Mapping the Contours of Caribbean Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Regional scholars in the Caribbean context have long advocated for quality early childhood education. The majority of their contributions however, focus primarily on curriculum, policy, and to a lesser extent, teaching practices. In this article, we broaden the scope of extant literature by conceptualizing a model for Caribbean early childhood education, one which draws on and supports an anti-colonial and decolonizing perspective. Specifically, we interrogate the enduring legacy of colonialism on teaching and learning practices—and illustrate how these manifest in contemporary schooling processes. Equally significant, we examine and critique underlying epistemologies that frame current regional approaches, and offer an alternative framework that accents cultural knowledges in curriculum, pedagogy and teacher education. In response, we foreground childhood decolonization as integral to the development of positive racial and cultural identity, and in such vein, offer curricula, pedagogical and institutional (i.e., teacher education) suggestions consonant with an anti-colonial and decolonizing approach to early childhood education in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Keywords

Anti-colonial; Caribbean; early childhood education; decolonization; curriculum policy; cultural identity

Introduction

In diverse national and international contexts, researchers continue to emphasize quality early childhood education and programming as a means of promoting optimal development in young children aged birth to eight. Typically, these discussions revolve around age-appropriate early learning curricula, such as play-based learning, teaching practices, family relationships, and policy. In the Caribbean, specifically, regional scholarship on early years education has addressed similar components: namely, teaching practices (e.g., Edwards & Rake; 2016; Latty & Ledbetter, 2016) and curricula (Caribbean Child Development Centre, 2010). Yet to date, no extant work has systematically and holistically examined the larger field of early childhood education in the Caribbean context through an anti-colonial and decolonizing lens. Such an approach interrogates and critiques ongoing Eurocentric influences in the knowledge base of early childhood education currently deployed in Caribbean contexts, and advocates for the integration of local knowledge—so as to propose

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a Caribbean-centered (English-speaking Caribbean) early childhood education in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and teacher education.

Drawing on anti-colonial Caribbean theory (Escayg, 2014) as well as Caribbean social-political thought, this paper establishes a Caribbean-centered model of early childhood education. First, we examine the colonial legacy of the Caribbean region, and illustrate how such historical process has shaped current schooling practices, including teacher education. Next, we provide an overview of the theoretical framework guiding the present discussion, delineating the specific tenets which inform our model of Caribbean early childhood education. Then, we engage in a more substantive discussion on the elements of curriculum, pedagogy and teacher education. We conclude with a review of the main contours, their applicability to regional educational and social anti-colonial reform, and suggestions for future research.

The Colonial Legacy

For many developing countries, recollections of colonisation unearth deep seated memories about institutionalized practices which for centuries marginalized the practices, beliefs, cultures and unique identities of indigenous peoples or those formerly enslaved. As suggested by Phillips and Whatman (2007) and Walke (2000) the impetus behind appeals to decolonize education is rooted in the position that education has continued to be used as a tool to marginalize the validity and the richness of the former colonized by negating the value of their beliefs, practices and cultures and minimizing how these benefit the teaching and learning process.

In his research, for instance, Lopes Cardozo (2012) argued decolonizing education implies the "removal of imposed educational practices which have little bearing or meaning to indigenous peoples while simultaneously highlighting the value or 're-evaluating' the importance of the indigenous cultures through education" (p. 767). For many islands in the Caribbean this poses a particularly poignant challenge.

The Caribbean Community comprises of a group of fifteen member state islands predominantly surrounded by the Caribbean Sea (Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Republic of Haiti, Montserrat, Federation of St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Barbados, Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Jamaica, Republic of Suriname, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago).   With a shared history of being former colonies, for hundreds of years these islands were used as trophies of war and, for the most part, functioned as "cash cows" for Britain and France. Considered to be particularly valuable for its sugar and rum exports and the hundreds of thousands of slaves that produced them, these islands thrived on a political and social system where the few elites were elevated and the vast majority (usually of darker skin) were disenfranchised and marginalized (King, 1998; Layne, 1999; Miller, 1998).

The West Indian islands are highly cosmopolitan and racially diverse. However, despite this diversity, education continues to be very two dimensional and seemingly untouched by this richness of the history of its peoples (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). In the over two hundred years since the abolition of slavery, education continues to reflect a highly segregated and exclusionary system along racial, gender and socio-economic lines. This is very similar to the practices during colonization (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998; Hamilton, 1997; Miller, 1999).

