colonialism. Since teacher training is such a pivotal component of the teaching services, it is a key point of entry to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of colonialism on educational institutions, structures and processes. As practitioners in the trenches of teacher education, the lived experiences of Jamaican teacher educators who work in teachers’ colleges provide a vivid and enlightening view of the Jamaican reality. Examined through postcolonial theoretical lens, the educators’ powerful testimonies confirmed as well as revealed troubling issues that are reminiscent of a past characterized by British domination, subordination and cultural devaluation. The disregard for teacher educators’ grounded knowledge, the lack of material support for teacher education, and the undervaluing and under-rewarding of the services of teachers’ college faculty exemplify the plight of teacher education in Jamaica.

## The context of teacher education in Jamaica

A two-tiered or dual<sup>1</sup> system of public education currently operates in a starkly socio-economically polarized Jamaica. On one hand, an elitist brand of education consisting of private elementary schools, traditional high schools<sup>2</sup>, and the University of the West Indies (UWI) largely serve the middle and upper classes. On the other hand, a largely under-supported and under-regarded system consisting of public elementary schools, upgraded secondary schools, and teachers’ colleges, serve predominantly the working class.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly (1978) posit the concept of ‘dualism’ as “a hallmark of colonial schools.” According to Altbach and Kelly, dualism is “the existence of two distinct school systems in the colonies that were controlled by the colonizer – that for the colonizer himself and that for the colonized” (p. 7). The researcher finds that the term “dualism” parallels the use of ‘two-tiered’ to describe what currently obtains in the Jamaican education system as a result of our colonial legacy.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional high schools evolved from elementary schools that were established for whites during slavery.

This separatism in education and the positional inferiority<sup>3</sup> of teachers' colleges have roots in the development and purpose of teacher education in Jamaica. Prior to emancipation from slavery, whites in Jamaica recruited teachers from Britain to tutor their children, while blacks had little or no formal education. Although religious denominations made the initial step to train local teachers in 1832 (D'Oyley, 1979, p.10) it was not until emancipation and the attendant Negro Education Grant (NEG) that teacher training institutions (then referred to as *Normal Schools*) were officially established (Whyte, 1983). As was the case with elementary education, the religious denominations and the Mico Trust<sup>4</sup> implemented the first system of teacher education in Jamaica in 1836. The purpose of these institutions was to prepare black teachers to teach in the newly established public elementary schools. Because blacks were denied secondary schooling during the period, teacher education for them functioned effectively as a secondary institution (Miller, 1990) as well as the primary route for upward social mobility.

During the colonial period, teacher education curricula strongly reflected the largely disempowering nature of education for blacks. As was the case at the elementary level, the teacher education program heavily emphasized religious and agricultural studies. From one angle, the religious groups were on a fervent campaign to use teaching as a vehicle to promote their doctrinal agenda. From another angle, the government, reflecting the colonizers' general view then that the place of blacks was in the 'field' of agriculture, insisted on the inclusion of agriculture in the training. The authorities at the Mico normal schools, however, represented a strong dissenting voice, arguing that the emphasis on 'agricultural studies' for example, was too similar to the recent slavery experience; hence they offered a more balanced curriculum. Although the Jamaican teachers' college curriculum today reflects current development and trends in teacher education, the content, to a significant extent, lacks local relevance, and relies heavily on foreign knowledge and scholarship.

## Theoretical Frames

### Postcolonial discourse

Postcolonial studies are a relatively recent ideological discourse and represent a critical response by the former colonized to the various forms and processes of Western domination and subjugation resulting from the colonial encounter. The evolving state of this theory is evident in the unstable use of the term *post-colonial* versus *postcolonial*. Some theorists use post-colonial to refer to conditions *after* or *post* colonialism (London, 2003), while others use postcolonial to mean the effects of colonialism since its inception to the present (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). In addition, you will find that in reference to this emerging critical theory, some interchangeably use both terms – *post-colonial* theory or *postcolonial* theory. To avoid any confusion of the terms in this study as well as based on the logic of the definitions given above, the researcher employs the form, "post-colonial" to mean after the event of colonialism; and "postcolonial" to refer to the discourse.

The colonial enterprise has left former colonies suffering from wounds which appear to deepen rather than heal. In virtually every aspect of their lives, former colonized people contend with the repercussions of their encounter with European colonizers. In response, postcolonial theorists engage in discussions about a host of experiences connected to slavery and colonialism such as suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, and social class. Within these broader themes, specific issues such as the primacy of the colonizer's language, religion, cultural histories, knowledge and other element of identity over that of the local people's, is topical in the postcolonial

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<sup>3</sup> I coin the term "positional inferiority" in juxtaposition to Edward Said's "positional superiority" where he describes the West's developing a view of themselves, and different positions of superiority in relation to Orientals or the Easterners.

