

## CHAPTER 7: Towards a Critical Pedagogy for Teacher Professional Development in the Caribbean

### *Introduction*

How we understand processes of teaching and learning shapes our work as educators.

(Boyce, 1996)

Countries in the Caribbean like those in the rest of the developing world appear to aspire to the same educational goals as those of the developed nations of the world. At least the jargon is the same. It is therefore not uncommon to hear the following popular terms which are used in the developed countries being bandied in the smaller countries as well viz. *education for all, lifelong learning, on-going teacher professional development, inclusion* and the like. Though the average teacher in the developing countries may not have a contextual understanding of these terms, they are swept into the euphoria of the jargon by the mass media, senior administrators and politicians.

In this chapter, I will explore the philosophy which I have embraced as a researcher-educator involved in Teacher Professional Development in the Caribbean. I will argue that the way forward is through the adoption of a critical pedagogy which can lead to social transformation and the true

emancipation of the people. This would include the fostering in our tutors and students a level of intellectual curiosity.

From infancy, colonised people are trained to depreciate themselves. They repeat the language of the coloniser as their own and as the language changes, new images are conjured up so the force of the coloniser is ever present. These patterns are readily transmitted through the various media of capitalist society and is encountered in the various social and natural geographies. For example, in many countries in the Caribbean, persons with fairer skin and light coloured eyes are treated by many others within the community as well as the wider region as being more attractive than those with darker skin tones and darker eyes.

Critical pedagogy has challenged the traditional view of teacher education and adopted a position whereby teachers are helped to develop alternative strategies and styles for engaging with their students' learning. Those exposed to such pedagogies recognise that there are probably as many ways to teach as there are to learn.

### ***Freire's Legacies***

Although as teachers, we may strive for a more liberatory approach to teaching, we need to acknowledge that inherent in our competence as

pedagogues, is the notion of authority. Freire has argued that this authority should never degenerate into authoritarianism and if he was alive today, he would probably insist that this authority should rest on the strength of humility and love (Mayo,1997), I would argue authority should be translated into *responsibility for promoting the empowerment of others* and *respect for and valuing of diversity and difference*. If as educators, we require our students to become critically active citizens of the Caribbean, then we need to recognise the relationship between power and knowledge and to acknowledge that power lies in the guises of race, gender and class. This is part of our colonial heritage and it is not going to disappear unless we learn to unpack and de-construct these labels and the attendant practices which support their perpetuation in a negative manner.

It is through his philosophy of hope that Freire has firmly established himself in the international history of education and left the peoples of the world a legacy of radical thoughts on education and social justice. His approach to adult education also referred to as the problem-posing approach (Wallerstein, 1986) and the liberatory approach (Shor & Freire, 1987) was based on the cultural and personal experiences of learners in a humanist philosophy which echoes Marx .

This philosophy revolves around “the ontological vocation of humans to become more fully human” (McLaren & Leonard 1993: 3). This is visible in his correspondence to literacy teachers in Chile advising them that:

To be a good liberating educator, you need above all to have faith in human beings. ... You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their domestication. (Freire 1971 as quoted in Shor 1993: 25)

If education is to be meaningful to a people, it must be contextualised and learning should be initiated out of the very real experiences of the learner through dialogue which is developed around themes of significant importance to these learners. Learners have their own history and culture which impinges on their learning and so the voice of the learner must be situated within an historical and cultural context because it is moulded by their experiences. This should be the starting point for any educative process which seeks social transformation as its goal. The role of the educator is not to accept the ‘stories’ of the students without question but to enable students to reflect on their various situations and be able to critique their own experiences. In this way, they could begin to identify the various imagery which has been created by the ideological hegemony to domesticate the masses.



For example, the second cohort of M. Ed. Students in St. Lucia has been asked to explore the impact of colonialism on their lives as people growing up in St. Lucia and to identify one situation which continues to make a significant impact on their lives as teachers today. This collection is being compiled as narratives with discursive elements of critical reflection, which will be used with this group and other successive groups of students as learning points.

### *Dialogue*

Though, the syllabus of the very first course which developed in collaboration with lecturers from the University of Sheffield, may have been 'strung together' based on the need for Special Educators in Trinidad and Tobago, I can remember that some of the potential students and lecturers sat on the committees that established and determined the direction of the course. The various stakeholders had a voice and topics and themes were discussed and their positions negotiated. As with any new programme, there have been some flaws and some setbacks from 1987 to the present time. This type of dialogue and negotiation continue to take place and has encouraged growth and development not only in the area of teaching but also research. Dialogue has been and continues to be a signature of the various collaborative engagements of the programme.

At the time, this was a political stance because the perpetrators recognised that "...education is politics!" and that the entire activity of teaching and learning (education) is indeed political (Freire & Shor 1987: 46). There was a need for specialist teachers in Special Education. Neither the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago nor the local University was addressing that need and an educational revolution was taking place among the teachers who sought to address that unfulfilled need. The level of dialogue which took place in the 1980s was linked directly to a transformation that could not have taken place within a 'political vacuum' (Freire and Shor 1987: 102). Freire states that "...to achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline and objectives." Dialogue encourages collaborative learning by limiting "teacher-talk". It allows people to name their experience and encourages them to find their voice within the context (Shor, 1992).

### ***Learning Theories and Culture***

All humans are nurtured within a culture - so there is a starting point to learning about other things. As an adult educator, it is important to remember that people do not all see or even experience the world in the same way and that all individuals bring multiple perspectives to any learning situation as a result of their gender, age, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and so on.

Jean Piaget the Swiss biologist and psychologist who was well known for his contribution to learning theories, suggested that learning took place as a result of making connections between what is known or facts and new information resulting in a 'new' understanding in students. Therefore at all levels, educators need to use the experiences (inclusive of culture) of the students as a springboard in order to make that critical link to the new information.

According to the model of 'social cognition learning' as proposed by Vygotsky, culture is the prime determinant of the individual's development. Therefore in the teaching process, one cannot simply divorce a learner from his culture.

Though constructivism supports the use of reflection to 'construct' a unique understanding of the world, I would contend that this construction can only take place within the context of culture. Like Freire, constructivists support the view that the purpose of learning is the construction of an understanding of life not merely the regurgitation of 'banked' information which is usually someone else's interpretation of the world. Habermas (1972) argues that all human knowledge is a social construction that is corrupted by the various ideologies which serves various interest groups and individuals. Therefore, engaging in critical

thinking around the various interests and being able to discern the limitations and potentials of the various kinds of knowledge is desirable and could lead to empowerment and creation of new knowledge. Thus the strength of critical pedagogy is the application of critical social science to education.

It is through the action and the reflection on that action that "...knowledge emerges [and it is] only through intervention and re-intervention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry" ( Freire, 1972: 46) that men become truly human. Praxis therefore, is about reflection which embodies the qualities of respect for the personhood of others, a never-ending quest for the 'truth' and a commitment to the well being of humans. Carr and Kemmis (1986:190) acknowledge that this is a tricky situation because it requires a person to make "wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation."

Reflection within a Freirean context would begin with the recognition of educational dilemmas or emotional discomforts resulting in a cyclical process where information circulates, and is acted upon, analysed and revised until meaning is arrived at. Of course, this would need to be explored within a framework of respect and commitment.

Freire argued that too much education (if there can be such a thing) involves '*banking*', which means that the learner is taught in a passive mode and so receives deposits of pre-selected, approved knowledge from an educator. He strongly believed that education was the pathway to permanent liberation, and that liberation resulted in empowerment.

Traditionally, tertiary education was delivered by the academic within the hallowed walls of the university. This person was perceived by all as being the ultimate expert and responsible entirely for the delivery of education. He /she structured his/her teaching to suit his/her particular style and delivered the lecture in the relatively intimate setting of the classroom or lecture theatre. Freire has suggested that the lecture format, where the teacher regurgitates knowledge and either pours that knowledge into the students' waiting heads or allows the students to absorb the information possibly through osmosis, should be replaced by the "culture circle" where teachers and students are able to meet one another and discuss issues of concern or problems in their own lives, discuss their causes, and propose actions that could be taken to solve and or resolve them (Freire, 1970, 1973; Wallerstein, 1983). He emphasised that:

... to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be

engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge.

(Freire 1998: 49)

Through his writings and his face-to-face interactions, Freire encouraged stakeholders in education to participate in dialogue as 'co-learners'. This is where people grapple with their 'culture' and through *conscientization* or critical thinking they are able to recognise that they make decisions which shape their lives and are able to participate in transforming their lives either individually or collectively.

### ***Culture and Distance Learning in the Caribbean***

Culture which can be interpreted as a non-static, dynamic process of transformation based on the individual and collective choices made by individuals and communities, forms the root of Freire's pedagogy. Shor (1993: 30-1), a disciple of Freire defines culture as:

... the actions and results of humans in society, the way people interact in their communities, and the addition people make to the world they find. Culture is what ordinary people do everyday, how they behave, speak, relate and make things. Everyone has and makes a culture, not only aesthetic specialists or members of the elite. Culture is the speech and behavior in everyday life, which liberating educators study anthropologically before they can offer effective critical learning.

I would like to think of teacher education at a post-graduate level as a collaborative effort between the student and the lecturer/tutor. It is a negotiation for space for the contestation of ideas and the sharing of ideologies. It is a space where the 'new' environment supports learning for both the student as well as the educator.

Michael Apple (1996:33) has argued that:

A democratic curriculum and pedagogy must begin with a recognition of the different social positionings and cultural repertoires in the classrooms, and the power relations between them.

This is equally applicable to the cultural repertoires within which collaborations around teacher education are situated and the power relationships between students and lecturers, host countries and service provider countries all of which provide both a historical and a political context for those collaborations and in some measure even define them.

Though at the post graduate level we tend to explore themes according to disciplines, we would notice that even between themes, there are areas of overlap which all come together as a whole - at that point the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. As such, assessment, which is seen as part of the learning process, should not be comprised simply of the regurgitation of isolated facts or bits of information, it should provide

students with avenues to explore the application of concepts in a meaningful exercise.

In the education of adults, a lot is dependent on the philosophy of the providers of the service as well as the philosophy of the participants of the programme. Terms such as reflective practice, humanistic education, empowerment, quality education, constructivist approaches which are currently trendy in the educational circles need to be re-defined and clarified for all those who are participating in the process of change. Learners and educators need to engage in dialogue about difference rather than in controversies about difference. As part of the critical citizenry, they are "... not only required to read texts but to understand contexts" (McLaren, 1996).

This liberatory aspect of Freire's philosophy can be particularly significant for the management of distance learning programmes where local tutors and adult learners can exercise significant control over the direction of present and future educational activities. The role of the local support tutors is critical. If Freire is to be taken seriously, then tutors are to engage in problem-posing dialogue with the students in an effort to get them to reflect on their particular professional circumstance(s) within their culture. The students would be encouraged to adopt a reflective



stance by becoming critical examiners of their experiences, as they question and constantly engage in re-interpreting life. (Shor 1993: 31) Emerging from a culture of colonialism, they would need to grow into the understanding that lecturers and tutors are not fountains of pure knowledge and so should not be expected to pour quantities of information into waiting heads.

As stated before, the culture of the Caribbean is based to a large extent on the oral tradition and the regurgitation of knowledge. However, drawing upon Wedemeyer's theory of independence (1973) and Moore's theory of autonomy (1973), it would be desirable to use the vehicle of distance education to develop the qualities of independence and autonomy while still being able to acknowledge the power of the group. The learner through the experiences of the various courses would be on the road to being self-directed and should be encouraged to become "co-investigators / researchers" on the way to creating knowledge.

In this quest for knowledge, the learners' souls are laid bare and their needs, hopes, fears and expectations are examined and reflected upon as part of the educative process. Fears are transcended and creativity is given some space in which to grow. The development which takes place is now political and people-centred. The learners through their various experiences become empowered and self-reliant. Through their

engagement with themselves, their country, their history, their culture and their ideas they are able to create education. Some of this is done by using the potential of research to understand and resolve educational challenges.

It is through the exploration of research questions that dialogue continues and the "culture of silence" which is so much a part of the colonial heritage is broken.

### ***Research as a Catalyst for Development***

The provision of "good education demands good teachers" says Perraton (1993:1). But, what is good education? Is it education for adaptation or is it education for self-development? Development is not about donations from the developed nations and benevolent organisations but, in general terms, it implies levels of economic prosperity. However, this cannot take place in a vacuum but must be linked directly to the growth and advancement of the peoples of the society in which the development is taking place.

Therefore if development is to be meaningful, there must be a direct improvement in the skills and capacity, creativity, discipline, intellectual freedom and material well-being of the population (Rodney, 1972: 9).

This requires 'good teachers' who are able to engage critically with the material presented to them via the various publications and be able to re-invent the world in which they live using the available tools of research.

Pat Ellis, a Caribbean researcher, observes that:

(I)n the Caribbean, there is not a well developed research culture and to the very mention of the word research conjures up pictures of a difficult activity that is demanded of those pursuing academic studies at a university, and generates fear, apprehension and doubt about the ability of non-academics, ordinary people to do research.

(Ellis, 2001:1)

A large part of this problem is the way in which universities and other traditional institutions of higher learning present the components of research - it is mainly advertised as the domain of the intellectual. It is not presented as an essential part of everyday life which people already use to some extent in order to make informed decisions. As such, when students arrive at the level where they are called upon to conduct their own research, they are filled with great trepidation as a result of the programming which has long been engraved in their consciousness.

The Trinidad and Tobago Education Policy Paper (1993 - 2003:29) acknowledges that:

(t)o date in Trinidad and Tobago, we have been relatively strong on philosophical orientations or judgements about education,

but relatively weak on the use of empirical evidence.

In the Caribbean generally, the positivist approach is held in high esteem while qualitative approaches are generally treated with scorn and described as 'soft' , meaning not very serious. In fact, it would appear that very little thought is given to the various types of research methodologies which could be applied to different situations. There is the misnomer that if research is to be respected and serve its ultimate purpose of enlightenment, the research process must be intricate, difficult and painful. Unfortunately, this is part of our colonial heritage. However, while the British and the French have moved on to include other research methodologies, we remain stuck in the past and are caught up in the false sense of power which is embedded within quantitative epistemologies.