After the abolition of slavery, education was used as a means to maintain a social status quo which perpetuated the marginalization of non-whites, and maintained the dominant hegemonic positions of others. To date, as suggested by Boisselle (2016), the colonial legacy of the Caribbean continues to shape our education structures in subtle and more overt ways. This system has largely been promoted both as a response to global shifts and the need for the Caribbean islands to keep up with these shifts, and secondly, for the tendencies to privilege education as influenced by more economically advantaged countries while minimising the value of our indigenous culture and the quality of our education product (Miller, 1999). Additionally, research suggests that in some Caribbean contexts, teacher-student relationships and pedagogies may in fact reflect many defining characteristics of the colonial social order.

The Colonial Legacy and the Current Education System: Themes of Congruency

With the advent of Independence, many English-Speaking Caribbean states sought to decolonize the education system by providing students with curricula and learning opportunities consistent with their socio-cultural realities. However, although much has been accomplished in such regard, the influences of the colonial legacy continue to permeate pedagogical approaches across different levels of education, including the early years. Bristol (2010), for instance, demonstrated how specific components of teaching stem from and in essence, reproduce, elements of colonial psycho-social conditioning.

Drawing on key premises of Beckford's (1976/2001) "*plantation society*", namely that of domination, Bristol (2010) described plantation pedagogy as both oppressive and as a practice of subversion. Given the scope of the present article, we explore the tenets of plantation pedagogy that mirror oppressive teacher-student relationship. According to the author, instructional practices include hierarchal relations of power (that is, the teacher holds all the power in the classroom), passivity (the teacher dispenses knowledge to students), and a "black practice of whiteness" (p. 173). With regards to the latter, the author explains such term by linking elements of Fanon's (1952/1967) psychological exegesis of the colonizer-colonized relationship, most notably mimicry, to teaching practices. The argument posits that within the classroom, the teacher performs the educational practices reminiscent of the colonial schooling experience to which he/she was exposed (hence the term "black practice of whiteness"). As a result of the psychological conditioning and violence of his/her earlier schooling experience, the teacher fails to incorporate—and perhaps assign value—to students' local/cultural knowledges "such as storytelling, dance, the Carnival and spontaneous community gatherings" (p. 173).

To advance Bristol's treatise, we argue that in some cases, as a result of the colonial experience, along with recent globalization agendas, teachers impute little significance to cultural/local knowledges. Indeed, the debasement of self, both as a cultural and racial body, is reminiscent of Fanon's "epidermalization of inferiority" (which refers to the internalization of African inferiority vis a Vis European superiority), producing a fractured consciousness marked by a desire for "whiteness" and more pointedly, what it embodies: power. In some cases, the colonized consciousness may impact teachers' disciplinary practices.

Discipline as a feature of plantation pedagogy bears striking parallels to the ways in

which the overseers and plantation owners controlled and surveilled the enslaved and later on, indentured labourers. Floggings and extreme forms of punishment were not uncommon; in fact, as the literature shows, physical violence was a core component of the colonial relationship in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Physical violence was strongly linked to social control, but racial doctrines that dehumanized non-white bodies also provided a rationale for inhumane treatment. In the context of Caribbean schooling, the use of harsh discipline (although it is important to note that corporal punishment in schools has been legally outlawed in Trinidad and Jamaica) signifies to some extent, a colonial psyche functioning in the gaze of the colonized such that delusions serve as truth; or to offer a more psychoanalytical interpretation, could such disciplinary measure function as an opportunity to relieve the psyche of deep collective and historical trauma? Could the violence evident in discipline practices indicate an expression of internal disequilibrium caused by experiences of powerlessness and silence? Although the author conceptualizes plantation pedagogy by referring to the Trinidadian context, there is evidence to suggest that teachers in other Caribbean nation states also employ features of plantation pedagogy, chief among them being harsh disciplinary practices (e.g., Anderson & Payne, 1994; Casey, 2016).

Although there is a dearth of empirical literature on how such practices affect students' learning outcomes, Caribbean writers (e.g., Hodge,1970; James, 1963/1969; Lamming, 1953; Lovelace, 1996) have revealed how colonial education affected students' sense of self, identity and belonging. Indeed, childhood colonization and decolonization, a tenet of anti-colonial Caribbean theory (Escayg, 2014), derived from a literary analysis of a few of these works, exemplified how colonial schooling practices are organized around a central principle of psychological conditioning; consequently, anti-colonial Caribbean theory, as applied to young children's educational experiences, advocates for anti-colonial teaching practices and teacher training.

We argue that these interventions are necessary, because as we have discussed earlier, in some instances, teachers' pedagogies tend to embody particular elements of the colonial psycho-social legacy. Conversely, in the curriculum of teacher education, however, we also find a similar record of colonial imposition.

Colonial Influence on Teacher Education and Implications for Current Curriculum Practices

(In this piece, we refer to curriculum as the planned and unplanned experiences children have in school or which are reflective of those promoted by the school context. This includes teachers' practices and expectations.)