<sup>4</sup> This trust was established through funds granted by Lady Mico, a British noble woman, to educate formerly enslaved individuals.

conversation. Postcolonial studies, therefore, is an academic space in which to contest hegemonic ideologies and impositions, which continue to oppress formerly colonized peoples who now inhabit what is called the ‘developing world’ (here after Third World or post-colonial societies).<sup>5</sup>

Postcolonial discourse is led by a host of passionate voices from different corners of the Third World who call attention to continued Western violence and domination. One prominent voice is *Edward Said* whose ground-breaking work *Orientalism* (1978) analyses how the West, through centuries of domination designates nations as ‘the Other’ – an entrenched characterization that distorts non-white identity, and relegate them to an inferior place in humanity. Said’s concept of “positional superiority” is quite useful in the researcher’s analysis and discussion of the two-tiered system of education in Jamaica, particularly the inferior status of teachers’ college in relation to the University of the West Indies..

### Phenomenology

Phenomenological research began in the early twentieth century as a philosophical movement but later gained traction as a powerful empirical methodology. Although influenced by the ideas of others before him, German philosopher Edmund Husserl is credited as the movement’s founder. Husserl crafted a brand of this inquiry into what he called *transcendental phenomenology*. The general principle underlying this methodology is that researchers should do all that is possible to ‘transcend’ or remove personal notions and experiences of the phenomenon being studied, in order to ensure credibility of the process. This ideal is virtually a human impossibility, and that is perhaps why Martin Heidegger, Husserl’s former student, advanced another perspective on the methodology. Heidegger’s *hermeneutic phenomenology* presupposes some prior understanding of the phenomenon by the interpreter/researcher, and therefore inevitably brings that experience to the inquiry process. Heidegger, therefore, believes that the way to deal with this inevitability is that the researcher’s ‘baggage’ be acknowledged, accounted for, and inform the process. In light of this principle, the researcher has, from the outset of this study, declared his interest in, and connections to the phenomenon to be investigated – the experience of Jamaican teachers’ college lecturers. The researcher however, appreciated the delicate balance that had to be maintained in this study regarding his prejudices and the integrity of the research process.

Notwithstanding the philosophical and ideological differences between Husserl and Heidegger, both philosophers would agree that “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). This statement therefore, illustrates the essential purpose of the methodology – which is to uncover the meaning of lived experiences. The phenomenological methodology therefore, provides critical value to the investigation as the researcher’s primary focus is the interpretation or meaning that Jamaican teachers’ college lecturers attach to their experience, as well as the deeper meanings that the themes derived from the findings revealed.

A primary mode of inquiry in phenomenological research is interviewing, and a powerful variant used in this study is *in-depth phenomenological interviewing*. This strategy features a three-interview structure formulated by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) and further developed by Seidman (1998). In-depth phenomenological interviewing is a combination of life-history interviewing (Bertaux, 1981) and deep, focused interviewing informed by principles of phenomenology. Because of the nature and the fusion of these two foci, in-depth phenomenological interviewing is “a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience[s] of the individuals whose lives constitute education” (Seidman, 1998, p. 7). Furthermore,

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<sup>5</sup> As part of the researcher’s political stance in joining the postcolonial conversation, I will not use the term “developing” or “developed” in reference to countries. Instead, for the want of a better term, I will go with “Third World” for less industrialized nations and “First World” for industrialized ones.

the two-way interaction inherent in the methodology provides a non-threatening environment where researcher and participants can share and explore the issues more extensively and openly. This technique allowed the researcher the opportunity to delve beyond the superficial layers of the phenomenon, enabling greater understanding of the essence that participants make of their experience, and the researcher of their experience in relation to the postcolonial context in which they practice.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study the researcher explored (1) the experience of Jamaican teacher educators who work in the teachers' college system; (2) the meaning they make of that experience; and (3) whether there were connections between the meaning of the educators' experiences and the country's history of slavery and colonialism. The researcher's approach to this inquiry was to capture the professional experience of teachers' college lecturers through their personal stories and reflections by using an in-depth phenomenological interviewing methodology. Further, the researcher made sense of the educators' experiences by conducting a thematic analysis of their responses. Finally, the deeper meanings of the emergent themes were interpreted through a post-colonial theoretical framework. The following discussion provides rationales and greater details about the methodological decisions and processes.

### **Participant selection**

The researcher intended to include twenty participants in this study but time limitation and other constraints restricted the number to seventeen – two more than the minimum target. Also, although the researcher desired to draw participants from all six teachers' colleges one was omitted because the faculty at that institution was engaged in a number of summer workshops and training programs and could not commit to all the interviews. With the exception of two cases, access to participants was gained largely through their peers, instead of through individuals in authority. The researcher took this approach as a first step in cultivating a sense of equity in the interviewing relationship; as well as to avoid giving the impression that the research was sanctioned by the administration. The researcher was very careful to eliminate or minimize any factor that could inhibit participants' willingness to share their experiences out of fear of possible repercussions.