With regard to this, the University of Sheffield with their team of British and Caribbean educators have been able to make some inroads into dispelling some of the myths surrounding research and a positive impact on the psyches of the teachers. Teachers from Trinidad and Tobago who completed the M.Ed. in Educational Studies in July 2000, commented that:

*This course has helped me to do much more reading and research than I am accustomed to.*

*This course has provided the framework that has resulted in a comprehensive development of my critical thinking skills and has encouraged me to explore and investigate educational areas using research.*

Many educators would agree that the traditional teacher education which was practised in these developing countries was often based on adaptation and non-interactive pedagogies. This type of education cannot provide the learners with the tools which would allow them to engage critically with national development but would produce passive and dependent learners.

Assessment, which is seen as part of the learning process, should not be comprised simply of the regurgitation of isolated facts or bits of information, it should provide students with avenues to explore the application of concepts in a meaningful exercise.

For example, when we were seeking approval for the Masters of Education Course in Educational Studies from the Ministry of Education in St. Lucia, they had a particular interest in furthering its research capacity and felt that a compulsory module focusing on 'Methods of Educational Enquiry' be built into the programme. We recognised the urgency of the request and genuinely believed that it was a worthwhile

meaningful not only to them at this stage of their development but also to other educators within that region. I shared my views on this with the teaching team and six months later, when we returned to teach Research Methods, we suggested to the students, that they collectively write this history from a 'life historical' perspective.

Recognising that this would not suffice the University requirements for assessment, we asked them to critically review their group research project and reflect upon the experience of the research process in which they engaged (See Appendix 4). It was the teaching team's intention to provide them with an opportunity to reflect upon the process of research as well as the issues and challenges that researchers face in designing, conducting, analysing and disseminating research. Upon reflection, it was only through respect for the various cultures involved and valuing the contributions of the other in spite of differences, that we were able to collaborate with those students in the development of such a bit of work.

Through dialogue and a critical engagement with educational issues we were able to enter into a genuine partnership with the students using research as the vehicle. The book when published by the University, in its series Teachers Voices from the Caribbean will make an important contribution to academic literature in St. Lucia and also to the lives of the students who engaged in the research.

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### *Feedback from St. Lucia*

Thirty-six participants completed evaluation questionnaires at the end of that second study school in St. Lucia. When asked about their expectations for the study school, they seemed intrigued a bit fearful of the notion of research. As was expected, they were also expecting feedback from their first assignment. One participant explained:

*Honestly, my expectations were of a mixed type.*

*Fear – what would the assignment be this time was a question that overpowered all expectations. I wanted a clear and detailed explanation of the assignment.*

Another indicated quite explicitly:

*I honestly had no expectations. What I know I did not want was lectures steeped in theories or research methods.*

Though they had participated in only one previous study school students were able to link teaching with research. For example, one explained that they expected:

*(t)o obtain relevant information on research methods and prepare me to participate in research which would build me up as an educator and also help in initiating change in the education system.*

Some were quite bubbly about their explanations and others indicated in 'question one' whether their expectations had been met. The feedback given under are examples of these:

*I expected a very fulfilling experience and that I got. I am happy that I didn't have to do things like standard deviation and margin of error. The evolution that led to the formulation of the assignment was revealing.*

*The study school was organised according to my expectations. Lecturers were well prepared and the information was given in a clear manner (It is difficult to be lost). All three lecturers are very helpful.*

Other students remarked thus:

*I expected it to be of a high standard since the first study school was. My expectations were met. I was very excited to begin the second study school. I also expected the content of this module to help me develop better professionally and in some way enhance the teaching learning environment.*



The remaining responses were very encouraging because it gave the impression that the study school had been well received. A few of these are quoted under:

*Much has been provided in terms of information, encouragement and support, so that I am more confident about the assignment now. However, in spite of all information given, I 'm still not quite certain how to go about it. However, the support and encouragement have been my guide and drive.*

*Adequately. This is because the lecturers really took time to expose me to e.g. methodology and its importance. My understanding of the importance of Research was also made clear.*

*I have to do research! I am pleased to be a group participant.*

There will always be a body of knowledge which would need to be transferred and disseminated to all. Examples of these are research methods, language and mathematics. Students would probably also have to negotiate their positions with educational institutions. However, when some measures of fluency have been achieved, then dialogue can take place so that they would be able to analyse the material being presented. Teaching according to Freire (1996:119) is a "democratic relationship" where "dialogue is the opportunity available to [the teacher] to open up the thinking of others". This approach to teaching the research methods module and developing the framework for the

assignment seemed to have paid off based on the comments of the following students:

*I was pleased about the approach employed in this study school. The content and issues discussed were defined largely by participants i.e. students. The idea of a practical approach to the learning of methods of educational enquiry is acceptable and intriguing.*

*There was a full discussion for the preparation of the assignment - forming the groups and discussing the methods and procedures for research.*

*The study school was quite productive. A significant amount of the course involved engaging in a process which enabled participants to use their experiences and experiences of their colleagues to analyse the education system.*

*Expectations have been met - in fact more so as my cup is now full and overflowing ! I was not expecting such a challenging exercise, but if I am able to accomplish this one, I dare say that there won't be anything else I won't be able to cope with.*

*Directives, information and discussions were uplifting and interesting.*

*Lots of materials were provided on the topic: Research Methods in Education. The lecturers worked hard and helped me to understand many in-depth areas on the topic.*

The first Course Director of the first M.Ed. Course in Trinidad, Dr. Peter Clough who had a penchant for writing expressive pieces in the dialect of the Trinidadian people wrote:

*Dis research is not what Bell an' Thompson an' Clough does do  
Dis research ting does start an' end wit' YOU.*

13th July, 1993 - Dr. Peter Clough to M.Ed. Students  
at Valsayn Teachers' College

These words are as applicable to students today as it was to the first cohort of Masters students in Trinidad and Tobago in 1993.

### ***Education as a Form of Intervention in the World***

Freirean education is a symbiotic process of reflecting upon and developing insights into the students' evolving culture.

Freire describes education, as a:

... specifically human experience, is a form of intervention in the world. In addition to contents either well or badly taught, this type of intervention also implies both the reproduction of the dominant ideology and its unmasking. The dialectical nature of the education process does not allow it to be only one or the other of these things.

(Freire, 1998: 90-1)

The use of a critical pedagogy being emancipatory in nature, would attempt to empower educators and learners alike, de-mystify language and unmask mainstream pedagogic claims to democracy and critical enquiry. It recognises "curriculum as a form of cultural politics [and acknowledges] the overriding goal of education as the creation of conditions for social transformation" (McLaren & Giroux 1995: 38).

Over the years (1972 - 1998) his ideology became less rigid. He willingly practised his own philosophy of reflection and was able to critique even his own work and identify shortcomings in his previous insights. To Freire, the re-creation of language to suit the changing needs and times was “part of the possible dream of a change of the world” (Freire, 1996: 67).

In his final writings he observed that:

As men and women, we are not simply determined by facts and events. At the same time, we are subject to genetic, cultural, social, class, sexual, and historical conditionings that mark us profoundly and that constitute for us a center of reference.

(Freire, 1998: 91)

### ***Mixed Reviews***

Freire has had mixed reviews far and wide. Admittedly there are many who unlike his faithful followers, find Freire’s writings and dialogues vague and lacking in focus and to some extent one can easily understand why the somewhat controversial writings of Freire can be difficult to read. His life’s work reflected a somewhat esoteric, metaphysical slant to life - his constant search for Utopia and his pedagogy which is a continuous process moving along a continuum in search of the ultimate Utopian product.

Freire (1985) has discussed the nature of the history of colonialism and viewed the inequality of knowledge production as evidence of a 'culture of silence'. Freire's argument however, seems to focus upon:

institutional relations of power and does not adequately address the complexity of conflict within the dominant societies and how this opens up the possibility of new alliances being forged across cultures through engagements that challenge the culture of silence in both dominated and dominant societies.

(Armstrong & Namsoo, 2000:211)

While it is acknowledged that there is a hegemonic aspect to globalisation, where there are tendencies among institutions within dominant societies to lock those with less economic power into a dependency syndrome, it is indeed foolhardy to make such sweeping generalisations without carefully examining the character of specific interactions and alliances. His argument assumes a homogeneous First World ideology and does not make any allowances for instances where the work of educators based in the first world was a genuine engagement across different geographical locations rather than a negatively globalising interaction. These sorts of assumptions would only serve to undermine the role of teachers who enter into such alliances to shape their own professional identities.

In spite of this Freire was full of 'unrepentant utopianism' and naïve faith in the future, that I am able to gather a joyful hope for the possibilities that

abound for Caribbean countries in the present. Freire recognised that decolonisation was an on-going process - a life long struggle that required injections of a critical intervention which would include compassionate dialogue, honesty, a willingness to be creative and insightful, common sense understanding with praxis (McLaren, 1999: 52). Though not clearly offering guidelines on the transitions from critical thought to critical practice, I refuse to be daunted because, it is exactly this space that allows me to be creative in my endeavours regarding teacher professional development - this helps me to recognise that I, like Freire can be a co-creator of paths to critical research and pedagogy.

It can be argued that Freire's model can be applied not only with adults in a third-world context but in any educational programme throughout the world simply because if properly implemented it can be contextualised within the culture and personality of groups and sub-groups of people.

To my mind, Freire's philosophy transcends the boundaries of time and geography, socio-political and economic status. Concepts that are now considered politically correct and refer to issues on human rights can establish real links with Freirean philosophy. Clear examples of these are issues related to the voicing of difference, feminism, socially and economically marginalised groups, disabled groups. His failure to fully

articulate his position on current issues of oppression under the banners of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and religion again allows me the freedom to explore the works of others, which in itself is an education.

If a critical pedagogy results in critical consciousness, then the goal of education, would be to prepare citizens to think holistically and critically about their particular situation; feel empowered to think and act on the conditions to effect change; and, be able to contextualise those conditions within the wider contexts of power within society. These to me have been the successes of the courses conducted by the University of Sheffield in the Caribbean.

Students from the 1998 - 2000 cohort from Trinidad and Tobago suggest that the graduates felt that their time and money were well spent. They announced that they *were happy that [they] chose to pursue this course of study and would recommend this programme to other teachers willingly*. This to me is the most effective form of advertisement, because quality sells itself. The advertisements in the newspaper is simply to inform those who are interested about the dates and times of the course. The strategies of engaging in dialogue and praxis and the de-mystification of research prompted the graduates to make the following comments:

*Generally, I believe that this programme benefits all educators who seek to improve our education*

*system. All tutors and format of the course all developed and delivered.*

*Relevant, well organised and well presented course. The content, structure and methodology was well suited to adult education and the payment plan allowed for working parents to finance studies.*

*An enriching experience.*

*Excellent Programme. I was impressed that the texts provided in 1998 were 1998 texts whilst the recommended texts in 1999 were 1999 texts. Keep it up*

*Both local and Sheffield tutors paid great interest to the needs of the learner.*

In embracing the practice of critical pedagogy, the Sheffield facilitators (British and Caribbean) have literally gone against the status quo by attempting to re-define education from the perspective of the sub-ordinate people, the teachers in the education system.

### ***Conclusion***

Agreeing with Apple (1993:180-1) it would be folly to suggest that in moving forward, one should simply embrace Freirean ideology as a "transportable technique" without modification to suit the needs of the particular situation. Though a substantial part of my work is rooted in the developing world of the Caribbean, the other substantial part of my work is rooted in the developed country, Britain. The countries of the world do not exist in a vacuum as entities unto themselves. Rather, they



negotiate for 'space' in the global village which has shrunk considerably over the last ten to fifteen years because of satellite communication and the information superhighway or World Wide Web. As such, not only should the participants of the various programmes be able to articulate their particular situations from a 'home grown' perspective, they must also be able to articulate these same situations with the added understanding of inclusion and exclusion. In so doing, they can begin to have a voice in negotiations involving educational reform.

I think it would be folly to even assume that adopting a Freirean Approach to education would serve as an antidote to the socio-cultural ills of society. Rather, efforts in that direction could serve to enlighten and empower the citizenry by giving new meaning to the world and to education practices at large.

[W]hat I have been proposing from my political convictions, is a profound respect for the autonomy of the educator. What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students - a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the color of the other, the gender of the other, the class of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other. But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air. These things take place in history.

(Freire, 1997: 307-8)

## CHAPTER 8: Understanding the Learners

### *Introduction*

Countries in the Caribbean like those in the rest of the developing world appear to aspire to the same educational goals like those of the developed nations of the world. At least the jargon is the same. It is therefore not uncommon to hear the following popular terms which are used in the developed countries being echoed in the smaller countries as well viz. *education for all, lifelong learning, on-going teacher professional development, inclusion* and the like. The average teacher in the developing countries does not have a contextual understanding of these terms but is swept into the euphoria of the jargon that is skilfully and persuasively used by senior administrators and politicians.

The education plans within this Caribbean region all speak about the provision of quality education to the children; but, the provision of "good education demands good teachers", says Perraton (1993:1). Good teachers are those who are able to engage critically with the material presented to them and take positive steps towards re-inventing the world in which they live.

When countries of the English-Caribbean began to gain their political independence from Britain, the demands on education increased

considerably. New schools were built and teachers who may not have been adequately qualified were placed in them to teach the nations' children resulting in a "... lack of confidence, knowledge and skills to teach more than they were themselves taught, or to teach in a different way" (Perraton, 1993: 1).

In some instances the qualifications needed for entry into the teaching service were as low as three subject passes at the Secondary Level. The status of the teaching profession was poor and the monetary remuneration was not attractive. It became even less attractive in some countries like Trinidad and Tobago when the teachers salaries were cut by 10 percent in the late 1980s. Teachers were becoming demoralised and some of the more educated ones left the country for greener pastures. This resulted in class sizes becoming larger and fewer teachers being hired.

The quality of education provided in the school system began to decrease. Very often the increase in class size was fixed to loan agreements between international lending agencies and governments of the developing nations who were eager to show progress in the form of new school buildings and perhaps some teacher sensitisation programmes.

Some of those teachers who have experienced these afore-mentioned social and economic changes have been students on our courses and in the future, others from that era may also become students on our courses. Knowing who your learners are, and understanding their various backgrounds are crucial if designers and administrators are to effectively develop and/or modify their programmes to accommodate and support their learners.

