



Retrieved from: <http://www.cifas.us/smith/journals.html>

Title: "The RISM-Spencer study of education and society in the Caribbean"

Author(s): M.G. Smith

Source: *Education and Society in the Commonwealth Caribbean*. Errol Miller, ed. (1991), pp. 7-14

Published by: Institute of Social and Economic Research (University College of the West Indies, Jamaica), with the assistance of the Research Institute for the Study of Man, New York

Education and Society in the Commonwealth Caribbean



Edited by Errol Miller

CONTENTS

FOREWORD by Alister McIntyre	i
PREFACE by Errol Miller	v
RISM AND CARIBBEAN SOCIAL SCIENCE by Lambros Comitas.....	1
THE RISM-SPENCER STUDY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN THE CARIBBEAN by M.G. Smith	7
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN THE CARIBBEAN: Issues and Problems by Rex Nettleford	15
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN ST. KITTS AND NEVIS by Joseph Halliday	27
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN GRENADA by George I. Brizan	59
A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN BARBADOS by Anthony Layne	75
A REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN JAMAICA by Marlene Hamilton.....	105
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: A Review of Educational Research in Trinidad and Tobago by Patricia Mohammed	143
ACCESS TO HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION IN POSTWAR JAMAICA by Derek Gordon.....	181
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN THE CARIBBEAN: Some Reflections by Errol Miller.....	207
Appendices	235

2

THE RISM-SPENCER STUDY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN THE CARIBBEAN

by M.G. Smith

It is obvious that we can learn much from a careful study of the relation of formal and informal education to social and cultural conditions in the recently independent English-speaking Caribbean societies. For Caribbeanists such research is particularly interesting since it focuses on the most important agencies of cultural assimilation and social mobility that came under local control at Independence. We may therefore expect such a study to show in what ways and to what degrees the educational systems and socialisation practices of these countries have operated since their independence to preserve and perpetuate or to change the social and cultural frameworks they inherited from the closing decades of colonial rule.

With such general aims the present research project, which is funded by the Spencer Foundation of Chicago, Illinois, and carried out by the Research Institute for the Study of Man (RISM) of New York City, seeks to study the relation between education and society in three ex-British West Indian colonies, namely, Barbados, Grenada and Trinidad & Tobago. Founded in 1962, the Spencer Foundation supports studies of ways in which education, broadly conceived, might be improved around the world. Founded by the late Vera Rubin and presently directed by Professor Lambros Comitas of Columbia University, who co-directs and administers this project, RISM was incorporated in 1955 as a non-profit organization for educational and scientific purposes. It has long played a special role in sponsoring socio-cultural studies in the Caribbean and has conducted research and training programs, developed an excellent Caribbean library, and supported scholarly exchanges and publications. It has organised several conferences with special focus on the Caribbean, provided consultation services and stimulated the initiation, development and dissemination of basic knowledge in behavioural science. Initiated in April 1987, this study has been carried out by RISM under the aegis of the Extra Mural Department of the U.W.I., thanks to the courtesy and strong support of its head, Professor Rex Nettleford, O.M., who has done much to promote and sponsor it regionally, besides

advising on its organisation. He and several members of his department in other islands have been very helpful, particularly in Trinidad. On behalf of our research group I take this opportunity to express our appreciation of their assistance and advice.

Aims and Organisation

Our study has the following general objectives: first, we seek to determine to what extent the techniques and methods of social and cultural anthropology can assess and demonstrate the relation of education to social and cultural continuity or change in recently independent developing societies. We do not assume that as social anthropologists we have the technical or methodological competence, or even an appropriate conceptual apparatus, for the task we tackle. We are very conscious that this is an exploratory attempt to assess the capability of our branch of social science for system studies of this kind and scope, but believe that even if our enquiry demonstrates that on the whole social and cultural anthropology is inadequate for this kind of study, the results should be of value, provided that their details enable us to identify specific limitations and inadequacies that derive from the discipline itself rather than the design or execution of the present study. Our first aim is therefore methodological, and expresses our professional concern as anthropologists to determine as best we can the competence of our discipline for studies of this sort and to increase that competence.

