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Abstract
This paper argues that contests over the production of knowledge, and conceptions of ‘research’ itself, will affect whose purposes are best served by education in the 21st century Caribbean.

In the colonial era, missionaries and administrators in the Commonwealth Caribbean drew heavily on the ‘mother country’ for knowledge and authority (Miller, 1984). Even after decades of political independence, education policies are strongly influenced by the knowledge and purposes of external actors, including the World Bank, ‘donor’ agencies, private education providers and consultants. Nevertheless, efforts to ‘decolonize’ the curriculum have achieved some success.

For national educational innovations to meet their objectives it is increasingly recognised that they must take account of the cultural context, and be informed by local knowledge. Consequently, research development initiatives are underway in several small, ‘non-campus’ countries. This paper uses a case study of Saint Lucia to explore some of the major issues arising. I demonstrate that some Saint Lucians are redefining, and effectively ‘decolonizing’, the meaning of ‘research’ in ways that are more appropriate to Saint Lucia’s oral traditions, its Kwéyòl culture, and its small population.

I argue that the emergence of a participatory, postcolonial research paradigm may help policy-makers to achieve the ‘right combination of local expertise, international experience and grass-roots consultation’ (Michel, 2000). However, this ‘postcolonial’ conception of ‘research’ is hotly contested by most ‘academic’ researchers and advocates of ‘policy-orientated’ research using management information systems. Furthermore, a ‘postcolonial’ conception of research is rejected outright by those external actors whose purposes it does not serve.
Introduction

The influence of geopolitics, external agendas and elite interests on education systems in the Commonwealth Caribbean has been an enduring one. In the colonial era, missionaries, planters and administrators drew heavily on the 'mother country' for knowledge and authority (Miller 1984, 38). Colonial education rewarded European behaviours and systematically denigrated Creole knowledge, language and cultures. As a result of the negotiated route to political independence many colonial institutions remained intact. Long after independence, the majority of the populations remained culturally excluded from the political and administrative strata of society.

In the postcolonial era, major efforts have been made to 'decolonize' the curriculum and harness the potential of education to contribute to national development goals. The dilemmas of the uncritical international transfer of education and policy practice have become increasingly clear (Crossley and Broadfoot 1992). Caribbean people have become rightly suspicious of international consultant's reports and external policy advice that often fail to appreciate the distinctive characteristics and circumstances of the Caribbean.

In education, as in other sectors, it is increasingly recognised that for innovations to succeed they must involve the knowledge and participation of stakeholders, and take proper account of the cultural context. Furthermore, if Caribbean societies are to pursue their own direction and purpose for education in the 21st century, it is essential that they develop more equally balanced partnerships with donor agencies and development banks. Efforts to generate knowledge through strengthening local and regional research capabilities can potentially help to mediate international agendas and contribute to more realistic and appropriate education policy and practice.
This paper uses a case study of Saint Lucia in the Eastern Caribbean to explore contemporary research development initiatives in small states. A postcolonial perspective is used to analyse and critically evaluate recent initiatives. This approach reveals some of the colonial assumptions embedded in the research process itself. Drawing on documentary sources and interview data, from governmental, educational and civil society organisations, I assert that Saint Lucians are decolonizing the meaning of educational 'research' itself in such ways that are more appropriate to the society's oral traditions, Kwéyòl culture and small population. I conclude by identifying some of the threats to local research development initiatives and the some of the constraints on the scope for Caribbean societies to pursue their own direction and purpose for education in the 21st century.

Education in the Caribbean

It is worth recalling that, “after the abolition of slavery the state began to focus its attention towards developing among the masses a new moral infrastructure to underpin the plantation society which succeeded slave society, but which had the same basic exploitative features without the legal infrastructure to support them” (Bacchus 1986, 11). Many of the European missionaries were compliant with this goal, and through their involvement in education often helped to legitimise the existing hierarchical social order. Schools and churches were seen as “the best instruments for the transformation of a rebellious slave population into a peaceful and obedient working class” (Smith 1962, 145) (cited in Bacchus, 1990, 150).