Because the research site is Jamaica and the researcher was in the United States, an approach akin<sup>6</sup> to snowball sampling in the initial search for participants two months prior to the study, was pursued. Through colleagues and acquaintances who teach in the colleges, the researcher first obtained one lecturer's telephone in each college. Prospective participants were then contacted by telephone, at which time the researcher introduced himself as a colleague, briefed them about the topic and the interviewing process, and invited their participation. Next, the researcher asked them to suggest additional names, and provide telephone numbers of colleagues who fit the study criteria, and who they think could be approached for inclusion in the study. Upon receiving the details for the prospective recruits, they were contacted and the process was repeated. That process yielded ten participants. At that point the researcher arranged tentative dates for the interviews. The remaining participants were selected when the researcher arrived at the research sites (colleges) and personally approached lecturers in their respective departments.

The initial use of use of snowball sampling was the most practical technique in light of the researcher's lack of proximity to the research site. At the same time, using random sampling would be impractical as well as unnecessary in this kind of research as the object is not to apply strict generalization to the findings. That said, the in-depth interviewing process, however, requires a great degree of thoughtfulness in selecting participants who would provide information that captures the depth, richness and complexity of the educators' experience. An essential element of participant selection in a phenomenological study is that participants are experiencing the phenomenon

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<sup>6</sup> I say "akin" because I did not strictly follow the classic route of snowball sampling where the entire sample was selected through the technique.

(Moustakas, 1994). Individuals must be experiencing a phenomenon to be able to speak about it with currency, credibility and authority. Hence, Jamaican teachers college lecturers are more than qualified to talk about their experience in the context of teacher education in the Third World or post-colonial society.

Another crucial issue concerning participant selection in this study is the decision regarding characteristics of the educators to be included. There is no strict “in-advance criteria” for accomplishing this objective in the qualitative study (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to age and gender mentioned by Moustakas, the researcher gathered from a pilot study on the topic, that *location of teachers’ college; years of service; and subject area* are important participant characteristics. Although the intent here was not about strict generalization, the inclusion of individuals from these different groups provided a reasonable spectrum of the educators’ experience that was sufficient for thematic development regarding the phenomenon.

### **Data collection**

In-depth phenomenological interviewing requires that three ninety-minute interviews be conducted with each participant, guided by three broad questions (See Seidman 1998, for a greater discussion on the general structure of such questions). The first interview addressed the question: *What was the life journey like for the participant before becoming a teacher educator?* The purpose of this question was to contextualize the participant’s experience by asking him or her to share as much as possible about him or herself in relation to the topic, up to the time of becoming a teacher educator. The researcher also found that this initial interview was an important point of entry for participants’ to share their experience as they were all enthused to reminisce about their childhood and paths to becoming teacher educators.

The second interview explored the question: *What is the participant’s experience like being a teacher educator in Jamaica?* The focus of this interview was for the participant to share concrete details about his or her work experience as a teacher educator. Based on those constitutive elements of the educators’ experience the researcher was able to better understand the essence of the opinions they expressed and the meanings they made of the experience.

And the third interview examined the question: *What does the experience of being a teacher educator mean to the participant?* This final interview was for the participant to reflect on his or her work and derive some essence from the experience with a view to providing an understanding of the connections between work and life – for example connections to his/her role in society or to personal wellbeing. In addition to exploring that basic question, in cases where time allowed the researcher asked participants to share any thoughts they had about the connection of their experience with Jamaica’s history.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. About half of the transcriptions were done by the researcher; the rest was completed by two competent typists. The researcher provided the typists a sample transcript and corresponding audio clip to study before they started. This was important to impress upon the typists the importance for the transcripts to be produced verbatim. Typing began as soon as the first interview was completed. In order to ensure accuracy as the typing progressed, the researcher compared samples of audio and the written texts produced by the typists. It was also important to protect participants’ identity, so they were always referred to by pseudonyms in the interview, in conversation with the typists, and throughout this study. Additionally, the typists were required not to discuss the contents of the interviews with anyone.

### **Data analysis and presentation process**

Managing and making sense of the interview data was a challenging aspect of the research process. This is largely so because the three-interview structure yields voluminous material and hence a critical decision is always to determine how much of the text one would include in the report and in what form. Three options of sharing the data are recommended by Seidman (1998): a profile of the



participant's story; vignettes of salient issues from the interview; or a thematic analysis of the material. A thematic analysis of the findings was judged by the researcher to be the most meaningful way of representing the multifaceted experiences of the 17 participants. Based on participants' articulation of their experience and the researcher's interpretation of how to organize the material in relation to the study's focus, the findings are presented according to three major topics and nine themes. In the discussion and analysis, however, the researcher focussed on six of those themes which he determined, situate more cogently in the postcolonial theoretical frame of this study.

The interview material was analyzed by following principles akin to the Grounded Theory method developed by Glaser and Strauss (See Charmaz, 1983, for further discussion on this method). Using a system of labeling or 'coding'<sup>7</sup>, the researcher sorted and categorized the interview data to identify themes and topics which are pertinent to the topic. From the pilot study the researcher found that reading and rereading each interview and assigning labels was a useful approach to putting order to the participant's story. The researcher recognized how common labels or topics across participants may be organized thematically in order to give meaning to the participants' collective experiences, in relation to the research topic. Basically, the process of organizing and analyzing the data involved the following major steps: (A) labeling excerpts from the interview text; (B) developing themes and categories by identifying connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts; and (C) presenting and commenting on the categories and themes, particularly in relation to the focus of the study.