Substantively, we seek to determine whether and how the educational systems of selected Caribbean societies have operated during their independence to perpetuate or change the structural and cultural frameworks each has inherited from its colonial past. Positively, then, we ask to what extent and in what ways do their current educational policies, programs, structures and systems perpetuate assumptions, ideals and patterns that are colonial in origin and character, or have been reoriented appropriately towards the needs of small independent developing states in the modern world, and especially to the needs of their peoples as well as their privileged minorities.

Finally, we seek to see whether and how, if at all, the educational systems of these small states have served since independence either to promote development in their respective societies or to increase their potential for development. As this topic involves questions of the general relationship between education on one hand and 'development' on the other, it directs attention to the questionable character of current concepts and criteria of development. Precisely what does one mean by social or cultural development? By what criteria do we propose to identify or assess it? How can we operationalise the concept to generate indices that will enable us objectively to measure and compare degrees and rates of 'development' in different sectors of social life and between different societies?

EDUCATION and SOCIETY IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

In pursuing these objectives we hope to contribute to a fuller though preliminary understanding of the broad relationship between education and society in three ways: theoretically, by delineating the roles of institutions of formal education in ex-colonial societies like those of the Creole Caribbean; methodologically, by formulating procedures and indicators that can be used to identify and perhaps to measure objectively the persistence or change and development in the institutional sectors of culture and social life in recently independent states; and finally, if the study achieves its goals, we hope our work may suggest certain ways and areas in which the developmental contributions of education to Caribbean societies may be enhanced and studied further.

To pursue these broad objectives we have relied on the familiar anthropological practice of year-long field studies of our topic *in situ* by researchers, each working independently in one of the three selected territories, and exchanging ideas and information about their studies with one another, Lambros Comitas and myself as opportunity allowed. Our field workers are seasoned professionals, drawn from universities in Britain and the U.S.A. due to lack of local personnel with adequate qualifications in social and cultural anthropology. While Dr. Josep Llobera studies Barbados, Dr. George Mentore works in Grenada, and Dr. Philip Burnham in Trinidad & Tobago. In addition we have been strongly supported by Jack Harewood, a former Director of the Central Statistical Office in Trinidad and of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the U.W.I. in St. Augustine, who has developed statistical profiles of the educational systems of these countries in different years since their independence, in order to compare each system at those intervals and with one another, to identify and estimate quantitatively the degree of continuity or change in their size, structure and articulations, internal and external. Working together we shall try to determine whether our particular combination of social statistics and socio-cultural anthropology can identify and demonstrate the precise relationships between education and continuity or change in the economic, political, social and cultural life of these small states. In this way we hope to assess the contributions of formal education to the processes of social and cultural development.

Given our three main research objectives, the scope and breadth of our enquiry seems to guarantee its failure in advance. Yet paradoxically those same ambitious commitments should ensure interesting results, both substantive and methodological, however partial and limited. In a sense the project seeks to explore and map uncharted territory like a pioneer. Even in Trinidad, despite its wealth of relevant statistics on education and many studies by officials, educationists and others, since our enquiry seeks to relate its educational structures, constraints and outputs to one another and to the metabolic process of the society's development, though exploratory, our results should show the need for systematic studies of more detailed aspects of these relations and processes.

For these reasons among others our research group is very happy to participate in this seminar at which U.W.I. and other Caribbean educationists attempt to update and extend Errol Miller's (1984) review of educational research by taking stock of recent university studies of socialisation, access to the better schools by class and sex, and factors that affect student achievement in Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, and by reviewing the educational provisions of Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis. As the U.W.I. reports indicate, research undertaken by education faculty and students in the three campuses differ in their emphases and direction almost as much from one another as they do from our anthropological study of education in these changing societies.

Derek Gordon's sociological study of changes in the differential access of children of differing racial phenotype and class to grammar schools in Jamaica between 1925 and 1964, when the country moved gradually towards independence and a more open society, shows how systemic studies of specific aspects of the articulations of education and society over time can illuminate their implications and trends. However Gordon writes as a sociologist. By contrast while several studies by educationists investigated access to schools and courses by class and sex, and some looked at extra-mural influences on school attendance and cognition, there has been less research on socialisation outside school, and most of the U.W.I. research in Jamaica seems to have focussed on the ways in which such diverse intra-mural factors as streaming, teacher reactions, gender stereotypes or same-sex versus bi-sex schooling have influenced pupil achievement. On the other hand, in Barbados research has dwelt on the relation of such extra-school factors as home backgrounds and parental occupations and status to pupil performance, and to children's chances of access to secondary schools with different performance levels as measured by exams, less attention being given to the relative influence of strictly intra-school factors in producing those outcomes.