The knowledge taught in schools often bore no relationship to Caribbean realities. To this day people in the Commonwealth Caribbean tell of reciting Shakespeare and singing the British National Anthem in school every morning. One Saint Lucian told me how she remembers having to learn the names of clouds that only appear in temperate climates. Doing well at school meant leaving local knowledge of culture and the environment at home. The challenge of transforming colonial education systems to better meet the contemporary needs of Caribbean societies, has been a daunting one. It has been made all the more difficult by the fact that educational standards in the metropolitan countries are taken as a benchmark for education in the Caribbean.

Education Reform

At the start of the 21st century Caribbean societies, and their education systems, are undergoing profound social, cultural and economic transformations. Rapid globalization presents multiple challenges to the region, including rampant consumerism, the banana crisis,
the international drugs trade, growing ethnic tensions, crime and violence. Faith in the ability of education systems to address society's problems remains remarkably high, and in most, if not all countries, education still receives the largest share of government revenue.

A major process of education reform is underway in the Commonwealth Caribbean, influenced by international organisations, including the World Bank, UNESCO, CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), as well as national governments. Education reform is being driven by the 'economic transition from development strategies based on the exploitation of natural resources, to strategies based on the development of human resources and the mastery and production of knowledge and technology' (OECS, 1990). According to the Head of the OECS Education Reform Unit, "we are going through a revolution in education". According to Duncan (2000), the challenge for education is to help Caribbean nations defend their cultural integrity while also preparing their citizens for participation in the 'information age'.

Given the hope that the OECS countries are placing on education reform to safeguard the future well-being of their societies, it is understandable that attention has turned to the potential contribution of educational research. It is crucial to the prospects of these societies to ensure that education policies 'fit' the needs of the society in question. The causes of pressing educational problems, such as the so-called 'marginalisation of the black male' (Miller 1986) must be properly understood, if they are to be meaningfully addressed.

There are some dissenting voices about the pattern of education reform. To date, education reform in the Caribbean has tended to privilege quantity over quality. At considerable cost to their governments, universal primary education has been achieved in most countries, and for many, universal secondary education is within reach. Yet, with so much energy directed at educational expansion, little attention has been given to defining what is meant by education itself. "One of the key questions is whether small countries have been able to look at education and ask what it is for?" (Martina Augustin, personal communication)

With cable television and internet technology available even in some rural districts, students have access to new forms of knowledge, and are beginning to question the benefits of formal schooling. Indeed, the traditional authority of teachers, and the legitimacy of education itself is being challenged. More generally, the culture and lifestyles of the political and economic elite is increasingly criticised by mass Creole culture, with its strong sense of justice,
community, rhythm, spontaneity and improvisation. Previously silenced voices (Garvey 2000), including the voices of Rastafarians, are now finding expression in formerly colonial settings such as law courts, schools, churches and parliament itself. These voices can no longer be ignored in the education policy process if education is to meet the needs of the whole population.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Whereas the dilemmas of the uncritical international transfer of education policy have received some attention in the literature, less attention has been given to the dilemmas of transferring research paradigms, agendas, theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Indeed, such transfer is only considered problematic if research is recognised to be a socio-cultural process containing contextually bound assumptions.

‘Postcolonial theory’ stems from the postmodern critique of modernist, rationalist ways of thinking and knowing. It involves the discussion of experiences closely associated with colonization and decolonization including migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, and gender (Ashcroft, Griffiths et al. 1995).

Whereas previous studies of educational research capacity development in the Caribbean (Miller 1984; Ellis 1992; Ellis 1995) have been written from a modernist perspective, this paper adopts a postcolonial stance. Modernist writers have tended to focus on technical problems and shortcomings, such as the lack of human and financial resources, brain drain, inertia and poor research facilities and networks. Applied to the Caribbean, a postcolonial perspective is helpful for recognising both ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ practices and beliefs. It acknowledges the contradictions between colonial and Creole ways of knowing. Furthermore, it foregrounds themes such as gender, ethnicity and culture as important topics for social analysis.