The process of reading and labeling the material from 90 ninety-minute interviews can be a daunting exercise; so in addition to using Microsoft Word-processing software to produce interview transcripts, a qualitative data 'analysis' software was also employed to facilitate greater management of the material. The researcher used the *Ethnograph 5.0* (Qualis Research, 2001) qualitative software which proved to be quite useful for organizing and reproducing data according to labels and themes. The *Ethnograph* allows the user to (a) create a project which is essentially the title of your study; (b) cut and paste each interview into the program editor and save (or file) according to the project's name; (c) label portions or excerpts from each interview as you choose; (d) store all labels which can be retrieved later to organize labeled excerpts from one interview or across all, which can be printed for closer analysis; and (e) write memos about passages and labels.

The findings are presented thematically, in relation to the research focus – the experience of Jamaican teachers' college lecturers. Although the report gained cohesiveness and structure through the researcher's comments, the first person was used report to ensure faithfulness to the participants' words by reporting their stories in their voice. The researcher however, removed idiosyncratic oral speech (e.g., uhm, ahm, yuh nuh,<sup>8</sup> etc), grammatical errors and the like, in order to make the text more readable. Also, in the cases where some Creole was used the researcher provides the English translations as best as possible. Essentially, final decisions about the selected material was made on the basis that justice is done to the participants and that the excerpts accurately reflect the interview as a whole or a "total experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 410). Finally, the researcher conducted a deeper analysis of the meaning that six of the nine themes revealed about the status of teacher education in Jamaica, specifically in light of postcolonial theory.

## Results and Discussion

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<sup>7</sup> I avoided using the term 'code' or 'coding' as I consider it language inappropriate as well as unnecessary for qualitative research. Apart from the fact that I think the term suggests secrecy, I agree with Ian Dey (1996) that its generic meaning imposes a mechanical sense on the complexity of qualitative data analysis. I used the term 'labeling' or 'label' which is a simpler, more appropriate language for the unstructured nature of the interview material in this study.

<sup>8</sup> "Yuh nuh" is Creole for the English "You know" which tends to be a speech pattern of many Jamaicans.

## The disregard for teacher educators' grounded knowledge

A key theme that distinctly emerged in this study is the need and desire for scholarly engagement among the majority of the participants. It is important to underscore here, that the primary work of training Jamaican teachers is done by teachers' college faculty. They are the people involved in the recruitment, instruction, supervision, assessment, and to some extent, the certification of prospective teachers. The point is, virtually no one else is so deeply engaged with, and likely to understand the complexities of teacher education in Jamaica better than teachers' college faculty. However, the experiences and insights teachers' college faculty gain from doing so, seem to be largely disregarded. The reality is, they are afforded very little opportunity to contribute to the scholarship on teacher education in Jamaica.

According to the findings of this study, all participants consider research to be a valuable exercise, and the majority feels that it should be a part of their responsibility. As summarized in this participant's remark, "Research is a worthwhile and beneficial effort, and we all as teacher educators should engage in it. Research findings could be the springboard for writing books, papers, as well as support for our teaching" (Carol). But as another participant points out:

...Much more needs to be done by and for teachers' college [faculty] in terms of research. There is very little happening, and it's only the people from the University [of the West Indies] that keep producing. And that is so because their job tenure hinges on them producing material...And of course they are facilitated by sabbatical or whatever they call it. We don't have that kind of support... (Althea)

In spite of the desire among many participants to be engaged in research, teachers' college faculty are largely left out of this important academic activity.

While teachers' college faculty languish for support to engage in research, their "counterparts" at the UWI are encouraged and supported through various means to do so. For example, research is part of their job description; and they have sabbaticals, funding, and opportunities to share their work. Hence UWI faculty have greater opportunities to explore and generate knowledge pertaining to their field and their clientele. On the other hand, teachers' college faculty are neither required, nor provided opportunities, to generate scholarship in teacher education. In light of the differential treatment between the two types of tertiary institutions, the researcher was strongly convinced that the "field" knowledge and experiences of teachers' college faculty are not sufficiently regarded. The researcher was compelled, therefore, to examine what accounts for this attitude towards the educators' grounded knowledge.

The lack of regard for the grounded knowledge and experience of Jamaican teachers' college faculty, as seen through postcolonial critical lens, can be broadly characterized as a function of Western domination beginning with colonialism and perpetuated through neocolonialism. By neocolonialism, the researcher means that not only do former colonial powers continue to greatly influence knowledge transactions in former colonies, but former colonial subjects are performing self-flagellation through oppressive practices and attitudes akin to those of their former colonial masters. During the early expansion of their empires, the British and other imperial powers, systematically suppressed the knowledge bases of the local cultures they controlled, and subtly and aggressively supplanted it with theirs. Consequently, Western powers have largely succeeded in not only convincing their victims to think about themselves in inferior terms, but to disregard their own knowledge and knowledge systems.