In this chapter, I have developed profiles of the distance learner on the University's courses in Trinidad and Tobago and St Lucia and identified some of the issues pertaining to those students. The data reveal that understanding the gender-related issues, the general challenges that may occur in distance learning courses and the *raison d'être* behind the students' enrolment on the various distance learning courses are crucial to providing adequate support in such locations. The data also draws attention to the need for strong pre-enrolment counselling and/or a mandatory induction programme where potential students are briefed on the nature of the model of distance learning which is to be used on the course to which they wish to be enrolled.

## *These Are My Students*

### **Trends in Trinidad and Tobago**

On the very first course which involved the University of Sheffield in Trinidad and Tobago, at least 86 percent of the students were women. I remember clearly that babies were born on that course and students took turns in child-minding. This trend in high female participation continued throughout the life of the diploma courses varying between 85 to 93 percent in every cohort. When the Masters Courses were introduced, the same tendency prevailed. I have modified a model developed by Rowntree (2000) and adapted it to suit the distance education course in Trinidad. In doing this, I have produced the following Table (8.1) on the implications of knowing my learners in Trinidad and Tobago:

**Table 8.1 Understanding the Profile of the Learner in Trinidad**

<b>My learners ...</b>	<b>This means that I must ...</b>
are mostly women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ acknowledge this</li></ul>
differ in their types and level of learning expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ make the sessions and course material as varied and as interesting as possible</li></ul>
may have very high expectations based on feedback from graduates of the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ be honest and open in my dealing with them not make promises that I cannot keep.</li></ul>
will have to get access to a variety of equipment and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ be aware that some will be uncomfortable using the computer and may have some difficulty communicating via e-mail.</li><li>▪ persevere and establish on-going</li></ul>

My learners ...	This means that I must ...
	communication with them using the technology.
are in most cases, paying for the course themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure that they get value for their money.</li> </ul>
live and work in various parts of the island and some may even come from the sister isle of Tobago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ understand that some may have problems with access to library facilities, therefore adequate provision must be made to accommodate those students.</li> <li>▪ understand that they may be occasionally late for class if study school sessions are held after regular (8-4) work hours because there are terrible traffic jams along the major routes in Trinidad.</li> <li>▪ understand that classes may have to end fairly early because of the lack of availability of reliable public transportation after 8:30 p.m.</li> <li>▪ some may have to go to the airport to catch a plane to go back home to Tobago</li> <li>▪ understand that women fear for their personal safety if they have to use public transportation alone after 8:30 p.m.</li> </ul>

### Emerging Trends in St. Lucia

When the M.Ed. course was introduced in St. Lucia, the same trend seemed to apply. Forty students enrolled in that first Certificate/Diploma/Masters Course in July 1999. At least 25 of the 33 persons who responded to the question on gender were female with 8 being male. The majority of participants (26) were between 30 and 45 years old with the majority of male students (7) falling into that category. See Table 8.2 below.

**Table 8.2 Age \* Gender Crosstabulation - Cohort 1 St. Lucia**

	Age Range	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
<b>Age</b>	18 - 24	0	2	2
	25 - 30	0	3	3
	30 - 35	3	4	7
	36 - 40	3	7	10
	40 - 45	1	6	7
	46 - 50	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>33</b>

At the final study school which was conducted in January 2001, the enrolment on the course was 35 with 6 of the students being male. Using an adaptation of the previously used Rowntree (2000) model to suit the distance education course in St. Lucia, I have produced the following table (8.3) on the implications of knowing 'my' learners in St. Lucia. This has been a very important exercise, because I have been able to acknowledge that the characteristics and the necessary support action vary somewhat.

**Table 8.3 Understanding the Profile of the Learner in St. Lucia**

<b>My learners ...</b>	<b>This means that I must ...</b>
are mostly women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ acknowledge this</li> </ul>
differ in their types and level of learning expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ make the sessions and course material as varied and as interesting as possible</li> </ul>
may be apprehensive about relating to tutors from a foreign university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ be honest and open in my dealing with them</li> <li>▪ not make promises that I cannot keep</li> <li>▪ ensure that any induction programme answers their questions and allays their</li> </ul>

My learners ...	This means that I must ...
	fears as far as possible without being patronising
will have to get access to a variety of equipment and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ be aware that some will be uncomfortable using the computer and may have some difficulty communicating via e-mail.</li> <li>▪ persevere and establish on-going communication with them using the technology.</li> </ul>
Are paying for the course themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure that they get value for their money.</li> </ul>
live and work in various parts of the island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ understand that they may have problems with access to library facilities.</li> <li>▪ understand that they may be occasionally late for class or may have to leave about half an hour earlier than everyone else because of the lack of availability of public transportation after dark and the ruggedness of the St. Lucian terrain.</li> </ul>

### *Gender and Distance Education in the Caribbean*

... Caribbean people are among the most modern in the world. They are Indians without caste, Chinese without dynasties, Lebanese without militias, Africans without tribes and Europeans without class! They have lost the distinctives that identified and defined them in the Old World societies from which they originated.

(Miller, 1991 :66)

In the Caribbean, women experience life differently from island to island. Though Afro-Caribbean women in the Caribbean may share similar experiences with other black women in the diaspora however, these



women are NOT identical. Caribbean women of East Indian descent also have different experiences and understandings of the world and so too do women of mixed heritage. Added to this are the variations of experiences that one can have as a result of skin colour, eye colour, class, political views, religion, physical ability or disability, the level of education acquired, sexual preference, the geographical location of the home on the island (urban/rural/suburban) (Cole, 1997:5). In spite of these differences, and whatever, her place in society, the woman is usually the primary care-giver whether it is actually looking after the physical aspects of the home or the emotional needs of the household.

Generally, the Caribbean is known as a matrifocal society because of the variety of female headed households which abound. While this may be the experience for many of the black and perhaps mixed women of the society, this label does not extend to most women of East Indian or 'white' or 'Lebanese/Syrian' parentage because the majority of those households are patriarchal. However, the education outcomes are the same as those of the Afro-centric families. The females are out-performing males in the secondary school system and in fact, "...women's enrolment in higher education has surpassed that of men in the Caribbean.... Although enrolment levels are still below 20 per 1,000 for women and for men (United Nations Statistics Division, 2000: online)." A similar situation is

true for Western Asia whilst in South America, the number of women enrolled is equal to the number of men enrolled (United Nations Statistics Division, 2000: online).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the world pattern in literacy was one of male literacy surpassing female literacy Miller (1991: 74). This was likewise the norm in the Caribbean (ibid). However, the pattern started to shift in the 1920s when women began catching up and surpassing the men (ibid). The vehicle that was used for upward social mobility was the school system - the public high school for the upper classes of society and the teachers' colleges for the lower strata. What began as a 'bias' in favour of the males in the nineteenth century evolved into a 'bias' in favour of the females in the twentieth century. Miller (1991:76-7) draws attention to the shift by explaining:

In the nineteenth century teachers' college enrolment was considerably male biased. By the first decade of the twentieth century this had shifted to a slight female bias...In the last decades of the twentieth century teachers' college enrolment is as female biased as it was male biased in the nineteenth century.

According to Miller (1991: 74), the Caribbean was one of the few regions of the world where girls enjoyed a higher level of literacy than boys between 1921 and 1975.

In spite of this increased access to and success in the education arena, few women are allowed to graduate to the commanding heights of the society. Though some are allowed to enter the inner sanctum of traditional male occupations and participate at senior levels, many work in traditional 'womanly jobs' such as nursing and teaching.

International statistics reveal that though women comprise the majority of teachers in the world, "with rare exception, [they] are seriously...under-represented in senior teaching and management posts" (ILO, 1996 - 2002). This is not so in the Caribbean where the majority of teachers and senior teachers are women. What you do find within this region is the under-representation of women in senior positions in the Ministries of Education and the Teachers' Unions. One of the arguments put forward about the teaching profession therefore, is its 'highly feminized nature' has resulted in a negative impact on the salaries and other conditions of service (ILO, 1996 - 2002). This of course contributes to a vicious cycle where males seeking higher wages and high quality females are not attracted to the lower wages offered to teachers, eventually resulting in a lower quality of education for both sexes and fewer male role models for boys.

Learning at any age for anybody requires support, space, time and resources. However, gender inequalities or sole-leadership in the

household can impede learning opportunities for women turning it into a real struggle. Though distance learning has created opportunities for all sorts of people in all walks of life to access courses of their choice, women remain a group at risk. In this respect, distance education has an important role to play in the lives of women in today's society and continues to make an important contribution. As a result of their level of participation within society, women experience:

... constraints of time, space, resources and socio-economic disabilities ...It gives them a second chance to step into the main systems of education ... enabling them at the same time to earn and learn as well as to fulfilling family responsibilities .

(Trivedi, 1989: 21)

According to Evans (1995), women experience several barriers to participation in education which can be broadly classified as cultural, attitudinal, qualifactory, situational and institutional, which tend to vary in significance according to the age of the woman, the local cultural context and the level of education which is envisaged. I will use these classifications to highlight some of the challenges which women have faced while pursuing University of Sheffield courses in Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia. The following discussion is based on stories that have been shared with me since the inception of the programme. The faces behind the stories were both male and female but the subjects were the females on the various courses and their struggles with life to pursue

their dream of professional development. In many cases, we have had to 'cover' for each other and find ways to support each other in the less than friendly environments in which we found ourselves.

### **Cultural and Situational Barriers**

If women live in a very traditional community, then they may be inhibited to participate in further education based on the 'guidance' of the elders. These elders can be either male or female or a combination of both but the power of tradition is exercised in such instances. In the Caribbean, this may be experienced in very rural communities where life is very insular and there is a tendency to perceive the outside world (towns and cities) as potentially 'evil'. Distance from the venue can be another deterrent especially if there is no reliable public transportation available during the period when that service is required.

An added challenge occurs when male partners are insecure, suspicious and jealous and resort to ridiculing their wives at the very suggestion of further or higher education (Ellis, 1990). Sometimes it does not matter whether the woman is earning her own income or earning more than her partner. The partner, whether he resides in the house or not, has the final say. Sometimes when the woman goes against the wishes of the partner, it could result in serious marginalisation of that woman in the household.

There have been instances where women on the Sheffield courses experience physical and/or psychological abuse as a result of the insecurity of their mates.

### **Attitudinal Barriers**

Socialisation in the home and the family which has been re-inforced by the school system and the career counselling services have played a vital role in determining the self-confidence of women. Though the patterns are changing now, the women who sign up to do the Masters Degree in Educational Studies are two or even three generations removed from the teenagers and young adults of today. They have been moulded by the old school of thought where it was understood that a woman's place was in the home. Our post-graduate students want to believe in themselves and their own ability to succeed but that in itself is a struggle. They may mask their discomfort about a situation by being aggressive, petulant or loud. However, as soon as they are challenged they retreat and return with an apologetic explanation at the end of the session 'in camera' with the lecturer.

### **Qualifactory and Situational Barriers**

There are limited opportunities for continuing higher education in developing countries in the Caribbean. As a result of this, many women

teachers register for Masters Courses without the basic entry requirement of a First Degree. They probably feel that it is an easier route to higher education and are willing to try anything to get "*another chance at success*". They explain that most of the courses which they wish to pursue are full-time and overseas and that would mean leaving their jobs and their families behind. Many are not prepared to take that risk.

When the first study school was conducted with the first cohort of 40 students in St. Lucia, most of them (33) had no significant problems with the course. The two female candidates who cited problems spoke about things which were specific to their ability to adapt to their new learning situation. For example, one stated that "*... the volume of reading demanded during the study school was enormous*". Another person had challenges adjusting "*to the level of new terminologies*". Yet another was grappling with the subject matter itself. These students were part of a pilot group who had not quite achieved the full qualification for admission directly into the Masters' Course. They were admitted at Certificate level on the condition that they could be up-graded to Diploma and then to Masters' Level if their performance was at a certain level. All the participants had considerable teaching experience and had shown evidence of pursuing some form of higher professional qualifications. Though the comments were all presented in a positive manner, they revealed that the students

did not fully comprehend the enormity of the task ahead. Even at that early stage, each person was individually interviewed by a member of the course team and the depth and breadth of the course explained. One can only assume that in their eagerness to be accepted, they agreed to everything that was explained without adequately digesting the information given and associated the impending course with their previous Teachers' College experiences or their on-line Certificate Courses which were conducted by the University of the West Indies.

Segregation and discrimination also reared its head during that first study school. One person who chose not to identify their gender felt that *"it is unfair for teachers who have attained a higher level of achievement to be treated as students who are at the base line requirement."* This statement suggests that either the person did not properly understand that the structure of the course provided an equal opportunity for all comers to succeed and that no one (even those with graduate qualifications) was guaranteed an automatic entry to the Masters level OR the person was incensed that others with *"lesser qualifications"* were allowed to begin at the same level as someone *"who had a higher level of qualification"*. That comment seemed to have its genesis in an old colonial understanding of education and hierarchy.



### **Situational Barriers**

In her qualitative study among women distance learners in the United States, May (1994) revealed that women had little control over what was perceived to be their domestic responsibilities in the home and this impacted negatively on their study schedules resulting in "double duty". Mothers rescheduled their studies to a much later period at night when their children were asleep and other women fit their studies around their household chores. Both sets of women were 'grateful' that distance learning was an option which allowed them to fulfil their familial responsibilities while engaging in professional development. This sentiment has been repeatedly echoed in the Caribbean. One student, in a state of exasperation commented, "*It is so difficult, trying to do everything at the same time.*"

Very often courses like these put a strain on romantic relationships and students require and expect extra support from the partners who are not studying. Men have been prone to 'straying', when their wives or women folk have pursued this new interest in learning. In fact, there have been at least four women who have been divorced from their husbands before the completion of the two year course.

## General Discussions on Gender and Ethnicity

Having been involved in the professional courses for educators in the Caribbean conducted by or supported by the University of Sheffield since 1987, I am able to say that to date that more than 80 percent of the participants have been women of varied ethnicity and background. Participation in these courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels has been a significant achievement for them as it was a very real example of them taking charge of their lives and empowering themselves with knowledge and skills.

One student from one of the Trinidad courses remarked:

*I am now doing work in the area of programme planning for both children and adults. I am a part-time working mother and have a keen interest in gender studies.*

This woman felt empowered as a result of her participation in the course and felt that she was now in a better position to contribute to society.