**Collaborative Methodology**

I sought to develop a research methodology consistent with my emerging postcolonial perspective. I felt uneasy about going ‘in’ as an ‘outsider’ to study a small state in a manner reminiscent of the colonial anthropologists. I even wondered if being a white, English, middle class male disqualified me from conducting the study in the first place. Instead I wanted to work with, not ‘on’ or ‘for’ research participants, recasting the role of the researcher from expert to initiator, consultant and collaborator (Stoecker 1999).
A case study approach appealed to me as it allows an investigation to 'retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events... ' Yin, (1994, 3). Indeed, 'the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening’ Stake (1995, 12). A constructivist, largely qualitative, approach is consistent with the postcolonial rationale of the study in that it accepts the 'authenticity' of previously marginalised voices. This approach proved well suited to the interpretative tasks of mapping, analysing discourses, and identifying research development initiatives with research participants.

**Research Development Initiatives in Saint Lucia**

A survey of the research landscape illuminates a number of issues that cannot easily be explained without reference to the colonial era. For example, a widely held view is that it is improper to overstep one's designated place in society. Anyone who does so is immediately reprimanded by, 'who do you think you are?’ This respect for 'place' and sense of deference applies both within organisational hierarchies and society at large. It has contributed to a high level of disconnectedness between organisations and individuals, which has had a debilitating effect on efforts to foster closer collaboration. Other issues may owe more to the smallness of Saint Lucian society, and the dynamics or 'social ecology' that has evolved. Most noticeable in Saint Lucia is what Lowenthal (1987) described as 'managed intimacy'. There is a strong sense of 'minding your own business', and a high level of energy devoted to self interest. The assumption that 'everyone knows everyone else’ does not necessarily hold true.

By most accounts, research is seen as an individual activity, usually pursued for qualifications. The research landscape may be described as fragmented, uncoordinated and unconnected to the education policy process. Rather than focussing on the debilitating effects of the colonial legacy on contemporary efforts to develop research capabilities, in what follows I will concentrate on positive research development initiatives taking place.

**Governmental Organizations**

In 1994 a World Bank team visiting Saint Lucia reported that “education data collection, processing and reporting and feedback to the system are inadequate quantitatively and qualitatively to inform management in a timely, reliable fashion or to form a basis for policy making in the sector” (World Bank 1994, 5). Strengthening the capacity for research in the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports was part of the
Basic Education Reform Project 1994-1999. In 1998, a full-time Research Officer was appointed, and this post is now an integral part of the Corporate Planning Unit.

The post holder is making every effort to strengthen national research capacity, though not necessarily in the ways originally envisaged by the World Bank. From consultations with District Education Officers, a research agenda was drawn up, and masters students are encouraged to select research topics from the list. Where possible Saint Lucian consultants are commissioned to write research reports. Efforts are being made to work in collaboration with other organisations and a list of ‘research providers’ has been prepared. Local research findings are being disseminated through seminars and the publication of research summaries in the form of leaflets, newspaper articles, and on the Ministry website. ‘Research’ is being reconceptualised from something that ‘outsiders’ do, to something that Saint Lucians can do competently, and with confidence. The word ‘research’ is still laden with ethnic and gendered assumptions. It is revealing that the illustration on the front of one of the Ministry’s research leaflets was changed from the image of a white man to that of a black man. This in itself can be interpreted as one way that ‘research’ is being decolonized.