This process of cultural domination and indoctrination largely took place through a transmission type educational system organized by the powers during the colonial era. Alas, the process surprisingly (or unsurprisingly) persists even today through an educational system that is now governed by the formerly colonized. The cultural domination continues to operate primarily through the same transmission paradigm, which, at its core, has very little regard for local insights and

experiences. As Dahlstrom, Swarts, & Zeichner (1999) observe: “This transmission perspective downgrades knowledge of practice and knowledge developed from practice and overemphasizes knowledge produced by ‘experts’ who are usually far away from reality” (p. 160). In the case of Jamaican teachers’ college faculty, their grounded knowledge is disregarded (by others and themselves) in favor of ‘expert’ knowledge transmitted through foreign textbooks, as well as that from the scholarship of UWI faculty who in most cases, are less engaged than teachers’ college faculty, with the day-to-day complexities of teacher education. A troubling question therefore, is how is this status quo maintained, with little or no effort even by teachers’ college faculty themselves to alter or challenge it?

The answer to this question might reside in the fact that, the entrenchment of this insidious system as it obtains in Jamaica, is largely attributable to the disparate intent behind the established purpose of the teachers’ college versus the UWI. Yes, both were conceived to facilitate the colonial enterprise, but at different levels: the UWI was designed to train the ‘social elites’ to perform the top functions of the colonial agenda; while the teachers’ colleges’ role was mainly to train individuals (i.e. teachers) to prepare the populace literate enough to carry out working class functions. Despite the fact that governance is now in the hands of descendants of the enslaved and colonized, it would seem that we have collected the baton and continued running with the imperial agenda. It is also troubling that the process seems to have largely conditioned teachers’ college faculty to accept that an academic endeavor, like engaging research, is outside their professional scope, and hence defer to others at ‘the top’ – namely faculty from the UWI and other universities from the industrialized centers of the world. As a result, teachers’ college faculty recline in a state of dependency – and are involved more in knowledge re-distribution rather than knowledge production. One participant was quite eloquent in recognizing this unproductive mode:

... We don't seem to see teacher education as our full responsibility. We tend to leave research to the people at UWI...; and they then issue their findings to us. So we have a dependency syndrome – we seem to take comfort in the knowledge that somebody else is going to do it. And we are always there waiting with our out-stretched hand... (Frank).

This comment profoundly underscores the point that the possibilities of the Jamaican educational enterprise, therefore, are under-actualized because the intellectual potential of teacher educators is under-utilized. If teachers’ college faculty were encouraged and supported to conduct research, as is the desire of many participants in this study, perhaps there would be locally derived theories and understanding on manifold topics such as: the benefits of the Creole language in teaching and learning, the impact of foreign textbooks on the development of identity and self-esteem, classroom predictors of crime and violence, to name a few. These are issues that attract much speculation by different interest groups in Jamaica and require deeper exploration and understanding. Little is done, however, to study them empirically. Teachers’ college faculty could make a significant contribution in this regard because they are intimately involved in the classrooms: first by what they glean from new interns fresh from the schools, as well as through their supervisory interactions on the ground. These vantage points provide the educators tremendous opportunities to systematically gather, make sense of, document, and ultimately share their grounded knowledge. Unfortunately, this kind of research potential remains largely untapped, as there is little or no expressed political will to exploit this advantageous possibility. Consequently, the problems regarding paucity of local material, and the prevalence of foreign textbooks, highlighted in this study, remain largely unresolved.

The culture of keeping teachers’ college faculty largely unpublished, also solidifies the process that keeps teachers’ colleges as second rate tertiary institutions. It is well established that colleges and universities are likely to command more recognition when the ideas and work of their faculty members are publicized. Although teaching is just as valuable as research, it is not normally brought up for special public notice. It is important research findings that are more likely to place the



spotlight on an institution. Jamaican teachers' colleges now experience limited visibility outside the fact that they are the primary institutions that train the nation's teachers. On the other hand, the UWI has greater visibility in terms of its faculty's publication of scholarly material. This therefore, further strengthens their position as a legitimate tertiary institution, and confirms the opposite for teachers' colleges.

When post-colonial governments, like Jamaica, show little regard for teacher educators' grounded knowledge, they are inadvertently advancing the agenda of neocolonialism and neo-imperialism in their societies. In so doing, the dearth of local knowledge production remains, and the reliance on Western material for educating the populace is unabated. It must be recognized that empowering our educators to have a voice about their realities is imperative in post-colonial societies. It is a part of the process of affirming our humanity and identity in a world where former colonial powers continue to exert their aggression through knowledge control and domination. To prevent this dehumanizing aggression, Freire (1970) argued, it is a must for those who have been denied the right to speak, to first reclaim this right. And it is a part of the postcolonial worker's duty (teachers' college faculty included), as Mulenga (2001) argues, "...to reappropriate the writings of the 'Other' on the margin and rehabilitates their histories and perspectives *on their terms*, and push them to the center" (p. 448). Hence Jamaican teachers' college faculty must be provided real opportunities and support to participate in constructing knowledge that is for, and of the Jamaica experience.