Despite past and contemporary appeals to contextualize teacher education, across the islands, teacher education programmes continue to draw predominantly on American and Eurocentric theories, which have largely prevented the achievement of this goal. A review of teacher education courses from several of the islands serves as testament to this dissonance where the philosophical underpinnings of the programmes demonstrate a heavy bias toward American and European theorists including; Bruner, Piaget, Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky and Montessori.

While valuable, none of these theories were developed with consideration of Caribbean children and therefore, while useful as a guide, cannot solely be used as the theoretical foundation guiding how teachers are prepared and how they are expected to teach young children. To do this means we perpetuate the

legacy of our teachers being ill-prepared to teach Caribbean children. Beyond the obvious challenges with this, Nsamenang (2007) stated this is dangerous because it minimizes the cultural identity and the uniqueness of eighty percent of the world's children who live outside of Europe and North America. As he suggested, "… Western conceptions of the construct must not simply be adjusted for use" [for children who are of a different culture] (p.1). Caribbean teacher education (including the curriculum requirements) has been very guilty of just this where programmes have not done enough to prepare teachers to meet Caribbean children's needs. What this means is that our children will continue to reap the negative implications of this practice especially as it relates to how they are treated in the school setting; the expectations teachers have of them and the pedagogical practices used to teach them.

Nsamenang (2007) has cautioned against taking culturally insensitive approaches to early childhood education, where teachers' practices are not aligned to the "ethnocultural realities and developmental norms" of the children. For instance, though learning through play is a highly recommended practice for young children, Caribbean children use play differently, and as such, an understanding of this ought to be explicitly articulated in the development of the curriculum (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994; Long, 2013).

It is in light of both the historical and contemporary manifestations of the colonial legacy on the Caribbean educational system, we now turn to a discussion on a theoretical framework that interrogates such practices and offer an anti-colonial conceptual lens from which to establish a regional and culturally relevant approach to early childhood education.

Theoretical Framework

Anti-colonial Caribbean theory (Escayg, 2014) is an interdisciplinary framework that foregrounds historical analyses and critiques of colonization in relation to the social, economic, education and psychological effects that continue to impact Caribbean peoples. While such framework comprises of several tenets, in this paper, we use the concepts of resistance, childhood decolonization, indigenous/cultural knowledges and practices, as well as creolization to articulate the Caribbean-centered model of early childhood education.

Anti-colonial Caribbean theory underscores resistance as central to anti-colonial praxis, and resistance as linked to the diversity of ways oppressed peoples have made sense of their realities and, in the process, have opposed the colonial social order. On this account, Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) explained that "it is a way of celebration of oral, visual, textual, political, and material resistance of colonized groups" (p. 301). Working with this central notion, anti-colonial Caribbean theory emphasizes the multiplicity of forms and creative expressions found in historical and contemporary narratives of resistance.

Also, similar to anti-colonial theory which supports the "decolonizing of the mind" (Dei, 2006, p. 11), anti-colonial Caribbean theory is articulated from a perspective that seeks to lay bare the ongoing forms of domination so as to further advance decolonizing initiatives. Such theory expands on the *decolonization of the mind* precept by arguing for a more holistic trajectory of the decolonization process. In other words, anti-colonial Caribbean theory conceptualizes colonization and decolonization from a life-span perspective by including the period of childhood and by examining how such early experiences are manifested in adult life, particularly in the areas of social-emotional well-being and development.

Moreover, decolonization is operationalized, similar to Dei (2006), to include the active resistance to current imposition of Western belief systems, as well as colonial legacies of thought that delegitimize Indigenous knowledge and values, positioning these as sub-standard or inferior to dominant epistemologies. What differentiates anti-colonial Caribbean theory, however, is that it recognizes the early years as a critical period in which children may develop and practice inimical colonial ideologies of race, much to their own psychological and social detriment; consequently, anti-colonial Caribbean theory supports educational practices consonant with the goals of childhood decolonization: These involve a critique of the knowledge systems that inform pedagogical practice, learning and teaching processes, as well as the curriculum utilized in early learning classrooms.

Second, decolonization in early childhood education emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural knowledges into the classroom, such as storytelling, music and culturally relevant curriculum and play materials. With regard to race and identity, decolonization in early childhood subverts colonial discourses of race, particularly those which play an influential role in shaping young children's beliefs and attitudes towards skin colour and hair texture (Escayg, 2014; Escayg, 2017). In fact, empirical work on Jamaican children (e.g., Ferguson & Cramer, 2007) and Trinidadian children (Escayg, 2014; 2017) clearly highlight the need for teaching practices that foster racial pride.