The Ministry is now undergoing a number of changes that may be described as ‘postcolonial’. Most significant is the transformation from a colonial model ‘command centre’ to a postcolonial ‘service centre’ (Ministry of Education 2000, 18). The Ministry is making a concerted effort to change its mode of operation from a top down, hierarchical organization to an organization based on consultation and collaboration with stakeholders. Whereas in the colonial era, policy was dictated from the centre to periphery, this transformation is evidence of “a movement away from technocratic solutions towards a dialogue between technocratic and popular conceptions”. Public consultations are now considered to be a form of research, an integral part of the education policy process. The value of parent involvement in education policy was verbalised to me by senior policy makers. “Parents’ concerns may be very basic… or sophisticated… but often they may raise things that we had not considered…”.

The value of stakeholder participation was also demonstrated in the preparation of Saint Lucia’s Education Development Plan for 2000-2005. This involved twenty-seven meetings across the country with teachers, parents and interested community members. According to the Minister of Education, the process was critical because it “brought together the best local expertise, international experience and grass roots consultation in an interactive way that facilitated the emergence of consensus” (Michel 2000, 3).
Another sign of change is the increasing interest shown by the Ministry of Education in collaborating with other line ministries and other organisations. Whereas in the colonial era ministries were hierarchical, and competitive bodies, there are signs that closer cooperation is now possible. This is most clearly demonstrated by recent proposals for adult and continuing education, whereby the intention is that the courses offered by separate Ministries will be brought together into one coherent programme. Knowledge recently generated by the Ministry of Agriculture, using the techniques of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Chambers 1994) is available to the Ministry of Education.

**Educational Organizations**

*University of the West Indies*

The University of the West Indies has played a formative role in the intellectual and political life of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Indeed many of its alumni are now serving as political leaders. As a parting 'gift' from the British, the UWI is arguably one of the most colonial of Caribbean institutions. Yet, paradoxically, it has contributed significantly to the decolonization of the Caribbean and the development of a Caribbean identity. Debates about the contribution of the university to regional and national development are very much alive (Howe 2000). While some writers warn of the dangers of corporatisation, and point to the 'dearth of critical academic research' since 1980 (Marshall 1999, 59), others welcome the opportunity for UWI to contribute more directly to public policy (Prichard 2000, 253). Such issues raise practical questions such as, what is the right balance between publishing in locally available journals or international journals? A concerted effort is now being made by the UWI to contribute more to the research needs of the non-campus countries, and there are proposals to set up a research support agency, to which competitive bids for research funding can be submitted. Research is being reconceptualised in a holistic way by the Education Evaluation Centre, to include dissemination and follow up. Professor Workeley Brathwaite (personal communication) notes that for research to have practical value in the Caribbean context, it is essential to hold a workshop to disseminate findings, and to identify a named person to see through any recommendations.

*Sir Arthur Lewis Community College*

After several efforts over the last few years, Saint Lucia’s main tertiary institution, the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC) officially opened a Research Institute in October 2000. A research project is currently being conducted on ‘students at risk’, and the hope is to gradually broaden to topics beyond education itself. The original aim of the institute was to
increase the regional and international reputation of the college, and to contribute to the generation of new knowledge about Saint Lucia (Millar 1996, 2). It will also provide the media with a pool of expert commentary and social analysis on national and regional news stories. Although the relationship between the SALCC and the Ministry of Education remains distant, a joint series of seminars has been launched. This will provide opportunities for educational researchers to discuss their findings with other educationalists and interested persons.

**Schools**

As well as teachers conducting research for qualification at certificate, bachelors and masters level, some school principals and teachers are conducting small-scale community surveys. One school-based study found a causal link between pupils coming to school without breakfast and disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Within schools, the culture of the classroom is gradually changing from teacher to learner centred (Wiltshire 1999). Greater attention is being given to promoting critical thinking, asking questions and student led research in all state run schools. Such changes should stimulate greater engagement by a wide cross-section of society in the debating and investigating the issues of the day.

**Civil Society Organisations**

**Folk Research Centre**

The Folk Research Centre (FRC), a small non-governmental organization, has played an influential role in the formation and promotion of Saint Lucian culture and identity. Since its establishment in 1973, the FRC has asserted that economic development must be matched by cultural development. FRC has promoted folk arts as a vehicle for change and to illustrate the development potential of cultural heritage especially in education and development.