### **The lack of material support for teacher education**

Another disturbing issue that emerged from this research is the lack of material support for the work of educators in Jamaican teachers' colleges. The participants in this study relate a dismal story in relation to access, availability, and quality of instructional materials and facilities available to them. For example, they describe teachers' college libraries as not only deplorably inadequate, but noted that much of the printed material lack local currency. According to one participant, "We do not have enough material to support the program. We need more books, more journals and in particular, more up-to-date material" (Carol). Another participant agrees by stating: "Sometimes when I am writing up my bibliography to give my students I am embarrassed by the age of the books in the library that I am recommending" (Beverly). And according to many participants, the issue goes beyond scarcity and dated text. They observe that even in the case where material is available, much of it lacks cultural significance. The two accounts below underscore that sentiment:

... [Although] Caribbean people have written a number of social studies books [and] a number of papers on social issues...most of our source materials have been prepared and printed elsewhere, mainly in the United States of America and England...I would say that very often when you use foreign sources, you have to be an experienced teacher in order to use them correctly, because many of the things which are presented are not really applicable. [I am] not suggesting that we tie our students down to knowledge about local issues only, but I believe that we need to have more material that speaks directly to our experiences. (Grace)

...We have very little to no local empirical information that our students can access in terms of making alive, in a national sense, what they are doing. We tend to draw heavily on North America. So you find that somebody doing language experience approach in reading in terms of visual literacy will be using material that they find in books written in the US. Look at our rich and varied experiences? Can you imagine how much could have been written in terms of our students' language experience? I am yet to see somebody use the Jamaican [Creole] to meaningfully develop reading materials for our schools. We simply refuse to experiment with what we have. (Frank)

The challenges posed by the deficiencies surrounding print materials have pushed some teachers' college faculty to buttress the system with their own resources. According to one educator "The most that we can do is that sometimes [faculty] have to put our own books on the reserve shelf and have students photocopy appropriate chapters or use the book for a limited period" (Wayne).

In addition, the educators report that basic electronic resources and support such as audiovisuals and photocopying services are seriously wanting. Erica has just completed her second year of teaching; and she reflects on how her debut as teacher educator was affected by the absence of a basic piece of equipment:

I evaluated myself and [felt] I could have done much more last year. I did not do enough because I had very little to use in terms of resources. For example I wanted a VCR to show my students something but there was none... So I am now thinking of buying one from personal funds because I really need it and that's the only way I am going to get it [or] you end up going back to the chalk-and-talk... (Erica)

In the excerpts below, participants express their frustration with the essential service of photocopying:

We have a photocopying area with two machines operating, but the volume of work that the machines have to take see them breaking down often. Also you have to give stuff you want copied to the office in advance. Persons have to seek photocopying services outside of the college sometimes because it is not [always easy] to get the information and leave it to be copied within a specific time to get it for your class... (Carol)

You want something photocopied for a class tomorrow [but] you are told, it can't be done because it has to be sent somewhere else away from the college and it's going to take so many days...and it just really frustrates you. (Jennifer)

According to another educator: "Sometimes I print at home; but then I can't print enough copies [for the entire class] and therefore I still have the problem with photocopying" (Latoya).

These resources are absolute essentials in the twenty first century if teacher education is to be efficient, effective and relevant. The woeful inadequacy of instructional resources that teachers' college faculty lament in this study may very well be a reflection of the economic state of the country. However, the researcher is of the view that this situation is partly indicative of the Jamaican governments' tepid commitment to teacher education.

In light of the experiences related by the participants, it would appear that little has changed since colonial times regarding government's attitude towards teacher education. During colonial times "teacher education was not a high priority item for the plantocracy" (D'Oyley & Murray, 1979). Teacher training institutions were established to train the offspring of the formerly enslaved blacks to become teachers to serve that population – not the white and brown class. As such, the colonial government cared very little about teacher training and hence left it to the churches. It was not until 13 years after emancipation that government took an active role in teacher education when they started a Normal School of Industry in 1847 to train male teachers in agriculture (D'Oyley & Murray, 1979), a rather strategically self-serving move. However, that attempt, plus two others failed until a permanent institution<sup>9</sup> was established by the government in 1885 at the behest of the missionaries, for a women's college (D'Oyley & Murray, 1979). It is not clear from the literature why the two institutions failed, but a likely reason is that they were not sufficiently supported by the colonial government. The researcher has not found much in the historical account either to comment definitively on the resources available to teacher training institutions then, but based on the poor conditions of elementary schools (King, 2003; Turner, 2001) which were under the same management of the churches, it is reasonable to assume that these institutions had little in terms of material support. And according to the findings of this study, today's teachers' colleges are still starved for resources even though they operate in a post-independent state.