Apart from decolonization, race and identity, the concept and discourses associated with creolization present much significance to the development of a Caribbean model of early childhood education. Generally defined, and largely attributed to scholars such as Braithwaite (1971), Nettleford (1978), and Patterson (1975),

creolization theory argues that Caribbean culture signifies a combination of both African and European practices. It is noteworthy to point out, however, that scholars have critiqued the Creolization discourse for centering primarily Afro-Caribbean cultural forms (e.g., Khan, 2007).

Notwithstanding such critiques, the creolization discourse helps elucidate the formation and transformations of Caribbean cultural practices, and further, informs the Caribbean early childhood education model as it provides the historical and conceptual lens to trace the genesis of Caribbean cultural traditions, and to demonstrate their relevance to children's educational and social experiences. As well, creolization dovetails with the anti-colonial Caribbean framework as it is derived from historical and social legacies that while inherently violent and unequal, gave rise to a pattern of resistance among Caribbean peoples—one which utilizes the creative arts as a means of self-expression, decolonization and community/nation building.

Articulating Caribbean Culture Through Creolization Theory

Although it is generally recognized that colonial histories vary according to the nation state, (King-Dorset, 2008), conceptualizing a definition of Caribbean culture, and one which engages with both context-specific differences as well regional commonalities, is a long-standing tradition in the canon of Caribbean social and cultural thought. Indeed, many scholars have conceived of and refined articulations of Caribbean culture through the prism of Creolization theory. Such body of scholarship, and one which continues to evolve, often underscores transplantation, transformation, and the significance of African cultural traditions (e.g., Bolland, 2006) as central

elements in the development of Caribbean culture.

Creolization theory highlights how African and European cultural forms were combined to create a distinct "Creole" culture, while also recognizing the unequal power relations inherent in such process. In one of the seminal contributions, Braithwaite (1971) described creolization as a symbiotic, that is, involving the cultural traditions of Africa and Europe; and further argued that these informed the social practices of Jamaican citizens, both Black and White. Simply stated, such process was mutual insofar as the colonizer and the colonized adapted to each other's cultural traditions. However, Braithwaite further characterized the engagement of European cultural traditions by African Jamaicans as "mimicry". Implicit in such charge is a recognition that the colonial power embedded in European cultural traditions affected the psyche of the colonized such that this "performance" was valued and endowed with a measure of social significance, particularly among middle-class Jamaicans.

The belief that the process of creolization—largely because of the colonial conditions under which it arose—privileges one cultural form over another, (that is, European over African) has been expressed by other scholars (e.g., Nettleford, 1970). Such claim has merit in the sense that it elucidates how specific characteristics of the colonial relationship (e.g., economic and social power, violence, and oppression) circumscribed the ways in which cultural traditions were deployed in the Caribbean context. In line with this view, Hall (2001) acknowledged that the development of Caribbean culture and cultural forms involved unequal relations of power between the colonized and the colonizer. One example that can be gleaned from his analysis points to the colonial violence (psychological and economic) of slavery and indentureship in the Caribbean

Diaspora,— in which African and Indo cultures were brought to— and subsequently retained and transformed. Yet, to expound on the issue of power as it pertains to the creolization process requires a more comprehensive lens, one that extends beyond the historical colonized-colonizer relationship. In recent years, for instance, due to formal independence, power relationships can be found in the specific cultural practices that constitute the discourse and imagery surrounding national identity (see, for example, discussions on nationalism in Trinidad).

Notwithstanding its violent antecedents, and contemporary manifestations, creolization signifies creativity and resistance. That is, while there is much debate surrounding the "purity" of African traditions or what were transferred to their descendants in the Caribbean Diaspora, it is generally agreed that for the most part, particular elements of African cultural traditions have exerted a profound influence on Caribbean culture (Bolland, 2006). These include cultural art forms such as music, dance and food (Chude-Sokei, 2015; Hall, 2001). As King-Dorset (2008) noted, "...dance, music and song from the cultural traditions of Africa survived better than other elements of African culture after the traumatic experience of transportation to the Caribbean" (p. 3). The fact that such practices bear relevance to contemporary art forms across the Caribbean testify to the enduring influence of African cultural traditions.

Despite the prevailing presence of the African cultural traditions, definitions of Caribbean culture and theoretical models including Creolization, must take into account the racial and cultural diversity of Caribbean peoples. For while the influence of African cultural traditions cannot be ignored or dismissed, the silencing or marginalizing of other voices and experiences in the articulations of a regional culture can prove equally limiting.

Bolland (2006) offered a similar sentiment when he noted that "Afro-Creole is not the whole or the end point of creole culture. The creole Caribbean has no end point" (p. 10). By drawing on these main currents of Creolization, its critiques, and elements of anti-colonial Caribbean theory, we now proceed to examine one feature of a Caribbean-centered approach to early childhood education: curriculum.