Another student, from that same programme, ever the mother said that the experiences from the course would *"improve the quality of the educational provision I make for my children."*

Those who had family commitments looked after the physical needs of the household as well as the emotional needs. Those without children supported those who had, by baby-sitting from time to time, taping

lectures and sharing literature. There have been several instances where students brought their babies, toddlers, pre-teen and adolescent children to lectures and tutorials because they needed to care for them and did live in an extended family setting. They also did not have that level of support from their men nor did they have the financial wherewithal to hire a child minder.

The East Indian women because of their wage earning abilities since the days of indentureship had developed some bargaining power within their families and some were allowed to pursue their professional development. In spite of this extra commitment to self, they were still expected to fulfil their normal household duties and support the family emotionally.

Of course, the more economically secure women were allowed to buy in domestic help to assist in household duties like cooking, washing, cleaning and ironing. Ethnicity was not an issue here: financial resources made the difference. This did not mean that husbands were emotionally supportive. Some were still perturbed that their wives were out 'late at night', about their own business. Some women reported that their partners felt excluded because they did not share that part of their wives' lives.

## *The Motivations of the Students*

### **Trinidad and Tobago**

The situation in Trinidad was and continues to be a bit different from that in St. Lucia. Since 1989, there has been a steady stream of preparatory undergraduate Certificate-Diploma courses which have been run as a franchised programme with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (T&TUTA). These courses have acted as feeders for the Masters Level Courses being conducted by the University of Sheffield. As a result of this gateway, one student commented that:

*(h)aving completed the Diploma in Special Education and many other courses and seminars, (she) felt the need to expand (her) knowledge in (her) field.*

Others cited :

*The flexibility (time).*

*No commitment to regular classes.*

It was also available “*at the right time*”, said another who had recently decided to pursue an MSc. but changed her mind when the Sheffield course was advertised. Some persons were experiencing a thirst for professional development and for realising their potential.

*Always interested in doing Masters by research. After 20 years as a teacher, I chose to delve deeper in the field.*

*To become more educated in a specific area. To make a difference in the level of education among the less fortunate in my community.*

*As a teacher it is of benefit to me for personal growth. I am able to renewing information and remain current*

*I have a chance to further my education – a major reason for choice.*

The students who participated in the Masters of Education programme in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 1998 – 2000 were motivated to participate in the programme because of its structure and content. They also acknowledged that the University Sheffield was chosen because of “*the international reputation of this institution*” and “*the certification from the course would have international currency*”. Students were also motivated by the relevance of the courses to their jobs.

### **St. Lucia**

Question 3 of the evaluation questionnaire given to the first cohort of St. Lucian students in July 1999 addressed the reasons for enrolment on the programme. Participants were encouraged to tick as many responses as were applicable to them. They identified several reasons for participation. The most common reason cited was *to gain more professional knowledge* with 37, followed by *to gain higher qualifications* with 24. Seven were motivated by the prospect of a *promotion* and 8 persons felt that they had *an opportunity to meet new people*. In the open-ended section, other reasons

cited included that of *convenience*. The course was being offered locally and candidates saw it as a chance to enhance their teaching learning experience without having to travel abroad for study schools and tutorials.

The seeming relevance of the course to their job was another motivator for joining the programme. When the St. Lucian students were asked about the relevance of the course to their jobs, their responses were as follows:

*Should assist me in developing curriculum that is relevant to needs and pedagogically effective. Improve my skills techniques as a trainer.*

*The areas of study are quite appropriate to me in my school. I am aware of the deficiencies of the system and I try to implement what I have been exposed to on this course.*

*Clarification of educational issues and engaging in the debate is undoubtedly interesting.*

*As an educator, this course assists in the dissemination of knowledge to students. Furthering my professional development status.*

*The revelations gained in this course will greatly assist me in making pupils under my care become more literate. It is hoped that when this happens, the home would eventually become a more literate and informed one.*

During our last recruitment (April 2001) for the Masters' of Education Course in Educational Studies in St. Lucia, we were looking for 40 students. One hundred and thirteen turned up. Eighty-five percent of

them were women who begged for 'a chance'. Some came openly and said:

*Miss, I know I don't have the correct qualifications, but could you run a course for me to bring me up to the level? I know a lot of people who would be interested.*

When asked why they wanted to do the course, at least half of the women said that they were "... busy seeing about [their] families and felt that it was time to see about [themselves]". Those who have been through the experience said that:

*The course has given me a chance to refresh my knowledge as well as to gain new knowledge in the field of education.*

*Teachers in the Caribbean are starved for knowledge in education. If there is an avenue open where teachers do not have to leave their homeland, they will grasp at it.*

Based on the various feedback from students of both locations (St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago), I recognised that some people signed up because they wanted a flexible education system, and fulltime enrolment based at an academic institution would not have suited them at all.

### ***Analysing the Success of the Programme***

The reality of emerging technologies is forcing institutions of higher learning to redefine their approach to teaching and learning in higher education, especially if they are faced with students who demand greater

access. Undoubtedly, moving away from face-to-face interactions will involve a drastic change to the traditional culture of universities. Whilst this may appear daunting to some staff within traditional universities, it may be readily accepted by students who have an avid interest in computers and have grown up within a rich multi-media environment. These students may have a degree of open-mindedness which has not yet been cultivated by their lecturers. Technology has therefore become a two edged sword which provides opportunities on the one hand and challenges on the other. The increasing tendency for universities to be managed like businesses and the impact of competition between universities in the marketplace, may force the hand of the traditional system to use the learning technology to redefine the way they operate and deliver courses.

As a result of these market forces, higher education, explains Duguet (1995: online) is faced with three challenges:

... to provide good-quality instruction adapted to the 21st century, to supply it to every young student and adult who requires it, and to deliver it as cost-effectively as possible.

In the Caribbean, the University of Sheffield has taken the idea one step further by accommodating the culture and degree of transition of the various countries within that region. While students are encouraged to use the technology to access internet and library resources and e-mail, the



University has capitalised on the strength of the oral tradition and the transitory state of the islands, hence the use of the multi-modal approach of face-to-face sessions supported by the technology. Students who do not have computers are not disadvantaged and those who do, share their resources so that their colleagues can have access to email facilities and the internet. This builds on the strengths of the Caribbean community and encourages the acceptance of modern facilities at the same time.

Over the years the students who registered on the various courses offered in the Caribbean did so because they provided opportunities for them that were not available from other institutions. Generally students felt that the courses provided: *opportunities for them to advance their career through promotions; follow alternate career paths; refresh their skills to return to their career; meet their personal goals; meet the goals that their families had for them; contributed to the economic stability of their family.*

Some felt that their prior degrees had placed them to be in a position where they could accept the concept of distance learning. One student explained:

*My first degree has placed me aptly. This programme must certainly have pre-requisites of a relatively high level. One who has not been exposed to tertiary education even at a basic level would certainly have difficulty in pursuing this programme.*

Students on distance learning courses have to juggle their academic commitments between families and jobs. Unfortunately, this new schedule would not fit in with the conventional hours of a traditional course. In the Caribbean there is little choice with regard to the institution of higher learning. Though some persons may want to pursue their higher degree with the local university, a number of them live and/or work a considerable distance away from the campus. This results in a problem of the location of teaching, if one has to attend regular classes every week. One of the students explained that:

*The opportunity presented itself for my professional development (it's something that I always wanted to do). It was difficult to pursue at UWI (the local university).*

In both countries, some students also had negative experiences and very unpleasant memories of schooling. These had sufficiently eroded their self-confidence to the point where they felt alienated from institutions which to them, represented traditional learning.

Some learners were attracted because the courses have been approved by their Ministry of Education as was the case in St. Lucia and the learners were willing to 'take a chance' on a programme which has been sold as supporting the national agenda. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, some students are also attracted by the international currency of the

certification and the transferability of academic credits on the international arena.

The University of Sheffield is not in competition with the University of the West Indies because the courses that are offered by the University of Sheffield are not available at the local university. For this reason, the students feel that they have another option to explore and feel free to make choices based on their current needs.

Students, regardless of their age, ethnicity and/or gender appreciate the ability to earn a 'normal' income as they continue to learn. This puts them in a position where they could maintain their families and attend to their financial commitments while pursuing their educational interests.

Distance education in some of the first world countries has now become highly acceptable and even trendy. It is no longer considered to be a fringe dweller on the margins of education. In other quarters, like the Caribbean, it is gaining acceptability with some caution. Concerns do exist, and rightly so, about the quality of the courses being offered and the academic rigour contained therein. When distance learning courses are new to a particular location, persons who could be considered as potential students are sceptical about participating in distance learning

programmes, thinking them to be of lesser quality than a traditional classroom-based university course . Students of the first cohort of students in St. Lucia confirmed this. They were amazed at the overwhelming response from interested persons for the new intake (2001 - 2003) and explained that they were waiting to see the outcome of the first course before they committed themselves.

The mode used in the Caribbean has paid off in terms of affecting motivation of new students. While distance education courses internationally, have a higher attrition rate than campus-based courses, at the University of Sheffield, the courses in the Caribbean have the highest retention and completion rate than any of the other distance learning courses in the University.

Based on the feedback from students, we recognised that at a glance, courses via distance education could give the impression of being a quick and relatively uncomplicated way to acquire a degree qualification. When participants become truly involved, they realise that it is not so. Indeed, students' personal characteristics and learning styles play a major part in the success achieved by the distance learner. A lot depends on the student's ability to organise time and resources. As students from Trinidad were approaching the end of the course in July 2000, they

commented that *time management, poor networking and poor organisation were the major challenges* that they experienced during the course. Sometimes potential students are so keen to participate that they very often underestimate the time commitment required and the need to make appropriate family or work arrangements to facilitate and complete their studies. They do take some time before they fully realise that they have to more fully accept the responsibility for their learning because there is no 'lecturer' who will be meeting you in a classroom next week and urging you to continue (Burge, 1989:online).

Over the years, the Directors of the courses in the Caribbean recognised that some students needed to see the faces of their support person(s). With their primary need addressed, they were then ready to continue the interaction via other means. It seems as though, those periodic face-to-face interactions helped to dissipate the miles of water which separate countries - then the distance seems not-so-far. They are then better able to appreciate the 'wonderful invention' of electronic mail. When an idea is new for a certain group of people, managers need to be patient with them and seek to develop creative methods of supporting them through their periods of transition.

### *Planning to Reduce Further Barriers*

There are several hurdles which one can encounter as a distance education provider. Some of these can be addressed through careful planning and some of the planned items further highlight the need for greater support for students.

The majority of our students in the Caribbean come into distance education 'cold-turkey'. The data point to the need for greater support through a briefing programme which I would call pre-enrolment counselling. Students need a forum where they can be informed about what is happening and what the course is about. One way of providing such an interface is through some sort of 'pre-enrolment activity or experience'. This can be provided through interview sessions, the telephone, video presentations, a special group session, pamphlets and/or other materials.

Like traditional courses, students need to be fully informed about the prior knowledge needed for the course as well as any specific entry requirements; the duration of the course; course fees; attendance at residential sessions or study schools and whether these are compulsory or optional; how the delivery system works and generally what is expected of them over the stipulated time period of the course.

Students, before they commit to a distance learning course, need to understand the differences between traditional courses and the type of distance learning course that is being offered. It is easy for course providers to overlook this element, because they already know what their programme is about. It's in their head. They developed it and sometimes set about implementing it. However, the two modes are different in terms of delivery and support structures. Students need to be thoroughly briefed on these.

As distance education and new technologies become more popular, it is important that educationalists begin to 'develop a culture of self-directed learning' among the students within the general school system. As Lennox Bernard, the Co-ordinator for the School of Continuing Studies at the University of the West Indies shared in an interview in August 1999:

*students need to become comfortable within a culture of self-directed learning so that it is maintained when they reach to the adult scenario ... if they aren't they will be forever begging for the tutors to be there ... in the transition, there may be a need to have more tutorial sessions in developing the self-instructional mode, but you can gradually begin to release them to themselves.*

Most distance learners have had no prior experience with this form of learning. Many are adults who left school a long time ago, and their education was for the most part conducted in traditional settings. Some were even underachievers in their earlier education. If students are to be

successful using a distance learning mode, then they need to be inducted into the culture and taught the skills required for this form of study. My experience in the field as well as the feedback from present and former students, suggest that the most important study skills include time management as was previously mentioned; the efficient use of reading, video, radio and television broadcasts, the internet and other materials (particularly television broadcasts); efficient listening at study school sessions; effective group participation whether or not the lecturer is present, and especially in the absence of a lecturer ; and effective techniques for taking notes, writing essays, and preparing for examinations.

Such skills may be taught at induction sessions before a course begins or through remedial assistance during the course, as deficiencies become apparent. Courses on study skills may be taught in face-to-face settings or, more usually, through self-study packages. Induction sessions should focus on advising students on the various ways they could best benefit from distance learning courses. Students need to appreciate that it is a serious step to engage in such endeavours and they can take steps to ensure that they get the most of their learning experiences. Providing what might seem to be obvious guidelines such as identifying a support team because there are many sacrifices to be made are simple but



important considerations. Family and friends who are supportive prepare the way for support. If students are not able to get that sort of support, and they decide to pursue their objective, then they should recognise that the experience is going to be particularly trying because it is going to a 'singular' effort.

Students should be encouraged to make every effort to actively participate in a peer group. Those groups usually provide support, because each member would be having similar experiences of being on the course. Those types of systems work well as study groups where students could engage in dialogue about educational issues. They could also use that forum as a clearinghouse for sharing literature.

This system worked very well in the early years of the franchised Certificate -Diploma Programme in Trinidad and Tobago (1989 - 992). Former students of that course who are now students of the Remote Location PhD. in the Trinidad and Tobago were reminiscing about how *"useful those sessions were to (their) development"*. They all agreed that they *"provided an enormous amount of support"* and worked well at that time because they *"transcended geographical boundaries. Strong and lasting relationships which were formed then continue to be strong even now"* within the evolving landscape of education in Trinidad and Tobago. The

formation of study groups is recommended in all our courses in that region and in St. Lucia, persons choose groups to work with towards the completion of a piece of local research. This also helps to build morale among the students.