As well as conducting research into aspects of Saint Lucian culture, vigorous efforts have been made by the FRC to promote the French Creole (Kwéyòl) language, food, dance and culture, through 'Jounen Kwéyòl' (meaning 'Creole Day') and other activities. The FRC also plays a valuable role in teaching, and nurturing enthusiasm for, traditional dances and drama in secondary schools. By drawing on African traditions, its work presents a postcolonial challenge to Euro-American ways of knowing and forms of expression. It has helped to legitimise Afro-centric community values and spiritual beliefs, and the roles of rhythm and improvisation in society. Through recording oral histories and oral literatures, including folk tales and proverbs, the FRC has demonstrated that Kwéyòl culture has intellectual traditions
and modes of analysis which, though they may not be written up as formal research reports, make an important contribution to national research capacity. Such work has had a direct impact upon debates about national language policies and proposals to establish a commission for the development of Saint Lucian French Creole. Over the years the FRC has also provided an intellectual home for artists, cultural activists and other persons, many of whom now play prominent public roles.

Calypso
A postcolonial analysis of research development in Saint Lucia must acknowledge the incisive social commentary of the calypsonians. Year after year, provocative and often overtly political songs inspired by the lived experience of ordinary Saint Lucians, reverberate around the island and pound the streets of Castries during the Carnival. Their lyrics quickly become far better known than the findings of the countless research projects conducted by student teachers. By supporting particular bands, the population at large contributes to the knowledge production process. Yet, from a modern, rationalist viewpoint, the knowledge and social analysis contained in such work is discounted and would not normally be considered to be ‘research’.

Community Based Research
At a local level, the Laborie community development committee, with the assistance of the Laborie Boys School Parent Teacher Association, is conducting a community survey to identify local opinion on human resource development in the village. Since this directly involves parents and other community members, this work is a genuine attempt by local people to take the initiative to generate the knowledge needed for sustainable development. Unlike academic studies written for accreditation, the results of this small scale survey are of direct utility to the community itself. It is recognised in Laborie that there is no need to wait for policy directives to come down from Castries, but that understanding and addressing pressing social issues, such as the ‘marginalisation of the male’, is a community responsibility.

Analysis and Future Prospects
In the above overview of research development initiatives in Saint Lucia, I have sought to show that in this context, research development does not simply mean better libraries, more researchers, more computers, and more published articles. Rather, it involves a deeper
process of reconceptualising the meaning of the ‘research’ itself to incorporate multiple ways of knowing.

While from a large state, modernistic viewpoint, such as that taken by the World Bank, there appears to be a lack of research capacity, and ‘inadequate educational data to inform policy’. This deficit analysis is challenged by the approach I have taken which highlights how much culturally appropriate research activity is going on. A postcolonial approach has further revealed some of the ethnic, gendered and cultural assumptions embedded in modernist conceptions of ‘research’.

In view of the fact that there are only 18 secondary schools in Saint Lucia, one has to question whether positivistic large scale, quantitative surveys are an appropriate research tool. Not only does the methodology contain large state assumptions, but to many non-specialists the research report will be incomprehensible. Far better, then, given Saint Lucia’s oral culture, that the Ministry of Education has sought to gather data through public consultations at which submissions may be made orally as well as submitted in writing. Through a consultative approach to knowledge generation Saint Lucia is making the most of its small population size, since on many public policy issues it is possible for all interested persons to have their say. The Ministers’ claim to have achieved a ‘national consensus’ on education policy would be virtually inconceivable in a larger state.