Caribbean-Centered Early Childhood Education: Curriculum

As the literature reveals, the majority of early childhood curriculum models stem from Euro-centric, Western perspectives. In recent years, for instance, the play-based approach has gained increasing attention, largely because some research evidence indicates positive associations between learning through play and children's social and emotional development (e.g., Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Paskek, 2006). Notwithstanding the influence of such approaches in Caribbean early childhood education, regional scholars have developed learning outcomes, incorporating both cultural and developmentally appropriate practices. This framework has been used to develop both a Jamaican and Trinidadian early learning curriculum guideline (Williams & Charles, 2008). In this section, we examine and assess the Caribbean Learning Outcomes along with the Trinidadian and Jamaican Early Learning Curricula with the aim of demonstrating how tenets of anti-colonial—namely that of decolonization—and Creolization, that is, the cultural traditions of the Caribbean—can be utilized to enhance specific features of the early learning curriculum.

While economic and other barriers exist, there have been notable attempts at constructing a regional curriculum for early childhood education, one that responds to the needs and well-being of Caribbean children (see, for example, Williams & Charles, 2008). Fundamental to such efforts have been the Child Focus II project. Established in 2001, one of the central goals of this project was curriculum development (Williams & Charles, 2008). Regional discussions on early learning curriculum began in 2004, however, with a workshop that included "representatives from eighteen countries…. regional early childhood specialists in child health and development, pre-school education, teacher and practitioner training, care of children from birth to three and in research on the quality of early learning environments in the region" (p. 24). This workshop led to the development of a regional learning outcomes framework and is characterized by the following strands: "1. A healthy, strong, well-adjusted child, 2. An effective communicator, 3.A child who values own culture, 4. A critical thinker and independent learner, 5. A child who respects self, others and the environment,6. A resilient child" (p. 25). These strands, while each containing specific features, appear to coalesce around developmental considerations; namely, physical and emotional (strand 1), cognitive (strand 2) social-emotional (strand 3), cognitive (strand 4), social (strand 5) and social-cognitive (strand 6). The developmental focus as it has been operationalized in the learning outcome framework has guided the development of both the Jamaican and Trinidadian early learning curriculum guidelines.

Review of Existing Curriculum Guidelines: Trinidad and Jamaica

While we acknowledge the diversity of curriculum approaches in the Caribbean context, we situate our analysis within a review of Trinidad and Jamaica curriculum guidelines because these derive from the regional framework—and hence, can serve as an entry point from which to begin conceptualizing the

constitutive elements of a Caribbean-centered early learning curriculum.

The National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide (2006) of Trinidad and Tobago is similar to the regional framework as it foregrounds its curricula approaches in five central developmental strands: "wellbeing, effective communication, citizenship, intellectual empowerment and aesthetic expression" (p. 32). Such developmental thrust emphasizes the importance of attending to the "whole child" by way of recognizing the domains of development, the relationship between and among them, and by illustrating how learning opportunities that take into account these domains can foster optimal outcomes for young children. Equally significant objectives include parent-teacher relationships, inclusive teaching, and research-informed practice (p. 14). More plainly, the Trinidad ECE curriculum "was...designed and developed to ensure that curriculum content and instructional strategies...will assist ECCE teachers in facilitating and encouraging learning and development appropriate to and inclusive of all children, including children with identified disabilities, challenges, and learning and developmental needs" (p. 15). Such an approach, however, is informed by specific bodies of knowledge that may be characterized as dominant educational standpoints, for they continue to exert much influence in the field of early childhood education.

Although the curriculum has at its core developmental considerations, it also consists of a wide range of theoretical perspectives. According to the document, "the National ECCE Curriculum Guide promotes an eclectic view" (p. 19); and as a result, incorporates theories of "cognitive development, constructivism, socio-constructivism, psychosocial, humanistic, ecological, multiple intelligences, brain-based learning, constructivist, social-cultural, and

post-modernist" (pp. 19-20). Incorporating these diverse theories allows for multiple interpretations of what constitutes knowledge, the socio-cultural factors that bear upon children's learning as well as their development, and from a more post-modern perspective, the ways in which children are not only culturally and historically situated in their social worlds, but also the lived experiences and types of knowledges that originate from these experiences. Yet, noticeably absent are Caribbean-centered theories that contextualize children's experiences within the appropriate historical, social and cultural processes.

The *Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum Guide* (2010) shares similar characteristics with its Trinidadian counterpart. Underscoring its developmental objectives are also strands identified in the regional learning outcomes (i.e., "wellness, communication, valuing culture, intellectual empowerment, respect for self, others and the environment and resilience" p. v). Of equal importance to note is that the Jamaican document is geared towards students between the ages of four and five.