Learning only becomes real when it can apply it to real life situations. Students should therefore be encouraged to embrace every opportunity to apply the learning from their involvement on the course to their current situations. Timetables are also massively important. Schedules should be developed every step of the way and taken very seriously. Students should endeavour to stick as closely as possible to their plans and put in extra work if time is lost some where along the line. It is very easy to procrastinate and fall behind. A plan is only effective if it is consistently followed. This has been tried and tested generally through the course, but more specifically through the co-ordination of the hands-on research project, the local tutorial system and the preparation for dissertation strategy where lecturers, local tutors and students are called upon by each other to account for their contribution throughout the various stages.

Having been through all the data, taught on several study schools and having been a student on some of the courses, I would surmise that the 'human' element is the most important element of all. Remembering that

whatever position you hold within the wider system, as a distance education provider, you are going to be interacting with 'humans' regardless of the mode of application. As such, the more noble human qualities are to be encouraged and supported. Not all students are intrinsically motivated and opportunities should be embraced where students are encouraged so that they keep on the right track. Timely and unambiguous feedback on assignments help to calm anxious nerves and encourage students further. Also, making the time to chat with students about their concerns when you are in the country for study schools helps to keep the experience real for them. One of the students who was experiencing both psychological and physical abuse, could not bring herself to write about her situation via email or a formal letter. Though she knew that she had to notify the 'authorities', she waited until there was face to face communication before doing so.

Students as a rule do not read manuals if they are left to do so on their own. However, if they are required to do so as in order to engage in discussions around a topic, it provides the impetus to do the required reading. That strategy works very well and encourages creative and active thinking, student participation and the reading of manuals.

## ***Conclusion***

Continuing to consider cultural and regional differences as the courses develop is of crucial importance. I would therefore suggest that a diversity policy is necessary. Learning is different in traditional societies. One must recognise the importance of the oral tradition and the tradition of face-to-face contact in any systems that are set up to support students. This approach has been and continues to be, useful in the continued development of the Sheffield programme. Students appreciate it when conscious efforts are made by lecturers to understand the culture. As they say in the Caribbean *"this is a ticklish situation - it is not as straightforward as it seems"*.

I would argue that answers lie in the philosophical underpinning of the entire programme. What images do students conjure up when they hear the appellation: 'University of Sheffield'? Do they have positive images of hope, respect, opportunities, democracy, and commitment or do they have negative images of disillusionment, neglect, banking education and disrespect? The former would seem to be the case and the reason that the programme continues to grow is as a result of the high quality student testimonies that are shared among the population at large. The University has never launched a massive public relations campaign

within the region. The quality of the programme speaks for itself through the voices of the participants thus:

*I am happy that I chose to pursue this course of study. I would recommend this distance learning programme to other teachers willingly. (Trinidad)*

*Distance learning is made interesting with educators like you at the other end of the communication system. ( St. Lucia)*

## Chapter 9: Supporting the Learners

### *Introduction*

Using the feedback from students and tutors, this chapter explores the importance of local tutorial support from these two perspectives within a local cultural context. It will be argued that the data points to the absolute necessity of ensuring that adequate library provisions are a fundamental aspect of the structure of any course and that this provision needs to be in place before teaching begins.

As stated earlier in Chapter 5, Focus Group Sessions were conducted with the 1998 - 2000 cohort of students from the Masters' of Education in Special and Inclusive Education and in Educational Studies courses conducted Trinidad.

For the most part these students were very satisfied with the programmes. They felt a sense of pride in their work and appreciated the fact that Lecturers from the University of Sheffield actually came to Trinidad to 'lecture' them. They were also appreciative of the comments made by lecturers, who indicated that they were not only there to support students in their learning but also to learn themselves. At first the students were flabbergasted but the University lecturers explained that there must be some exchange of ideas and information if the trips across the Atlantic were going to be worth their efforts. This notion of 'an

exchange of ideas' enhanced the students' self-esteem enormously and every effort was made to engage with the material presented and to enter into debates about current issues, using both local as well as international perspectives. Most participants were able to improve their practice in their field of work and their participation in the course encouraged them to be more tolerant and supportive of others with whom they came into contact.

### *Local Tutorials*

In the Caribbean, the University of Sheffield has developed a system whereby they hire a team of local (Caribbean) tutors, some of whom are graduates of previous University of Sheffield courses, to provide face-to-face tutorials for each module using guidelines prepared by the lecturers on the courses. The understanding is that these tutors are there as critical friends and advisors to the students and should not be seen as 'dispensers' of knowledge. When students have been through an education system, like that in many Caribbean countries, where they have mastered the art of being passive learners, it is very easy to continue that trend throughout their life.

The Sheffield course philosophy is one which cautions both tutors and students against the use of 'banking' education. Tutors have been

encouraged to be as innovative as possible in generating activities which illustrate or enrich the objectives of the modules and they are expected to encourage the students to think critically by discussing journal articles or other pieces of writing. They provide guidance in developing assignment plans, etc., and provide encouragement when the going gets rough and students feel stressed and demotivated. Their role is to encourage the students to accept responsibility for their learning and to guide them in actively participating in their learning. For further support students are encouraged to contact their University lecturers and Course Co-ordinator by whatever means suits them ( letters through the post, fax, email, telephone). Students are also encouraged to use computers whenever possible because notices, web-based articles etc are forwarded to them periodically.

During the semester, pastoral support, is provided in the first instance by the local tutor who is usually able to bridge any cultural gaps that may exist and guide the students in thinking creatively about their situations.

### ***The Students' Perspectives***

#### **Tutorial Support - Trinidad (1998 - 2000)**

Students were asked to comment on the various aspects of the programme including the study school and local tutorials. The study



schools were considered to *“be a chance to interface with Sheffield personnel.... It helped to clarify issues and to gather new information from informed sources.”*

Students enjoyed the face-to-face aspects of the programme. That made it culturally relevant because the culture of that region favours the face-to-face communication and oracy. One student from the 1998 – 2000 cohort of the Trinidad programme felt that the study schools were:

*Extremely important. Access to professors and foreign tutors deepens the process, enhances critical analysis of issues and helps to clarify thorny issues. Also provides connection with organisation and with other learners, which for me is important in feelings of belonging to something.*

Another recognised that local tutorials:

*assured that we keep on target as far as the deadline of assignments are concerned. They also keep us informed as to the development of new matters arising. They were very valuable for sustained effort. They keep the motive to study alive.*

However, there was some negative feedback which suggested that the tutorials support needed *“to be developed to be more thought provoking on the various issues. Should provide greater challenges for the mind.”*

One student felt that there was:

*limited effectiveness. Value and effectiveness of sessions are based on individual tutors. Format of having persons make presentations at tutorials very*

*helpful in gaining deeper understanding of education issues in the local context.*

Moreover, another student maintained that tutorials:

*Could be of great value but is also dependent on who (student's emphasis) is the local lecturer.*

It would appear that while the majority of the students are satisfied with the quality of programme being delivered, some have their concerns about the tutorials. They seem to feel that they lack provocativeness.

Meetings with the local tutors revealed that:

*students expect us to lecture at tutorials.*

*we need further clarification on what to expect from tutorial sessions with written guidelines if possible.*

Though, the tutors on the current Masters Programme all have their Masters qualifications, they seem to lack the confidence and skills required to support students at this level of tertiary education without strong backing from the University staff in Sheffield.

### **Tutorial Support - St. Lucia (2000 - 2001)**

Caribbean Tutors also questioned students in St. Lucia about the effectiveness of the module tutorials led. Those who participated in **Education for Employment** shared the view of the student who said that

the sessions were *"good once [the tutors] can establish a communication link. At various times, though, that link has been almost impossible, mainly because of problems related to the communication system used."*

As indicated earlier in Chapter Three, there are challenges with some of the communication systems in small island developing states. In this particular instance, the tutor for that specialist option lived in Trinidad and the email server that she used was not functional for approximately two weeks and the phone systems were also being overhauled. This situation, though unanticipated, left the student feeling very frustrated.

Another, believed that the sessions were *"...very effective"* and felt *"inspired to look at various issues more critically than I did before"*.

A participant in the Management option acknowledged that the tutorials were *"very thorough"* with *"very supportive tutors who were comfortable with what they were doing"*. Another stated that she could *"identify with the examples / references made by them. Their experiences [were] useful."* Challenges with communication again reared its head because some students, while acknowledging that the feedback was *"very helpful"*, revealed that it was *"sometimes untimely"*. There was a general recognition among students that some of the Caribbean Tutors *"really*

*tried their best to help students. On the other hand, some still need to be a little more efficient".*

### **Tutorial Support for Guidance & Counselling**

It seems that the major challenge in the Guidance and Counselling module was the level of support which they received from their local tutor. This has not seemed to be a very positive experience for the students who felt unsupported throughout. Some of their comments were very blunt, as the ones cited below.

*Not very helpful at all. No suggestions were given; no reference material; questions were not answered but were re-directed to students with no conclusive answer*

*Absolutely ineffective. There was very little almost no support in guiding students (a) suggestions were not given (b) no reference in terms of books, journals; questions were inadequately responded to (c) a strategy for re-directing questions was used.*

*For this tutorial, the Caribbean tutor was not prepared and not aware of the expectations of the assignment. The feedback of the first draft was not adequate and comments were few.*

Clearly the students were displeased and did not in any way attempt to soften the blow by being diplomatic. One student was quick to acknowledge that while the Guidance and Counselling tutorials were "*not that effective – left [them] all confused*", they also indicated that:

*The first three modules went well but the last one was not that impressive. I found the tutor too tight-lipped where matters concerning individual assignments were concerned.*

### **Tutorial Support for Dissertation Writing**

The students were all very positive about the quality and effectiveness of the dissertation tutorials led by the Caribbean Tutors. The following comments have been selected because they are particularly interesting and insightful.

*Very informative and provided much needed guidance on formulating research questions and topic. Through the lectures, I felt better able to address the actual dissertation process.*

*Couldn't have been better. I left every session feeling a lot better, knowing that the tutors had helped me climb over the mountains that I had erected.*

*The dissertation was adequately prepared and the sessions were helpful. However, there is a need for co-ordination between individual tutors and the dissertation tutors.*

*Very effective – and productive especially those done by the St. Lucian Team.*

*Very good overall. I never thought that my time was wasted. There was always something new to learn – particularly from the last one.*

There were a couple of areas which were flagged up by the students which need addressing. Some comments revealed criticism of a particular approach to research methodology on the part of tutors which reflected the influence on tutors of the more traditional approach to this

by the University of the West Indies (UWI). While acknowledging the tutorials were "*very good*", one student, for instance, commented that tutors "*tend to advance methods and approaches adopted by UWI*". While this in itself is not a negative practice, it does point out that perhaps more professional development sessions need to be conducted with the local tutors so that they can more closely follow the model(s) proposed by the University of Sheffield. Certainly, there should be more dialogue with the University team, if tutors wish to incorporate other models into the local system.

The other area that needs attention is communication between the provider institution, Caribbean tutors and the students. One student observed that though the tutorials were "*good*" and that "*in terms of what is expected of students regarding a Masters dissertation, they were right on target*" they "*usually got information from students not directly from Sheffield regarding expectations, dates, library service etc. This impacted to an extent on my level of confidence in them*".

To my mind this suggests that there needs to be a definite improvement in the way information is circulated between the various actors in the programme, the School of Education and the Caribbean Institute for Research and Professional Education (CIRPE) as regional agents

responsible for co-ordinating the local tutorials, the local tutors and the students. It is important that when one is managing a programme such as this that clear messages are sent about the various channels of communication as well as expectations, schedules and available facilities.

The University should make some sort of investment in staff development in the Caribbean. As such, a series of training sessions could be conducted over a period of three or four study schools to support the local tutors. It could be run on a similar model as the Post-graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PCHE), where tutors earn credits towards advanced professional certification, after completing assignments and submitting portfolios as part of their assessment.

### *The Tutors' Perspectives*

#### **Feedback from the S.W.O.T. Analysis (1996 - 1998)**

Using a SWOT analysis has proven to be very effective when dealing with complex situations within a limited amount of time. Strategic planners have successfully used the concept of the SWOT analysis to provide a framework for identifying crucial issues, because such a framework assists them in limiting their focus and their efforts to those issues which have the most impact on a situation. It is a more organised strategy than attempting to address all the issues at the same time.

The object of focus is usually one entity and in this instance it was the Sheffield programme in Trinidad and Tobago over the period 1996 - 1998. This was the second cycle of the course, so it was a relatively new experience for the local tutors. The analysis which follows is therefore focused upon the significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and strengths that characterise the situation as it was interpreted by the local tutors of the M.Ed. Course in Special Education.

Strengths are *positive* aspects *internal* to the programme while weaknesses are *negative* aspects *internal* to programme. Opportunities are *positive* aspects *external* to the programme and threats are *negative* aspects that are *external* to the programme.

Table 9.1 maps out in a diagrammatic format the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they have been identified by the local tutors. As the chapter unfolds, each of the items will be expanded upon with explanations where necessary. Feedback will be given on the steps which have been taken to address the identified issues.



**Table 9.1 Feedback from the SWOT Analysis**

Strengths (internal)	Weaknesses (internal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Course materials and texts</li> <li>○ Capacity building to support the course</li> <li>○ Communication</li> <li>○ Access to tutorial venue and revision of tutorial groups</li> <li>○ Students' background / Profile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tardy feedback</li> <li>○ Unscrupulous students</li> <li>○ Library access</li> <li>○ Colonial heritage</li> </ul>
Opportunities (external)	Threats (external)
<p><b>STUDENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access to quality education</li> <li>○ Payment of fees by instalments due to support provided by T&amp;TUTA</li> <li>○ Participate in a research-led course</li> <li>○ Expanding the library facilities</li> <li>○ Conducting useful supervised research</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL TUTORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For local tutors to be involved in an innovative programme and return to academia</li> <li>○ Expanding the library facilities</li> <li>○ Participate in seminars and debates on current issues</li> <li>○ Forging new alliances as a result of pursuing research interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cost factor: Exchange rates of Trinidad and Tobago Dollar against the British Pound</li> <li>○ Course accreditation by local body.</li> <li>○ The changing political climate of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (T&amp;TUTA)</li> </ul>

## STRENGTHS

### **Course Materials and Texts**

When looking at the strengths of the programme, the tutors found that the course material and texts were “*always available ahead of time*” and that they were “*clear, relevant and well packaged, covering a wide range of situations and experiences*”.