In educational institutions too, there are examples of the research process being ‘decolonized’. The value of research done for examinations is being intensely questioned by students themselves, “it is really sad that on this island so many persons put in sweat and blood and tears into research that is .. can be so useful... and [...] ...nothing is being done with it ... its like ... [...] ... the research is there just as an exam...that is what you have to do to pass through the school” (Focus group of student teachers). In contrast to these studies which sit, unread on library shelves, Calypso as a form of social analysis appears far more appropriate to Saint Lucia’s musical and oral traditions, its Kwéyòl culture and small population. If education reform is to succeed in not only quantitative but qualitative terms, the knowledge produced through artistic and expressive forms can be seen as an essential resource for policy makers.

By adopting a postcolonial perspective I have shown that vigorous efforts are underway in governmental, educational and civil society organisations to develop models of research that
are more appropriate to Saint Lucian realities. However, it is necessary to recognise that these models may in themselves be under threat from internal and external forces and from ‘selective hearing’ by those in positions of power. Like elsewhere in the Caribbean and other small states, Saint Lucia faces the contradictory imperatives of global competition and the need to defend local cultural values.

First, at governmental level, it is proposed to introduce Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) as part of the second Basic Education Project. EMIS is intended integrate the work of Research Officers and the Statistician in the Corporate Planning Unit. This will inevitably impact upon the meaning of ‘research’, and is likely to result in a more ‘scientific’, quantitative approach to educational knowledge and decision making, devaluing qualitative and artistic knowledge, despite its appropriateness in a small state.

Second, a recent theft of oral histories, video recordings and valuable equipment from the Folk Research Centre demonstrates the vulnerability of national archives. Furthermore, due to declining interest by funders, the Folk Research Centre itself is fighting for financial survival. As yet, it has failed to attract the substantial government funding that it needs.

Third, and most importantly, it has been assumed in this study that the Government of Saint Lucia will continue to have at least some influence over the purpose and direction of education policy. Yet, in practice the role of the state in relation to education policy is changing rapidly. North American technology corporations such as Intel and Knowledge House claim to be ‘redefining the way the world learns’. Their influence is pervasive and the momentum behind their marketing messages is apparently unstoppable. Under the World Trade Organizations’ General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations, it looks likely that transnational providers of educational goods and services will be able sue governments who show preferential treatment to national providers of education goods and services. This amounts to antidemocratic practice and the ‘abuse of hegemonic power’ which ‘places new restraints on the ability of independent, particularly developing nations to assert self-determinism’ (Barrow-Giles 1999). Unless trade liberalisation is challenged, Saint Lucia, and other Caribbean states will have less and less influence on the direction and purpose of education in the 21st century.
Conclusions

Local knowledge and postcolonial conceptions of research will not solve all Saint Lucia’s problems. Indeed, I concur with the Ministers’ view that for Saint Lucia to achieve more appropriate education policies, both internal and external knowledge are needed to achieve the ‘right combination of local expertise, international experience and grass-roots consultation’ (Michel, 2000).

Speaking after the tragic attack in Castries Cathedral on New Years Eve, Saint Lucia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rt Hon George Odlum, made a plea that “we must then examine ourselves closely and analyze the root causes of alienation, hatred and division in our society” (quoted in The Star Newspaper, 6 January 2001). Due in large measure to the historical exclusion of Kwéyòl language and culture from colonial institutions and their successor organisations, there is now an urgent need for more attention to be given to Kwéyòl perspectives.

The research development initiatives identified above can be interpreted as part of Saint Lucia’s continuing drive for genuine emancipation and some degree of political autonomy. Saint Lucians have begun to redefine and even ‘decolonize’ the meaning of ‘research’ itself, in a way that more appropriately reflects its oral traditions, Kwéyòl culture and small population size. A paradigm shift is taking place, from a hierarchical, ‘academic’ and ‘colonial’ mode of educational research towards a ‘popular’, ‘postcolonial’, and participatory mode. At their heart, debates about research development in the small states of the Caribbean are about whose knowledge counts in the development process. However unwelcome, it is no surprise to find that a ‘postcolonial’ conception of research is rejected by those whose purposes it does not serve.
References


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**Biography**

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