Although both regional documents contain various strengths, such as the developmental domains and considerations of culture, the weaknesses, however, include epistemological underpinnings of such models (that is, Eurocentric perspectives without any reference to Caribbean social thought), the lack of emphasis on decolonization through anti-colonial pedagogies, and the failure to conceptualize and provide teaching strategies that would challenge colonial meanings attached to racial characteristics, such as skin colour and hair texture. The preliminary model of Caribbean early childhood education which we have proposed addresses these gaps by utilizing the decolonizing framework of anti-colonial Caribbean theory.

Decolonizing Framework for Caribbean Early Childhood Education: Curriculum

From the writings of Fanon (1952/1967), to literary prose (e.g., Edgell, 1982; Hodge, 1970; Lamming 1953; Lovelace,1996) to the melodious rhythms of reggae and calypso beckoning our minds to imagine alternate social-economic possibilities, to the storytelling of elders invoking cultural elements with a particular wisdom of the soul, to the impassioned speeches of great political leaders combining scintillating intellect with an astute cognizance of the conditions of the oppressed, Caribbean peoples have consistently exposed and challenged the psychological and economic legacies of colonization. Rarely have such emancipatory approaches been incorporated into the teaching and learning activities of early childhood education. In the discussion below, we outline a decolonizing framework, one which accents the early childhood education context as a potential site for decolonizing praxis.

From the outset, it is important to note that what we are suggesting is a decolonizing framework that can be integrated across the different strands of the curriculum. It is not a stand-alone product; rather, a decolonizing framework consists of overarching ideals which can then inform the existing curricula strands. Therefore, we define the decolonizing framework as an epistemological lens derived from historical and current socio-cultural analyses of the Caribbean region, and the lived experiences of Caribbean peoples and their cultural knowledges. Namely, the decolonizing framework recognizes and resists the ongoing forms of neo-colonial domination and globalization such as the imposition of Western knowledge, culture, ways of knowing, and Western cultural artifacts (e.g., play materials). This framework also centers childhood decolonization (and resistance to globalization) as a spiritual, moral, cultural, and psychological right for Caribbean children. It positions teachers and parents as the conduits for developing a consciousness that fosters critical and accurate understandings of the historical colonial legacy and its relationship to contemporary realities, and one which supports positive racial, regional and national identity.

Ideally, we hope that young Caribbean children in the contemporary era and beyond will possess the presence of mind to actively discern and resist the hegemonic values, imageries and practices of powerful nation states that continue to impinge upon the economic and cultural autonomy/identity of Caribbean countries. In short, we want our Caribbean children to develop and appreciate anti-colonial ways of being and knowing. The ways in which these particular elements are consonant with the strands of the regional framework are indicated below; however, for purposes of clarity, we have organized these around the central goal of the proposed curriculum: decolonization. Accordingly, we begin each objective with the heading "**The decolonized child will**":

- Not valorize the colonial/western culture and knowledges at the expense of his/her own cultural history, ways of knowing and knowledges (**wellness strand**). This also applies to colonial meanings attached to skin colour and hair texture (Escayg, 2017).
- Be able to construct narratives (stories) that center the accuracy of the historical encounter (and the effects); engage in literacy activities that reflect his/her socio-cultural context and that of the region (specific songs, poems, etc.), and value his/her own local dialect (**effective communication**).
- Use the arts, for example, dramatic activities, to express pride in his/her identity

and physical characteristics **(aesthetic expression and intellectual empowerment).** Drama such as plays can also be used to teach children about the history of their local context.

- Appreciate the diverse elements of regional and local culture; Awareness of how these have been used as means of resistance in the past **(citizenship & intellectual empowerment)**.

- Thrive in a learning environment that embraces and supports individual differences (**Valuing culture)**.

- Display consciousness that despite innate differences/ unique characteristics/ traits they *[and others]* have the ability and the opportunity to do and try new things without fear (Kinkead-Clark, 2017) **(resilience & respect for self & others)**.

- Develop and nurture a decolonized consciousness that is not rooted in historical amnesia, but rather, in a keen awareness of how the past continues to inform the present (Escayg, 2017). This applies specifically to helping children recognize how and why certain meanings and values were attached to physical characteristics such as skin colour and hair texture (**intellectual empowerment)**.

It is important to note that the aforementioned elements are not an exhaustive list. As a preliminary framework, it represents a nascent stage of development, which we will refine and further elaborate in the near future by drawing on an empirical study with early childhood teachers and administrators from the English-speaking region. Apart from the curricula efforts, however, we have also considered how a decolonizing framework can be applied to teachers' pedagogical approaches.