### **Capacity Building to support the Course**

People at various levels were benefiting from the programme. All the local tutors at that time had either graduated from the first cohort of the M.Ed. course or were involved in tutoring on it. Some had even graduated from the first Certificate and Diploma Special Education Programmes in 1991. Tutors perceived this as the University of Sheffield investing in its own product. One tutors felt that:

*through the various interactions with Lecturers from the University of Sheffield during vacation study schools, tutorials and study group sessions, they were able to upgrade their knowledge and understanding of topics, themes and issues related to special education needs.*

During the period being analysed, the local Course Director, supported by the tutors and the students was very successful in persuading the local management of the programme (the Teachers' Union) to employ a former graduate of both the Diploma and the Masters' Programmes as an

Assistant Librarian. This person was extremely committed to the professional development of teachers and from July 1998 when the course began with the first vacation school, had volunteered her services to the students after 4:00 p.m. This person has since, herself, become the local Course Director of the Masters' Courses in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Open and Clear Channels of Communication**

Several points were made under the heading 'communication'. During this cycle of the course both tutors and students felt that the whole group tutorials sessions were not as effective as they could have been. The tutors read the evaluations forms submitted by the students, met with them to discuss their challenges and in consultation with the Director of the Course in Sheffield, revised the tutorial system. The tutors as well as the students opted for small group as well as whole group tutorial sessions so that they could benefit from both types of interaction. Rather than having the same tutor for each module, tutors were also rotated around study groups. This ensured that all groups at some point during the course, had access to each tutor. This was identified as a strength since:

*the rotation of (study) groups among tutors allows for varied perspectives. Tutors are then able to identify varied levels of demand for support and independence among students.*

The tutors also felt that there was “... a greater sense of value with more open discussions and interaction through small group sessions. They lend themselves to allowing more individual comment and participation.” The tutors also felt that the topics which were used as the focus of the tutorials would “...improve advocacy among the participants and should open their eyes to wider issues which they must seek to discuss at their own institutions as well as address in their professional practice”. These they felt were the advantages of the small group tutorials.

There was also the recognition that there were ample support structures at the ‘local end’ of the programme. This comprised the Administrators from the Teachers' Union, a local Course Director and local Tutors. The following was identified as a strength:

*The support of and for the programme i.e. Administrators, (local) Course Directors (local) Tutors and the structure for communication between the various groups are definitely positive elements.*

The student groups had also devised their own communication network where people shared information through study groups or work groups. In the early days of the programme, there were insufficient library resources for the students. However, the students were very determined to succeed and they developed study groups which they used as information hubs. Each study group was a very organised body with

an identified leader. Students who identified relevant journal articles, chapters of books and policy documents circulated these among the groups through the group leaders. There was an on-going fund that students contributed to and this offset the cost of photo-copying. Groups met on a regular basis and the students initiated and accepted the responsibility to hold their own discussion groups. Some of the tutors were former members of these study/discussion groups and because this strategy had been so successful, they encouraged the new cohort of students to establish the same sort of network.

It is extremely important in developing countries to be as creative as possible in accessing relevant literature. At the time, the best method was to share what was available among all students. This was the method that was adopted to establish the first TASETT Library for the University of Sheffield Courses. By this time, the tutors and the students had collected *"a healthy source of materials and personnel to accommodate research by students. The tutors on the programme made not only themselves, but also their materials available to students."*

There were also open communication lines between local tutors, British-based lecturers and students. The tutors also felt that the Course Director readily shared information with them. One tutor wrote:

*there is an open communication between Sheffield and the Local Project Director which facilitates quick responses and access to information.*

### **Access to Tutorial Venue and Revision of Tutorial Groups**

The official venue for the course, Valsayn Teachers' College was centrally located and within relatively easy access for students who were coming from the north west, north east, central and southern parts of the island of Trinidad. It was also within easy reach of the airport for Tobago students. Several venues were offered as possible sites for tutorials. Students and tutors used their networking skills to identify suitable venues where small group tutorial could be held free of charge and which were accessible to the students of the group. The Valsayn Teachers' College was reserved for whole group tutorials where the smaller groups came together to share their small group experiences and to engage in wider debates. These were very successful because students always felt that they had experiences to share with the larger group. They felt comfortable with this exercise, because their views had already passed the test of the small groups.

### **Students' Background / Profile**

This cohort was comprised of students who came from different levels from within the education system. At least one half of the 26 students had a strong foundation in Special Education having completed the

University of Sheffield's Diploma Course or were employed in Special Schools.

## WEAKNESSES

### **Tardy Feedback**

Though there were several positive aspects to the programme at that time, there were also some weaknesses which needed to be addressed. For example, feedback from assignments one and two did not arrive early enough to make much of an impact on the students' performance on subsequent assignments. As a result some were not able to strengthen the areas in which they had previously experienced problems. It was felt that the submission dates of assignments should be rescheduled to avoid the Christmas package rush (December) and hectic Carnival activities (February) on the Islands.

By unanimous agreement, it was decided that this situation would be corrected by sending the assignments off to the University by express mail on the day after the deadline rather than wait for late submissions as was the custom. Students who submitted late would be responsible for their own postage. This provided enough time for assignments to be marked, commented upon and returned to the students by the middle of January.

### **Unscrupulous students**

Based on past experiences, one tutor argued that there was a “...growing need to ensure that all requests for transcripts be monitored and sanctioned both by the Teachers' Union and the University of Sheffield. They were being requested by unscrupulous persons who had either not completed the course satisfactorily or had not completed full payment of the course”.

The Union was also having a problem collecting fees from students and it was felt that there was a need to obtain a guarantor for each student to ensure fulfilment of their financial contract with the Union and that there were strategies put in place for dealing with defaulters.

The University became more thorough in the checking of the financial status of any student requesting a transcript. Clearance would have to be given by the Teachers' Union who was keeping individual student accounts. It was also decided that the Teachers' Union would discontinue the system where students had in effect taken a loan from them to pay for the course. Subsequently, students were expected to request loans from proper financial institutions and pay their fees before the start of every module.



### **Library Access**

Because the library was housed in a Union Executive Officer's office, "there was a problem with accessing the books in the daytime during normal office hours " (between 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.). Though it took a while, T&TUTA eventually established a proper library in a new location which was just across the road from the main building.

### **Colonial Heritage**

There exists what might be described as a 'teacher-culture' which is part of the colonial heritage. Teachers who attend the Teachers' Training Colleges are taught through lecturers. When they are placed within the education system and are assigned their own class, they transfer that teaching style to that environment - they stand before the class and regurgitate information. Therefore, when they are later exposed to higher education, it is not surprising that "they 'expect' to be lectured to".

Students were given more activities through which they were encouraged to engage in critical thinking. Though, it was difficult at first, the strategy eventually began to work ; now, it is expected practice and students look forward to that type of interaction. One such example, was previously discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven when the first

cohort of St. Lucia students had to engage in a piece of research which focused on the social history of education in St. Lucia.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Tutors felt that there were opportunities which were accessible by students and others which were accessible by themselves.

### **Students - Access to Quality Education**

For the students who otherwise would not have been able to afford the cost of study abroad, "*...the Distance Learning course presented them with an opportunity for Higher Education especially since there were no Special Education programmes at Masters' Level offered at the University of the West Indies at that time. The qualifications which they would gain would be internationally accepted*".

### **Students - Payment of Fees by Instalments**

Students were allowed to access education and be facilitated financially. "*The Teachers' Union allowed the students to pay their course fees via instalments*". In some cases, direct debit instructions were attached to their monthly salaries and the money was deducted by the Ministry of Education and forwarded to the Teachers' Union. Though some were unscrupulous as indicated earlier, some were eternally grateful for the facility and honoured their indebtedness admirably.

### **Students – Opportunity to participate in a research-led course**

Through the Research Methods Module and the compulsory dissertation, *“students had the opportunity to conduct supervised research in thought-provoking areas of their interest. Through their various 'investigations', they were able to access the services offered by the Special Education Unit and the local special educators within the system”*. This provided them with the confidence to work more closely with their colleagues in schools to begin pilot projects to support parents and children.

### **Students and Tutors – Expanding the Library Facilities**

*“The University of Sheffield was providing multiple copies of additional books and other resource material ”* and a small location was provided for the storage of these in the office of the First Vice President of the Teachers' Union because it fell under her portfolio of Professional Development matters within the structure of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association. This support benefited all locals connected with the programme.

### **Tutors – Seminars and Debates on Current Issues in Special Education**

Tutors perceived this course as providing a fantastic opportunity for them to be in an environment of continued research and exposed to the

*“upgrading of information” where they were able “to compare and assess local situations with international trends”.*

It also allowed tutors the opportunity to *“return to academia and refocus on Special Education in terms of Models ”* and to *“be able to engage in seminar type discussions and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each model”*. Tutors seemed highly motivated based on the following comments which were thrown into the general discussion of the SWOT exercise:

*The interaction capitalises on the skill and expertise of the best talents and brains from two cultures (Trinidad and Tobago and the UK), working towards the development of a new future.*

*The opportunity is always there for tutors to continue research and present papers on new issues.*

*... a great opportunity to develop the resources in Special Education in Trinidad and Tobago, through the building of library resources and investment in the training of the teachers.*

*Re-focussing of Special education at this time is vital because of concept of inclusivity.*

### **Forging New Alliances**

The course also presented the opportunity for *“forging new alliances with groups who had similar interests nationally and internationally.”* For example, while researching material for sessions, some new and important links were being established. For examples, links were made with the School of Continuing Studies in Trinidad, Education International, Norris

Haynes who was very instrumental in promoting the Comer Process (a school development programme in the US) and the very progressive Teachers Unions in St. Lucia and Antigua.

## THREATS

### **Cost Factor**

Some students pleaded hardship and were not paying their agreed upon instalments on time. Some even reneged on their payments altogether and there was the fear by local tutors that this situation would lead to a lack of financial support from the Teachers' Union.

There was also a need to increase the course fee in order to meet the basic operating costs of the course. It was felt that this may have inhibited the running of future programmes. There was the *“possibility of the programme being discontinued because at that time, the British Pound was increasingly appreciating in value against the Trinidad and Tobago Dollar and one pound was equivalent to almost eleven Trinidad and Tobago Dollars”*.

Teachers' salaries were very low at that time and it was felt that teachers would not have been able to afford to repay a loan for the amount of money which was being asked especially since they already had house and car mortgages to repay. Some of them were single parents and some

were the victims of divorce. This meant that there was only one small income available to pay the bills and support the household. In addition, in 1997, T&TUTA was engaged in a prolonged and largely unsuccessful industrial action against the Ministry of Education because of derogatory comments made against teachers by the Prime Minister. This resulted in some teachers being victimised and in some cases placed in positions of greater financial hardships. It was a period of low morale among teachers.

### **Course Accreditation by Local Body**

In Trinidad and Tobago, the National Institute of Higher Education, Research and Technology, (NIHERST), was established in 1984 as a statutory body by the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act No. 20 of 1984 with a mandate for the development of science, technology and higher education in the country. The body operates a college of health science, a college of nursing, a school of languages and an information technology college.

Through its Committee on the Recognition of Degrees (CORD), NIHERST is responsible for assessing and advising on the recognition of post-secondary programmes awards offered by national, regional and international institutions and providers. Accreditation of post-secondary

educational programmes is a major concern of the Government, especially given the growth of the tertiary educational opportunities and the increase in educational products from abroad, which is a world-wide phenomenon (NIHERST: online [www.niherst.gov.tt](http://www.niherst.gov.tt)).

The accreditation body of Trinidad and Tobago, “ NIHERST, had made recent enquiries about the quality of the M.Ed. Programme offered by Sheffield”. Tutors felt it “necessary to have the Sheffield qualifications recognised by the local authorising body”.

It was also felt that “ALL agreements between the University of Sheffield and the Teachers Union must be clearly articulated in order to avoid any misunderstanding about the programme”.

### **The Changing Political Climate of T&TUTA**

The Officers of the Teachers’ Union are elected every 3 years and Officers are only allowed to serve for two consecutive terms (6 years). At this point they must step down from office and cannot present themselves as an election candidate. The Officers at that time had served for two consecutive terms and tutors were concerned about the changing political climate within the organisation which would come about as a result of up-coming elections. The concern centred on whether *the new*

*officers would accept the programme and continue to work with Sheffield, especially as there were already rumblings to suggest the opposite.*

The rumblings proved to be accurate and when the new T&TUTA regime was installed, the story changed. Dr. Derrick Armstrong, the former Director of the Caribbean Programme identified his major challenge as arising from “...*the breakdown of the relationship between TTUTA and Sheffield*” and argued that, “...*the break-up with TTUTA in 1998 was a turning point*”. He acknowledged that there were also serious challenges to the programme over the years from within the University of Sheffield and the School of Education itself. In his reflections about the programme, he expressed the view that:

*the success of the programme was not really established in Sheffield before the strategic decision in 1998 to focus upon the Caribbean as a major venue for the department's distance learning activity. Even then there have continued to be financial challenges.*

He identified the period 1996 to 1998 as a crucial time when things were very much in a state of uncertainty and remembers there being serious financial and administrative problems which he described as “... *seeming at times to be endemic to the programme*”.

With the start of the first term of office of the new T&TUTA executive, the tutors worst fears were realised. In his analysis of the situation,



Armstrong regards the split-up with T&TUTA in 1998 as a major decision point for the programme. He felt that the situation as it was, forced the Department of Education into a position where it either had to give its uncompromising support for the programme by expanding it further, thereby supporting the group of original collaborators or “...cut its losses” and bring the programme to an end. He surmises:

*... on the one hand it was a make or break situation which could easily have led to the university being frozen out of Trinidad. On the other hand, the very strong commitment given to the programme by the Trinidad team forced the Department's hand.*

Along with the former Head of the Education Department, Wilfred Carr, he supported the establishment of a Caribbean Institute for Research and Teacher Professional Education (CIRPE) and supported the expansion of the programme to include Masters courses in St Lucia. CIRPE emerged as an institution which was established by former graduates of the Sheffield Courses. Armstrong felt that this movement away from the Teachers' Union was only possible as a result of the ... *unqualified backing of Wilfred Carr, Head of the School of Education*”. Had this support not been given, the programme would have surely met its demise.