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<sup>9</sup> Shortwood Teachers' College which is still in existence

The researcher hastens to acknowledge, however, that unfavorable economic realities facing Jamaica adversely affect the provision of resources for teacher education. After Jamaica lost strategic value to British imperialist expansion, the country was effectively abandoned and relegated to the status of a Third World state. Local administrators have never been able to stabilize the county to a point where it could effectively compete with the imperial powers who continue to control the bulk of world resources. Consequently, Jamaica remains in a constant struggle to meet its economic and social demands. Like any other society, Third World or industrialized, Jamaica has to provide roads, water, health, education and other crucial services for its citizens. The cost of providing and maintaining such services increases frequently in a capitalist driven environment, where industrialized countries tighten their hold on the world resources; and countries like Jamaica are forced to pay more in order to survive. It must be appreciated therefore, that the Jamaican government would experience difficulty to furnish educational institutions with resources.

Nevertheless, I am not convinced that the Jamaican government truly regards teacher education as an important priority that requires meaningful material support to function effectively. The researcher is not arguing here for government to necessarily provide cutting edge resources that can only be afforded by First World nations; rather, the researcher refers to basic materials and equipment that the participants in this study so eloquently argue are inadequate or nonexistent. There are creative ways that resources can be procured and shared if we are deeply committed to exploring such possibilities. If the Jamaican society is to unshackle itself from the predicament in which it finds itself as a nation, government needs to be much more committed to teacher education. The leaders must appreciate that if teachers' colleges are neglected, especially in the ways described in this study, then the capacity to prepare teachers who will make a significant difference in the life of the nation, greatly diminishes. Education has to be engaged differently, not as an avenue the privileged uses to achieve the "good life", but as a mechanism that is geared towards empowering the nation as a whole. This latter point segues into another that the researcher wishes to foreground – the dearth of local written material and the reliance on foreign text.

The twin problem of paucity in local written material and a heavy reliance on foreign sources, highlighted by the findings, challenge the degree to which the Jamaican government is serious about supporting national intellectual growth. It is quite troubling that, like in many other post-colonial societies (Lewin & Stuart, 2003; Mayumbelo, 1999; Coutinho, 1992), Jamaica has not relinquished its heavy dependence on foreign knowledge base after almost fifty years of political independence. It is understandable that since education was established by the colonial powers, the system would have relied on their knowledge initially, but it has troubled many observers that there has not been a significant shift from that dependence. For example, as early as 1922, Under Secretary of State, Major Wood, commented on the fact that Jamaica was too dependent on English publication and urged the preparation of local material in History, Geography, Hygiene, and Gardening (Whyte, 1983). Today, almost nine decades later, the Under Secretary's underlying concern still has strong resonance. While the educators in this study acknowledged that there is some noticeable change at the lower levels of the education system, teachers' colleges today have yet to benefit in any real sense from local scholarship. This problem must be rectified if teacher education is to have greater societal significance and relevance.

While it is prudent for all societies to learn from others, Third World societies in particular, must recognize that they remain victims of imperialism and neocolonialism because of their heavy reliance on Western knowledge. As Altbach (1995) asserts "Neocolonialism can be quite open and obvious, such as the distribution of foreign textbooks in the schools of a developing country" (p. 452). The Jamaican government must, therefore, guard against its unwitting partnership in neocolonialism. The government can alleviate this unflattering role by providing the resources to generate local knowledge and facilitate the empowerment of teachers' colleges with culturally sensitive material.

Improvement in the status of Jamaican teachers' colleges depends a great deal on the improvement of government's attitude in terms of providing them with the necessary resources. If

these institutions remain materially ill-equipped it retards their capacity to provide experiences that will prepare teachers who can make a positive difference in a failing education system. Consequently, if teachers' colleges are not positioned to make this difference they are unlikely to have the prominence and presence of effective tertiary institutions. This situation perpetuates the perception that the Jamaican teachers' college is not a legitimate institution of higher education; hence, it continues to occupy a space of positional inferiority in relation to the University of the West Indies.

### **Undervaluing and under-rewarding the services of teachers' college faculty**

One important need for people who provide professional service is to feel that their efforts are justly rewarded. However, there is overwhelming evidence in this study to suggest that this need is largely unmet for teachers' college faculty in Jamaica. The participants in this study unanimously concur that they are grossly under-compensated for their services. In addition to faculty's wages being incommensurate with their out-put, there is a huge disparity between their remuneration and that of faculty at the UWI. The following comment eloquently illustrates the point:

I don't think how [faculty] in teachers colleges are paid really equate the duties and responsibilities they have. For instance, when you compare say a college lecturer with a lecturer at the University of the West Indies...Our teaching load is much greater and very, very, taxing; and I don't think it's factored into the salary equation. Because, as a lecturer, your weekly teaching contact hours is about eighteen, and that doesn't include supervision, time to meet with students, preparation time, assessment time, involvement in extracurricular activities, and that sort of a thing. So I don't believe that what [faculty] are paid is anywhere reflective of the quality and volume of work we are asked to do. (Frank)

Because of the inadequate salary they receive, many participants in this study report that they have to seek additional income to supplement their earnings. In the following comments two faculty members attest to this reality:

...Almost every lecturer at [this college] does something else. Some people teach part-time – they teach in high schools, [and] evening programs... to make a few extra dollars. And like me, I have been sewing for a long time and I earn a few dollars off that. But it's still scrimping and scraping for me. (Grace)

Personally, I need an additional income, so I try to seek part-time work. I do my own personal teaching on a Saturday. This has nothing to do with the college, but I have to do that 'cause my current salary does not give me enough to tide me over to the next payday. (Latoya)

The findings of this study indicate therefore, that the services of Jamaican teachers' college faculty are not only under-rewarded but under-valued. This results in a scenario that forces the educators to seek supplemental sources of livelihood. What accounts for this economic injustice, and what are the implications for teacher education and Jamaican education in general, are important questions to examine.