Caribbean Early Childhood Education: Decolonizing Pedagogy

While researchers have often operationalized pedagogy in accordance with their particular perspectives/positions, the definition which we employ in this article—and one which aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of our present work—is "any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another" (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999, p. 3). In doing so, firstly, we broaden the scope of teaching activities to include a wide range of instructional practices, for instance, play-based learning and classroom organization; and secondly, we connect dimensions of decolonized consciousness with approaches specific to a student-centered learning process. To contextualize our discussion however, it would be helpful to first review the historical and contemporary literature on teaching practices in the Caribbean.

As an integrated system of domination, the colonial relationship extended well beyond the economic, social and political spheres; indeed, it pervaded all contexts of daily life, and education was no exception. In Trinidad, for example, features of colonial education such as curriculum and instructional strategies were designed to create a psyche so deeply committed to the colonizer's interests, culture, and beliefs, that the colonized would not only come to see him/her self through the eyes of the colonizer, but also consciously accept the myth of European superiority, thereby undermining his/her own liberation (London, 2001, *emphasis added*). Combining London's analysis of colonial education with Fanon's (1952/1967) psychoanalytical reading of the social processes germane to the colonizer-colonized relationship, we gesture towards a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the goals of colonial education: to develop a pathological sense of self in the colonized, to develop a love and admiration for

the colonizer, and to hinder critical consciousness among the oppressed. James (1963/1969) provided a compelling personal narrative of such experience:

It was only long years after that I understood the limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect which imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion for success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal. (p. 30, as cited in Lavia, 2006, p. 284)Inimical in form and function, the aims of colonial education served to maintain the social order, while simultaneously afflicting the mind and soul of the oppressed with a barrage of knowledges and social practices that denied basic human needs, including that of self-esteem. Simply stated, colonial education in the English-speaking Caribbean functioned as an apparatus of social domination (Tiffin, 2001) with psychological violence at its helm. Notwithstanding curricular reform in primary and secondary education, in some contexts, contemporary teaching practices reflect methods consistent with the former colonial model; and as such, warrant a decolonized approach.

Decolonizing Pedagogy: Teachers' Practices and Teacher Education

We have proposed a pedagogy that aligns with and supports the decolonizing early childhood education initiative. We focus our attention on teachers' practices and teacher education. In the ensuing section, we explore some concrete ways teachers can perform a decolonizing pedagogy in their classrooms.

Similar to other anti-oppression advocates (e.g., Freire, 1968/1970; Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003), we conceive decolonizing

pedagogy as a practice of teaching committed to fostering students' critical consciousness through dialogue, meaningful, supportive relationships, collaboration, and opportunities for questioning and problem solving. In the Caribbean early childhood classroom, for instance, the teacher can include materials that reflect Caribbean culture (e.g., picture books, ring games, jingles, and pretend play materials). We do acknowledge, however, that there is a dearth of children's literature (specifically, picture books appropriate for the 3-5 age group) specific to the Caribbean context. As well, granted the environment is conducive to such a change, spatial arrangements that reflect a community/collectivist orientation can also be implemented; that could encourage dialogue between teachers and students. Such strategy not only eschews teaching practices that reflect the hierarchal arrangements of the plantation (and the psychological violence that derives from such experience, including silence and powerlessness) but also promotes students' critical thinking skills. In other words, we encourage teachers to infuse the elements of Caribbean storytelling into the formal pedagogical approaches in the classroom. To this end, we also recommend that teachers encourage student- student dialogue as well as teacher-student dialogue to demonstrate to students the importance of voice and collaborative learning.

In a similar vein, we propose that teachers make use of activities that derive from students' experiences and cultures. In fact, in Escayg's (2014) study, one teacher remarked, "Why can't we say A for achar (an Indo-Trinidadian delicacy), instead of A for apple?" Thus, as the participant expressed, the approach to learning the alphabet is skewed towards using items, in this case, fruits, that are not indigenous to the child's local and cultural context. To address such disconnect, the teacher suggested

incorporating cultural foods in the learning activities and materials so as to make the learning more culturally relevant and meaningful.

Teachers' anti-colonial and decolonizing pedagogy can and should be developed throughout their pre-service education. However, the precursor to this ideal is to ensure that teacher education programs are grounded in anti-colonial perspectives and practices. More specifically, decolonising teacher education requires a deep understanding of the biases and tensions that exist in how knowledge is constructed and how pre-service and in-service teachers are trained to disseminate it. As Battiste (2002) and Phelan (2011) explained, despite the plethora of changes taking place in teacher education, Euro-American ideologies have had a considerable impact on perspectives regarding what teachers should teach, what constitutes teachers' best practices, and how and what teachers should do in order to achieve this.

Arguably, two of the dominant features of Caribbean teacher education are the heavy dependence on texts and research from Euro-American authors to provide the framework for what teachers' education ought to look like, and, the questionable practice of ascribing wholeheartedly to internationally prescribed notions of best practice in early childhood education.