*However, once that decision was taken the break up with TTUTA in many respects opened up opportunities because the university's activities were no longer constrained by the conservative and bureaucratic role of the teachers' union.*

Over a 6 year period from 1996 to 2001, Dr. Armstrong has had several roles in the Caribbean as Course Director of the Masters in Special and Inclusive Education 1996-2000; Course Director of the Masters in Educational Studies 1998-2000; Moderator for the TTUTA Cert/Dip in Special Education 1998- 2001; and, Director of Caribbean Programmes 1998-2001. During that period, he worked closely with his colleagues in Sheffield and those in the Caribbean to expand the programme in Trinidad and Tobago to include non-special education Masters courses, the Schools Teachers and Action Research (STAR) Certificate Course and the Remote Location PhD programme. Dr. Armstrong, again capitalising on the notion of collaboration contributed to the winning of research funding which he sees (alongside publications) as the key to a serious engagement with educational issues in the Caribbean. He was also able to launch the book series 'Teachers' Voices from the Caribbean', a forum where Caribbean based research could be given a platform.

### **Discussion**

In my interview with Dr. Thompson from the Sheffield team, He argued that when working at a distance, the tutorial system would only be able to work effectively if "*... the value system was quite clear*". He reminisced about the early years of the course in Trinidad where the local tutors were all either Heads or Senior Teachers of schools in Port-of-Spain or

academic staff of the Faculty of Education at the UWI Campus. He perceived there to be two different models of operation by the two groups. Model A, where the academics' interpretation of the role of the tutors was:

*It's people individual responsibility to learn. We are here if people come to us – so we are here as much as people want us to be here and you do whatever they want you to do.*

On the other hand, there was Model B where "... *the Heads and Senior Teachers organised their tutorials in such a way that people had to deliver.*" He continued by explaining that there was a very clear split in the assumption of what the local tutor's role was. It was obviously related to the background roles that different people had. As a Head, particularly, your job is to organise things so that they happen without offending the people that you're working with. My own experience bears testimony to the fact that if you have an 'efficient' person 'on the ground' as the 'Manager', that person contacts everyone in the group including tutors, keeps them together and keeps them on task.

Even with an excellent manager, Dr. Thompson thinks that you can get your value system right either through selection in the first instance, that is, by choosing successful Head Teachers and/or by providing specific induction and training about what the programme is about and what it

hopes to achieve. Another important point in working with tutors, is including them on teaching sessions and in brainstorming sessions for curriculum development. There should be on-going dialogue between the Lecturer of the Course and the local tutor to ensure that the tutor understands the material and their role in supporting the students in the particular module.

Dr. Armstrong thinks that part of the problem lies in the various perceptions in the role of the tutor:

*Should they supply pastoral support and critical guidance or should they engage in some teaching?*

In the Caribbean, both governments and students expect 'quality' support from the University of Sheffield and so quality assurance has to be a necessary component of its distance learning programme in that region. The commodification of education, means that learners now have a choice among institutions which provide distance learning courses and in order to maintain its competitive edge in the region, the University has had to ensure that the local tutors have the necessary post-graduate qualifications and are also well respected within the local community. This is a necessary pre-requisite to gaining the confidence of the students especially since the local tutor is strategically placed between the provider institution and the students.

On the other hand, the University while recognising that the local tutor is well placed to provide the service institution with the necessary feedback useful for programme development, has never been clear on guidance in this area. Employing local tutors is a labour intensive intervention which provides on-the-spot support for students and also enhances the skills and social standing of the local educators.

One of the challenges which does occur in systems where boundaries are not clearly defined, is that confusion and uncertainty can arise from the deliberate attempts to foster a collaborative and empowering structure between the University staff and local tutors. Some tutors may use the opportunity to engage in a bit of teaching as it could be seen as strengthening their position within the community, yet there needs to be a boundary on the amount of work that is given to someone whose remit is to provide pastoral support, clarify issues related to the relevant module and to guide the students in producing an acceptable assignment.

Tutors as part of their role are expected to encourage feedback from the students on all aspects of the programme ranging from design to the ability to meet their learning and career objectives. In the past, both students and tutors have made suggestions on programme administration, modifications to the course content and/or general

logistics. As a result, of this engagement with the issues, the programme has developed a multiplicity of strands which are ably supported by a growing local staff. There continues to be hiccups but that continues to be part of progress and development.

### *Library Issues*

Over the last 15 years, there has been an enormous increase in distance learning programmes worldwide. In the United Kingdom, a library survey conducted by Unwin, Stephens and Bolton (1998:1) revealed that:

...over half of conventional universities are currently involved in postgraduate DL provision... more and more 'traditional', campus based universities have moved towards provision of courses off-campus through franchising arrangements with colleges or through DL.

This expansion it has been argued, has been taking place mostly in relation to post-graduate DL provision probably because students would be attracted by the support for part-time learning as well as the flexibility of studying in your own time at your own pace "unfettered by geographical considerations" within an area which complements your career choices and further professional development. (Stephens and Unwin: August 1997 online)

At the beginning of the M.Ed. in Educational Studies in St. Lucia, 30 of the 36 participants felt that they would have access to a library while participating in the programme while 7 were not sure whether they would have problems with access or not. The libraries which they identified as possible options were: The Hunter Francois Library at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, the Central Library in the centre of the capital, the UNESCO Documentation Centre, the OECS Infonet Library, The University of the West Indies Libraries, The Teachers' Union Library, District and School Libraries as well as Personal Libraries.

Twenty-three candidates felt that they would seldom or never have difficulties accessing libraries. However the other 11 envisaged that they would have some level of difficulty especially because the opening hours of the libraries facilitated those who live and / or work near the capital of Castries and in some cases, only those who did not work during the regular daylight hours. Three persons did not respond to this question. Those who do not live near Castries, live at least one hour's drive away from the nearest library and this also hampers access because by the time they arrive at the site, the library is either closed or closing. While there is a library at the Community College, it is in heavy demand by the students of the College and this limits accessibility by students from other programmes. The libraries of the University of the West Indies are only

'legitimately' accessible if you are a graduate of that institution and have access cards.

The majority of students (29) identified the internet as their main 'other' strategy for accessing learning materials. Other possible strategies cited by students included the use of other institutions, networking with students on the programme, and persons who have done similar programmes. One person thought of purchasing books and 2 others thought of using newspapers/clippings. It is interesting, that few students seemed to consider purchasing resource books for their own use. There was a feeling among students that, as they are already making a sacrifice by taking loans to pay for their professional development, and expenditure would be too much of a strain.

As Unwin et al (1998:1) stated:

The very fact that DL students have, in general, no ready access to campus facilities means that they present a different challenge to a university provider than do on-campus students.

I should state now that library access for students, be they distance learning students or not, is not a privilege, it is a right. The Open University (1992), in its Student Handbook recognised that:

Using libraries is an essential part of your education. The most important purpose of a



university is to teach you to think for yourself. This implies learning where to find information, and, in particular, how to use the literature of your subject effectively. If you do not have command of that literature you can neither extend your studies to fields not covered by the course nor keep abreast of new developments after the course is over.

After 6 months of studying on the programme, some students commented on the inadequacy of library facilities and indicated that they had hoped for *“a wider variety of books and other reference material in relation to the assignment.”*

One year into the programme, the majority of comments were extremely positive with high commendations for the course and the teaching team. However, the library was one area that was seen as needing particular attention. Students felt, that adequate consideration should be given to the provision of library services. For example, those who were experiencing difficulty accessing the libraries in Castries because of the opening hours, wanted a larger supply of reference books, journals and copies of dissertations to be placed in a room at the Teachers' Union for their use. This of course warrants the use of a 'librarian'. The team suggested that students volunteer their services as 'librarian' and to share the workload among themselves. Two students volunteered their

services. The group developed a working strategy and proceeded to implement it.

Six months before the end of the course, the library definitely remained a sore point and many students complained bitterly about the available library resources. The most popular library for the students was the Hunter J. Francois Library at the Community College. Students in general said that it was inadequate for their purposes. The following comments provide an understanding of how the students on the course experienced the library:

*The staff are willing to assist, but they and we are constrained by outdated materials*

*If the opening hours of the library can be extended it would prove more useful for persons who have to work during the day. A late closure like 8:00 p.m. would be appropriate*

*Material was usually out-dated and somewhat irrelevant.*

For some students, the concern is not only the availability of up-to-date material but also access. Although St. Lucia is a small island, it is very hilly and driving from one end to the other is both tiring and precarious. In the evenings the conditions are worse because there are few street lights. In spite of this the students were impressed with the staff at the College Library.

*Very Supportive – went to library and I was given special treatment. Received a tour of library – got help in locating information relevant to my assignment and dissertation.*

*Good, some information is available and staff is co-operative with students.*

One solution suggested by a student was to “ make more journal articles available to the “ Teachers’ Union’s Library”.

Some students in spite of the ‘library challenge’ were able find adequate material because they were able to network effectively with their local tutors. Some tutors, recognising the hardships which students face with regard to sourcing reference materials in the Caribbean, were extremely supportive. Students said:

*Accessing material from the local library was quite easy; moreover for the 3<sup>rd</sup> module re: Special and Inclusive, my group received a wide range of materials from the tutor assigned.*

Unwin (1994: 85) points out that distance learning students are faced with undue difficulties when they need to gain “... access to adequate higher education library services”. Unwin argues when traditional modes of course delivery are used, usually in traditional university settings, it is expected that the students would use their initiative and engage more critically with the issues by identifying and reading material recommended in course reading lists and beyond. In those

circumstances, this pursuit of knowledge is supported by the provision of library facilities. In the case of St. Lucia, although the library was physically there on the island and attractive in its outlook, the standard was not what was required for post-graduate support. The Library is part of the campus of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and so its primary support function is for the sixth form students and teachers in training.

It had emerged in Unwin's (1994: 85 - 91) research on post-graduate distance learning students on Masters Degree programmes that not only did students find the use of libraries necessary for expanding their knowledge in specific disciplines, they also saw it as an important learning space which was central to their lives.

The needs and expectations of distance learning students are different from those students who are studying in traditional campuses. Yet because of the opening hours of the library, it would not always be possible for distance education students to go into the library. Of-campus students require a level of support which ensures that there is some measure of equity to the process - the opportunities must be there to support these types of students. Services such as inter-library loan access for students when they become registered are a necessity. It should not

simply be a case of wanting hefty fees from students but providing them with adequate support services. In this era of ready access to technology, the library has a role in being pro-active in their support towards distance learning students.

Stephens and Unwin (1997: online) argue that:

... unless libraries are encouraged to play a central role in the learning process and supported in that effort, distance learners will face a future in which their experiences as learners are tightly bound and controlled.

Perhaps if those issues are laid on the table and dealt with, then designers of programmes would be encouraged to consider inviting discussions with librarians. Both parties could engage in creative thinking and develop workable strategies to support distance learning students before the courses are advertised to the public.

How can providers expect to promote critical thought and enquiry among their students, when they provide limited flow of material? One can understand the good intentions of trying to provide quality post-graduate education for educators in developing countries and one applauds the fact that efforts are made to provide some added material. However, if research-led enquiry is one of the goals of post-graduate courses, then library support must be improved.

In the event that students are provided with all the necessary material that is required to complete the course satisfactorily, it would still be appropriate for students to have access to a library, in case they may wish to pursue a topic further. Bernard, the current Head of the School of Continuing Studies in Trinidad, in his interview with me in 1998 expressed the view that the failure of distance education world-wide is that universities and colleges have attempted to package material simply to meet the needs of the module and in doing so, have allowed learning to be remain 'incestuous' because everybody is learning the same type of work, the same nature of knowledge. He suggests that distance learning courses, especially at post-graduate level, should develop the programmes to the point where material can be accessed by CD ROM and through electronic gateway access. Bernard believes that this is what is needed, in particular, if the University of Sheffield is to establish its programmes to a point of excellence in the Caribbean.

One way of dealing with 'long-distance' distance education is to establish relationships with local libraries so that better uses can be made of available resources and funding. This could be done by providing the local library with resource material up to a specified amount of money every year. The library gets the books and the students have improved access. In developed countries, it is very possible to find local libraries,

fully equipped and well stocked with librarians who are ready and able to support visiting students from institutions of higher learning. However, in developing countries, well-run libraries are a novelty and those that are functioning fairly well are usually overstretched with demands for their services. The School of Education Library at the University of the West Indies Campus in St. Augustine, Trinidad is one such example where demand on the few resources are heavy and very often only former or present students of that University can gain access to their resources.

When the first official course-link was made with the University of Sheffield in 1989, the Course Director, local tutors and students donated books to form a library and raise funds to enhance its offerings. Copies of government documents were made and shared among the 100 students and the students formed a library committee and volunteered their services to catalogue and monitor the borrowing of literature. The stock grew and in August, 1998, the entire collection was donated by the Association for Special Education of Trinidad and Tobago to the continuing students of the University of Sheffield. The library was housed in the Teachers' Union. Unfortunately, when the relations with the Union 'broke down', the library was closed and the University had to begin a new collection of books elsewhere. Such are the challenges which Universities can face when entering into collaborative ventures with

organisations whose leadership is political and where new political philosophies can change every three to five years when different political parties are empowered.

Students are increasingly using the Web as a primary source of information. However, they need assistance in developing their research skills on the net - being able to differentiate between poor quality sources and appropriate sources of information. Having on-line access to journals articles is a great facility if one is a student in the same country as the education provider because one can have access at off-peak times at off-peak rates. However, when the provider is on a different land mass from the learner, all sorts of difficulties can surface. As a registered student, though it may be possible to have access codes to the University's on-line library journals, the rates for access are astronomical because it is akin to making long distance phone calls for the duration of the time on-line.

At the University of Sheffield, a new service development referred to as 'The Gateway' is currently under trial. It seeks to allow access to intranet Web resources from the University from external sites. A service account has to be provided by the Library through negotiation with the Course Administrator and the Internet is used as a delivery platform to give access to the Library's electronic resources at the cost of a local telephone



call to the student's local Internet provider. Unfortunately, certain Internet providers do not allow flexibility in allowing you to change the server you use. Also, this is not possible with Internet Explorer Version 6 because the browser does not allow access to the GATEWAY. On a more positive note, a recent e-mail from the Deputy Director of the Corporate Information and Computing Service (CICS) indicated that they have initiated a project to create a Portal which will enable bona-fide users to log in and get University services via the web from anywhere on the Internet (so any ISP), including mail, local resources, electronic library, Corporate Time, WebCT, and so on. It is expected that this will not come into effect until sometime in 2002.