The apparent disregard for the work of Jamaican teachers' college faculty may be rooted in the historical fact that the teachers' college came into being as an institution for the black majority who were second class citizens in colonial Jamaica. Although the majority of teachers' colleges were established since the 1800s<sup>10</sup>, long before the UWI was established in 1948, they still have not been upgraded to full degree-granting status – a precondition for improved salary, as argued by government. However, the UWI was conceived as a degree granting institution from its inception. An essential difference between the UWI and the teachers' college is that the former was historically designed for

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<sup>10</sup> Mico (1836), Bethlehem (1861), Shortwood (1885), and St. Josephs (1897)

the middle class and the 'academic elite', while the latter was designed to serve the working-class and the educationally dispossessed. Consequently, the teachers' college was even considered the black man's secondary school (Miller, 1990) during the colonial period; and even today, not truly recognized as a tertiary institution. It is also important to note that teachers' college graduates were not considered suitable for teaching in traditional high schools<sup>11</sup> until in the 1950s, and even then, they taught only the lower grades<sup>12</sup> in those schools. On the other hand, UWI graduates [although not trained as teachers] were recruited to teach in the traditional high schools once the institutions started producing graduates (Miller, 1990). Hence, the stage was set for teachers' college faculty's service to be seen in a lower regard than that of UWI faculty.

The low regard for the educators' work, therefore, is part of an insidious process that continues to lock teachers' colleges into positional inferiority in relation to UWI. Based on the origin and treatment of teachers' colleges, the path was set for them to remain lower-tiered institutions unless radical interventions are made to alter that course. The status quo has largely remained, and paying teachers' college faculty pittance wages for their work is one way of sealing the fate of these institutions. Because teachers' colleges are not full degree-granting institutions, they are not considered legitimate tertiary institutions; hence, teachers' college faculty members are also not considered legitimate higher education faculty and are paid accordingly.

The Jamaican government has demonstrated little foresight regarding the implications of undervaluing the work of teachers' college faculty. To some degree, I understand the reluctance towards upgrading the status of teachers' colleges because of the short-term economic implications it would have for funding higher wages. However, government must also be cognizant of the long-term opportunity costs for not improving education in this fundamental way. There is little doubt that under-paying the individuals who prepare teachers will ultimately compromise the quality of the teaching services in general. The almost desperate struggle for economic survival among most teachers' college faculty will adversely affect their morale, commitment and professional dignity.

As found in this study, most lecturers have to engage in additional income generating activities to offset their expenses in a country with a high cost of living. This undoubtedly compromises commitment to their primary assignment in the colleges. Consequently, teachers' colleges have experienced the exodus of many educators to the USA, Canada and Britain where they feel that their services will be better rewarded and where they can enjoy a higher standard of living. These are usually competent, highly qualified and well-experienced individuals who have left a void in the education services. This vacuum may take a few months to fill quantitatively, but years qualitatively. Although these individuals may send well needed remittances back to Jamaica, their real contribution benefits the already enriched industrialized countries in which they now practice. Thus, industrialized powers continue to fortify their empires on the resources of Third World countries like Jamaica, albeit in more subtle and generally acceptable ways.

## Conclusion

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<sup>11</sup> Prior to that time high school teachers were largely expatriates and white and brown Jamaicans trained in Britain.

<sup>12</sup> Jamaican high schools normally comprised of grades from 7 – 12; or 7 – 13 in some schools that still adheres strictly to the colonial system. Grades 7 – 9 are considered lower school and 10 upwards are classified as upper school. It is established in the Jamaican school system that it is the 'smarter' teachers who are assigned to teach the upper grades.



The issues discussed in this paper are representative of the findings of a larger study that in whole and in part, strongly indicate that there are entrenched colonial vestiges that continue to undermine the Jamaican education system and teacher education in particular. The disregard for the educators' grounded knowledge, lack of material support for the colleges, and inadequate remuneration, are three poignant indicators of gross neglect. These issues present compelling evidence that Jamaica continues to operate an inequitable system of education. As reflected in the treatment of teachers' college faculty in relation to their counterparts at the University of the West Indies, teachers' colleges are not considered legitimate institutions of higher learning. Based on postcolonial discourse, the researcher concludes that this disregard for the educators, vis-à-vis teachers' colleges, is reminiscent of the colonial powers' negative attitude towards the social mobility of the black population during slavery and colonialism. Jamaica's inability to break free from these chains of inequity and elitism in education suggests that the society still has a significant distance to cover in extricating itself from an oppressive past.

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