While in recent years there have been attempts to infuse a more Caribbean-centric focus in teacher education, there still remain several challenges militating against the full achievement of this goal. Kinkead-Clark's (2017) research on the impact of globalization on teachers' practices revealed the tension Jamaican teachers felt as a result of pressures to align their practices with global standards while simultaneously meeting local goals. These teachers acknowledged there were various types of pressures to replicate the teaching practices of

"first world countries" in order to be considered "good teachers".

As such, one recommendation to decolonize teacher education is to ensure that teachers are prepared to teach in the contexts for which they are expected to teach in. To do this, Gay (2010) suggested stakeholders must demand that education be culturally responsive by ensuring it reflects the needs of the people in order to be relevant to the people. Likewise, Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006) and Vandenbroeck (2007) recommended that approaches to early childhood education must be grounded in an understanding that diverse factors shape how children develop and that to effectively meet the needs of children from these diverse contexts, teacher education must be highly reflective of these contexts.

Additionally, we recommend that within the Caribbean, we promote our own ideas of what best practice looks like in the typical early childhood classroom. We need to outline how best practice is demonstrated, and how the classroom should be designed to facilitate these practices. Teacher education ought to focus on these practices and promote them as pedagogical strategies to be used in the classroom. For example, one strategy that has often been minimized is the use of oral story telling. Oral storytelling is a remnant of our rich African history where families and communities would tell folktales and share cultural traditions. Stories of Anansy and Bre'r Rabbit are still told today. Decolonizing teacher education ensures that teachers are supported to continue these authentic Caribbean traditions in the early childhood classroom.

Finally, another recommendation to decolonize teacher education is to promote teachers' understanding of the multiplicity of factors that influence their practice and to holistically consider how Caribbean children

develop. Teacher education must ensure that pre-service teachers are aware of the factors that affect how our children are raised. As suggested by Roopnarine et al. (2006), there is a need to contextualize our understanding of child development. Within the Caribbean, there needs to be deep understanding of the home and family idiosyncrasies, the unique cultural practices, the experiences and social factors, all which shape how Caribbean children develop. Decolonising teacher education implies that pre-service and in-service teachers are made aware of the diverse factors which impact on how children develop and, through training, are armed with a repertoire of strategies to support them in their development.

Conclusion

To a large degree, the English-speaking Caribbean has not escaped the grips of its colonial past. The influences of hegemonic power—which were (and remain) unjustly obtained— are still visible in the education system, in the social-political-economic arrangements, and for some, in the ideologies/epistemologies that inform habitus of mind, and perhaps as well, cross-ethnic interactions.

Education, and early childhood education in particular, represents one context in which the knowledge of the North, while applicable to their communities and demographic, continues to receive an endearing reception in the global South, often without taking into account the significance of context, culture and validity of local and cultural knowledges. This paper, using a Caribbean-centered analysis, sought to disrupt such practice by examining specific features of early childhood education, and suggesting how such features can be aligned with Caribbean principles: principles derived from the history of the people, their knowledges, needs and experiences. Indeed, we frame our central

argument around the tenets of anti-colonial Caribbean theory.

One area, however, which requires further attention, but which we did not address in this paper due to space constraints, is the need for a regional document on children's development. Specifically, while we recognize the benefits and limitations of developmentally appropriate practice, we also urge—and perhaps challenge—educators and researchers to consider developing a regional guideline on Caribbean children's development. More pointedly, and keeping in the spirit of Caribbean story-telling, we ask: Can Piaget speak for us? Can Vygotsky? Can Bandura? What are the cultural knowledges that can inform conceptualizations of *our* children's development? How are our children's lives different from children in the North, and how can we demonstrate to our children in our teaching and in our curriculum that we recognize and value their experiences, including local languages?

From an empirical standpoint, future research inquiries should explore teachers' and administrators' perspectives of Caribbean early childhood education. The inclusion of teachers' and administrators' ideas on what constitutes Caribbean early childhood education will not only be consistent with an anti-colonial methodology, but will also bring together the conceptual suggestions offered in the present article with the experiential knowledges of teachers and administrators, thereby rendering a richer and multilayered conceptualization of Caribbean early childhood education.

In conclusion, global events reveal that the anti-colonial struggle persists; as the resistance takes different forms, so does the counter-resistance. In response, we have chosen the site of early childhood education to articulate counter-knowledges, a cornerstone of subversive thought. We recognize the saliency of education and the early years, specifically. Anti-colonial

and decolonized early childhood education are constitutive of a much broader regional transformation, however. While the process for such threshold continues, we retain the reassuring hope that as a people, and as a region, we are well-equipped to orient our daily realities towards new imaginings, and new possibilities. Reverberating beyond the deep blue Caribbean sky and sea, are the echoes of regional pride and the legacies of creative, enduring, resistance.

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