In Trinidad, which was ruled by the PNM under Dr. Eric Williams who gave education top priority for over twenty years, and which also benefited from the oil boom of the seventies, following the pioneer work of Vera Rubin and Marisa Zavalloni (1969) on the aspirations of secondary school children, official and academic studies have ranged more widely over such diverse topics as the effect of language on classroom instruction (Carrington, 1972), differential access by ethnicity and sex of children to secondary schools, the educational experience and expectations of students, the conditions and levels of student achievement, the quality of teacher training and effects of periodic change in government's educational policies.

It seems clear that all these territories could benefit greatly from the combined pursuit of these and other research topics by their respective university departments of education and others, since on its own none can deliver an adequate account of the relative significance of the variables studied in the school system nor of the relation between education and the local society. Perhaps then RISM's attempt to construct comprehensive analytic accounts of the structure, scope and recent evolu-

tion of three island educational systems and to set them firmly in their changing socio-economic contexts, may complement the more specific and diverse research orientations that hold sway in the three U.W.I. campuses, which lack adequate research resources.

Issues and Expectations

Differing concepts of education adopted by various authors and disciplines have long been keenly debated. To some the term is best reserved for those processes of formal instruction and training carried on in schools, universities, gymnasia, contexts of apprenticeship, technical training and the like. For others, besides such contexts and processes of formal instruction, education includes all those activities and relations by which cultural beliefs, attitudes and values are transmitted, both within and between generations and other social categories or groups. In the latter sense education includes all formal contexts and processes of primary, secondary and tertiary socialisation, and is therefore open-ended and lifelong. Given the broad differences of scope and foci between these two competing conceptions and the ample room for various intermediate definitions, there is clear advantage in provisionally adopting the most inclusive conception for research purposes, since that should accommodate the rest.

The prime obstacle to successful use of inclusive concepts of education such as lifelong socialisation in anthropological field studies of developing societies is their inclusiveness, since such concepts implicitly require the researcher to develop equally comprehensive data and analyses of the formal and informal structures, contexts and processes of education and socialisation in the lives of a sufficient number of representative individuals of different generations from all the major social categories within the society under study. The range of skills and length of time such an undertaking requires are rarely available together to individual researchers, some of whom may be more competent and keen to study institutions and processes of formal education while others, like the social psychologist Madeline Kerr (1952), may be more inclined to concentrate on the informal processes of socialisation in the home, community, playing-fields, work places and the like. Though we should not expect individual researchers to supply equally detailed data on the full range of informal and formal education, any thorough study of the relations of education to social and cultural development and change should integrate adequate information on the formal system with complementary data on the extra mural processes and contents of informal education and socialisation. Moreover, within such institutional contexts as schools, as Errol Miller (1971, 1973) has shown, special attention should be given to the mechanisms, processes and effects of informal socialisation to 'official' and popular attitudes, values, stereotypes, language patterns and status criteria. Accordingly, since field workers drawn from different backgrounds will inevitably differ in the intensity and scope of their observations of diverse situations

and aspects of education in society, we have adopted a comparative design in this study to ensure that the researchers in different societies may indirectly complement and illuminate one another. In this way we hope to achieve a better balance of data on the formal and informal sectors of educational systems than we otherwise might; but we recognise clearly that our report must be grounded on adequate and comprehensive accounts of the institutional sector and its development during independence.

Our study accordingly assigns priority to the following sectors and topics:

1. All salient dimensions and aspects of institutions, structures, contents and processes of formal education.
2. Structures and cultures of policy formation and administration in public and private education
3. Such "private" contexts, institutions and mechanisms of informal education and socialisation as the family, neighbourhood, community, peer groups and other associations, work groups and markets.
4. Such public institutions and mechanisms of secondary and tertiary socialisation as church or sect, trade unions, political parties, the press, television, radio, films or theatre.

Besides documenting the characteristics and contents of these diverse institutional processes, we need to examine and document their composition and interrelations, paying special attention to data that indicate continuity or change in their structures, contents and articulations with one another and with the wider society.

Adequate data on the four institutional fields listed above should allow us to describe the formal and informal educational systems in each of the selected countries and to analyse their composition and interrelations. By comparing accounts of education in these islands at intervals during their independence, we shall try to identify and assess the conservative or transformative contributions of formal and informal education to their societies. To these ends we shall try to construct sufficiently detailed models of the current and late colonial cultures and social structures of these countries to distinguish clearly those institutional and cultural forms which have persisted with or without change from others which have changed in greater or less degree, or disappeared, with or without functional substitutes. Studied in relation to the political and economic histories of their societies since independence, those profiles of institutional continuity and change should reveal links between their recent educational policies, provisions and arrangements and the political and economic conditions and cultural orientations that promoted those outcomes. Once we can compare and analyse in sufficient detail the structural and cultural compositions of these societies now and on the eve of independence, the comparative scope of our research design should identify various parallels and differences of orientation, structure, policy, resources and organisation in these *milieux* that together should indicate the specific relations of educational policies to political and economic developments since the countries became independent.

Unlike economists, who regard increases in the per annum GDP or GNP per capita as the best general measures of development, and who have perhaps persuaded most people to do the same, I understand development to consist in those processes by which units of any kind, whether organisms, species or societies, increase their abilities to cope with their needs and environments. Such a concept is essentially biological and derived from biological studies of the natural growth of living organisms and species (Smith 1983). When applied to societies and cultures, as also to animals, the concept denotes a dialectically integrated process by which units simultaneously redefine and expand their environment and their ability to manipulate and exploit it, thus satisfying their intrinsic needs while often generating new ones as well as new capacities. The mechanism that expands and redefines a unit's environment consists of its progressively developing ability to deal with the world around it.

For our study of the contribution of education to development in Caribbean societies, this means that we can assess the rate and level of a society's development by comparing at intervals of time the numbers of its personnel with the different kinds and degrees of skill required for it to cope with such internal needs as health, education, administration, production, worship, art or law, etc., and to maintain and improve its relations with the environment. In this context perhaps the best measure of the relative development of a society and its culture is the degree of rationality in its ordering of collective goals and the allocation and use of all available means, both material and human, for their pursuit. Though I do not expect my colleagues in this project to share these views, as development is clearly a special kind of change and one of the chief foci of our enquiry, I look forward to a range of stimulating ideas, questions and comments on its relationship to education in Grenada, Barbados and Trinidad since independence, supported quantitatively by statistical and qualitatively by other kinds of data.

In their histories, cultural compositions, social structures and educational programs as independent states, Grenada, Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago provide sufficient arrays of significant similarities and differences to reveal the transformations and continuities of their colonial socio-cultural and economic patterns and perhaps also to expose the relation of their educational systems to those outcomes and processes. If so, then comparative analysis of the three case studies should enable us to identify and perhaps to assess reliably the relations of specific conditions and factors to those outcomes and processes.

On their completion we plan to send copies of the case studies to those academics and officials in each country who assisted the field workers and to ask for their critical comments, suggestions and queries. If any suggestions emerge from our data, we anticipate critical reactions to those proposals we might make, however tentative, for changes or programs that might enhance the quality of formal education in these islands. Meanwhile we hope that the opportunity this seminar provides for academics and officials professionally engaged in the promotion and study of Caribbean education to exchange information and ideas may stimulate the desire for

M.G. Smith

similar discussions between the scattered University departments and educational ministries in future meetings, and that academics in all three campuses may together develop and pursue continuous and systematic study of the relations between education and society in the English-speaking Caribbean. While each country and each campus surely have their own immediate local problems and priorities, the joint design and pursuit of certain regional studies should be economic and rewarding.

References

- CARRINGTON, L.D., 1972, *Linguistic Exposure of Trinidadian Children*, St. Augustine, Trinidad: U.W.I. Institute of Education
- KERR, Madeline, 1952, *Personality and Conflict in Jamaica*. Liverpool: The University Press
- MILLER, Errol, 1971, Self identity problems in Jamaica: from the perspective of shame. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 17, 15-35
- 1973, Self-evaluation among Jamaican High School girls. *Social and Economic Studies*, 22, 407-426
- 1984, *Educational Research: the English-speaking Caribbean*. Ottawa, Ont.: IDRC
- RUBIN, Vera and Marisa Zavalloni
- 1969, *We Wish to be Looked Upon: A Study of the Aspirations of Youth in a Developing Society* New York: Teachers College Press
- SMITH, M.G., 1983, The role of basic needs and provisions in planning and development. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. 3, 2, 341-360.