The UK's Library and Information Commission identified three areas of concern in its core policy document *2020 Vision*. These were **connectivity**, **content** and **competencies**. These are equally applicable in the Caribbean especially if there are leading providers of higher education in that region. This does not put the entire responsibility in the laps of the education providers but emphasizes the need for adequate networking with governments and non-governmental agencies, so that development will not be haphazard. These three Cs need to become part of a larger plan which drives the formation of information policy and the

development of an information infrastructure which has sustainability as its primary aim and co-operation and resource sharing as its outcome.

### **Connectivity**

In terms of connectivity, Universities, need to ensure that adequate access to their libraries is available to all of its distance learning students and alert governments of the developing countries to the need for information networks that are appropriate for local realities. There needs also to be a strategy which seeks to improve access to key organisations and groups, including schools, libraries and rural communities within a networked structure. Within this framework, there should be the simultaneous creation of a core content of material which is accessible to everyone.

### **Content**

Certainly, for those who are participating in distance education, there should be ready accessibility to content provided by the 'source' of the programme. At the moment, there is a regular under-spend in the library budget for the School of Education at the University of Sheffield and every month notices are sent around, encouraging staff to order more

books and other resources in order to decrease the budgetary variance. What is needed is a new library strategy for dealing with the situation. For example, it might be more effective and efficient if a significant proportion of the University's School of Education budget allowance for the library was disaggregated into library resources for other locations especially since a large percentage of the School of Education students are overseas. The strategy would be to increase the University's collaboration with other libraries in parts of the world where the University's Courses are being conducted. A precedent could be set by running a pilot project as described, with clearly defined guidelines. At the moment, it seems as though the School of Education pays library costs twice - once out of the programme budget as a direct cost to the programme and twice as an element within the University overhead, even though the students receive limited benefit from it.

### **Competencies**

Finally, it is important to support a basic level of information literacy within developing societies. Enhanced competencies are assured if courses continue to support the development of countries such as those in the Caribbean. Because the world is metaphorically shrinking as a result of the available technologies, distance will become less of a barrier

to educational opportunities and the norm in that instance would be 'competition' from those who are eager to explore the 'new' opportunities.

Getting the three Cs right in itself will not be an easy task, but it will most certainly be a worthwhile endeavour. The managers of the libraries will have to begin thinking of their facility as being much larger than four walls and of the provision of quality service with regard to information support as a right.

## CHAPTER 10: Listening to the Learners and Meeting their Expectations

### *Introduction*

No two students will learn in the same way. Every individual will take out of the course what he [sic] feels he wants or needs and will put into it whatever efforts his capacity and willingness to learn allow. The [teacher] who is aware of these differences in learning will permit different students to use him, and the material of the course, in their own unique ways. As long as the student is sincerely trying to do something with himself and struggling to learn, he should be permitted to move at his own speed and on his own level.

(Cantor, 1946)

Distance learning students, are our new consumers who expect value for their money. They expect that the courses are going to cater to their individual needs and be relevant to their particular situations. These they think, are fair expectations for persons who are self-funded. Students in this era have become more expressive and very readily share their praises as well as their displeasure about various aspects of the courses which are self funded. Though they may not begin a training programme believing that they have a 'voice', it becomes evident as they progress through the prescribed programme of work, that they perceive themselves as partners in learning.

The information for this chapter is based on four sets of feedback from students who participated on the first Masters of Education Course in Educational Studies in St. Lucia. The data was collected over a two-year period from July 1999 to April 2001. During this period, I engaged in various types of interactions with this first cohort of students from St. Lucia and I have learnt quite a bit about them. I have corrected their assignments, worked with them during study schools, responded to countless e-mails, and even spoke to some over the phone.

Understanding your learners is absolutely essential for education and has far-reaching implications for distance learners especially, because as a facilitator/lecturer you do not have that constant face-to-face contact, body language and para-language to guide you through the particular nuances of a culture. In this case, the culture is distinctly Caribbean which is grounded on a very oral tradition.

In this section you will get a flavour of some of the course expectations as well as the levels of fulfilment of the first cohort of students in St. Lucia (1999 - 2001).

The first of 4 evaluation questionnaires was administered to the first cohort of post-graduate students in St. Lucia in July 1999. Out of an enrolment of 40 students, 37 students submitted responses.

### ***Study School 1***

#### Foundation Module

With regard to *expectations of the programme*, these fell into **several** categories which addressed issues relevant to changes within themselves. The students expected that at the end of the programme they would be able to *“critically engage with the prevailing educational issues and make recommendations for the improvement of the system.”* They also expected to be equipped *“... with the skills and knowledge necessary to help them to contribute effectively to the demands of the growing and the changing education system.”*

Only two responses referred directly to the programme. One addressed the expectation of a *“high level of professional instruction through contact with lecturers ... and other effective learning support mechanisms”* so that *“students can attain greater professional qualifications through academic excellence”*. The other took that theme one step further by indicating an interest in *“joining the Sheffield team in the very near future”*. This was interesting because this has been the practice of the University of

Sheffield since the inception of the programme. Suitably qualified graduates who meet the University's criteria have previously been hired to manage the local administration as well as conduct supporting modular tutorials for the students.

### ***Study School 2***

#### Methods of Educational Enquiry

Thirty-six participants completed evaluation questionnaires at the end of the second study school. When asked about their expectations for the study school, they seemed intrigued and a bit fearful of the notion of research. As was expected, they were also expecting feedback from their first assignment. One participant explained:

*Honestly, my expectations were of a mixed type. Fear – what would the assignment be this time was a question that overpowered all expectations. I wanted a clear and detailed explanation of the assignment.*

Another indicated quite explicitly:

*I honestly had no expectations. What I know I did not want was lectures steeped in theories or research methods.*

Though they had participated in only one previous study school, students were able to link teaching with research. For example, one explained that they expected:



*(t)o obtain relevant information on research methods to prepare me to participate in research which would build me up as an educator; and also help in initiating change in the education system.*

The majority of students were very bubbly about their expectations and some examples of the feedback are given under:

*I expected a very fulfilling experience and that I got. I am happy that I had a choice and that I didn't have to do things like standard deviation and margin of error in order to do research. The evolution that led to the formulation of the assignment was revealing.*

*The study school was organised according to my expectations. Lecturers were well prepared and the information was given in a clear manner (It is difficult to be lost). All three lecturers are very helpful.*

*My expectations of the study school were: (1) to get clear direction and instructions in relation to the second module and assignment, and (2) liaise with the facilitators to clarify issues related to the Module One. Both of the above were achieved.*

Other students remarked thus:

*I expected it to be of a high standard since the first study school was. My expectations were met. I was very excited to begin the second study school. I also expected the content of this module to help me develop better professionally and in some way enhance the teaching learning environment.*

When questioned about the extent to which the expectations had been met, one person clearly disappointed about not receiving feedback on her

assignment simply said “*partially*”. Other students who were a bit more accepting of the reason given for the non-completion of marking the assignments said:

*I was really hoping to go home today knowing what the level of my work was like (I do appreciate the problem though) I find the study schools very informative and important and have never missed a day yet.*

*With the exception of feedback, and grade on assignment all my expectations were met.*

### ***Specialist Options***

Following the first two compulsory modules, study school sessions were conducted according to the specialists options which the students chose at the end of Module 2. Because Management was a popular option it was offered twice. The findings have been recorded based on the 5 specialist options which were offered as follows:

#### **STUDY SCHOOL 3-            JULY 2000**

- The Adult Learner;
- Management;
- Special and Inclusive Education

#### **STUDY SCHOOL 4            -            JANUARY 2001**

- Education for Employment;
- Management;
- Guidance and Counselling.

### ***Study School 3***

#### **The Adult Learner**

The responses from the 9 students revolved around their expectations of acquiring *“some background knowledge about the adult learner”, “support for writing the assignment and dissertation”* and *“feedback on the last assignment.”* They had no problems with the study school programme and indicated that they were *“quite satisfied”* and had received some *“invaluable help”* with the dissertation. At this point I need to point out that the word *“quite”* means *“very”* in the context of the Caribbean. One student indicated the lecturer *“touched on every chapter in the module”* and all his/her concerns were addressed. Generally students felt that they learnt a lot from the study school sessions and that *“the Saturday session on writing the dissertation was very helpful.”*

#### **Management (first offering)**

The 12 students who responded indicated that they wanted *“an insight into the managing of schools”, “to be able to asses [their] own strength in terms of managing”,* the course to *“furnish some techniques that would help [them] to enhance administration and management at [their] school.”* Based on the type of responses which were given to questions (1) and (2), it would seem as though most of the persons who chose this specialist option were either Principals, Vice Principals or Heads of Departments in schools.

Like the other groups, they also wanted feedback from their previous assignment and looked forward to being provided with adequate guidance on structuring and writing a thesis.

Based on the comments, it would appear that though the topic was “*very broad*”, the students expectations had been met. They believed that the programme “*provided practical ideas and approaches to management*”; “*the sessions were insightful and [they] were given adequate material to work with.*”

### **Special and Inclusive**

Seven of the 12 students who participated in the study school, indicated that they expected to learn more about teaching children with Special Educational Needs. Four were concerned with obtaining feedback from their previously submitted assignment and 1 was hoping to get adequate support so that they would be able to work on their own over the following months.

Remarking on the extent to which their expectations have been met, all the students believed that their expectations had been met. One student remarked that “*... the study school did not only meet my expectations but proved to be more rewarding in aspects of policy, writing a thesis and developing critical skills.*” Another stated that “*My distorted vision of Special Education*

... has been changed. My 'eyes have opened' and a whole new outlook on Special and Inclusive education has been obtained." One person felt that perhaps some more attention could have been given to the gifted and talented child.

### Reflection of St. Lucia

The majority of persons (24) felt that the study school was adequate in its reflection of St. Lucia. Five felt that it was more than adequate. Of these, 4 were from the Special and Inclusive Group and the other was a member of the management group. Four persons perceived it as inadequate. Of these, there were two each from the Adult Learner and the Management groups. See Table 10.1 below.

**Table 10.1: Reflect the Context of St. Lucia - Cross-tabulation with Specialist Option**

Reflect St Lucia	Specialist Option			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	SIE	
More than adequate	-	1	4	5
Adequate	7	9	8	24
Inadequate	2	2	-	4
Total	9	12	12	33

The 32 persons who rated the introduction of principal themes felt that it was either very good or excellent across all three specialist options.

**Table 10.2: Rated Aspects 1 - 3 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	Special & Inclusive Education	
<b>Introduction of principal themes</b>				
Very Good	5	6	8	19
Excellent	4	6	3	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Provision of forum for discussion of identified issues</b>				
Very Good	2	2	1	5
Excellent	7	10	11	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Provision of support for assignment writing</b>				
Good	-	1	1	2
Very Good	3	8	7	18
Excellent	6	3	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>

Twenty-eight persons rated the discussion of identified issues as excellent. The remaining 5 felt that it was very good. Thirty-one persons felt that the support provided for the writing of assignments was either excellent or very good. Two persons rated this aspect of the programme as good. See Table 10.2 above.

There were no negative comments on either the support given in the preparation of the dissertation outline or the practical suggestions / methods of planning the dissertation. The majority of persons (31 and 28

respectively) felt that it was either very good or excellent (See Table 10.3 below).

**Table 10.3 : Rated Thesis Aspects 4 - 5 of Study School Cross-tabulated with Option**

Thesis Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	Special & Inclusive Education	
<b>Support for preparation of thesis outline</b>				
Good		1	1	2
Very Good	3	8	7	18
Excellent	6	3	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Suggestions for planning thesis</b>				
Good		3	2	5
Very Good	5	7	3	15
Excellent	4	2	7	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>

Again the ratings remained positive when asked whether the study school provided the students with an adequate opportunity to re-define or identify their own learning objectives; a participative learning opportunity and sufficient insight / information to allow them to pursue the subject on their own. Thirty, 32, 31 participants respectively from all specialist options felt that those aspects of the study-school were either very good or excellent. The others felt that it was good. (See Table 10.4 below)

**Table 10.4: Rated Aspects 6 – 8 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	Special & Inclusive Education	
<b>Provided an opportunity to identify your learning objectives</b>				
Good	1	1	-	2
Very Good	4	8	9	21
Excellent	3	3	3	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Provided a participative learning opportunity</b>				
Good	-	1	-	1
Very Good	3	3	5	11
Excellent	6	8	7	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Provision of sufficient insight to support individual's pursuit of knowledge</b>				
Good	-	-	1	1
Very Good	8	8	7	23
Excellent	1	4	3	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>

Thirty students felt that the study was very well organised, rating it as either very good or excellent. Three persons also felt that it was good. With regard to professional relevance to teachers/educators, 32 rated it as either very good or excellent with 1 person rating it as good. See Table 10.5 below.



**Table 10.5: Rated Aspects 9 - 10 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	Special & Inclusive Education	
<b>Well - organised Study School</b>				
Good	2	1		3
Very Good	3	7	7	17
Excellent	4	4	5	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Professional relevance of Study School for teachers / educators</b>				
Good	1	-	-	1
Very Good	-	4	4	8
Excellent	8	8	8	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>

Thirty-two persons responded to question (9). Thirty-one of them indicated that the assignment was either very appropriate or appropriate enough. Only one person indicated their uncertainty by ticking the 'Don't know' option. See Table 10.6 below.

**Table 10.6: Appropriateness of Assignment**

Appropriateness of Assignment	Option			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	SIE	
Very Appropriate	5	7	6	18
Appropriate	3	5	5	13
Don't Know	1	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>

Twenty-six persons indicated that the information provided in the books and materials would either be helpful or very help in completing the third

assignment. However, 6 persons weren't sure and indicated that they did not know. This could have been because they had not reviewed the course material in-depth or because they had not been able to clearly link the assignment with the course material. (See Table 10.7 below.)

**Table 10.7: Helpfulness of Material**

Helpfulness of material in completing 3 <sup>rd</sup> assignment	Option			Total
	Adult Learner	Management	SIE	
Very Helpful	4	4	3	11
Helpful	2	7	6	15
Don't Know	3	1	2	6
Total	9	12	11	32

### ***Study School 4***

#### **Education and Employment**

Seven students responded and indicated among other things they expected “good tutoring; relevant texts”, “guidance on writing assignments” and “an understanding of the role of Tech/Voc within the general education system”. Generally the students seemed pleased with the outcomes. One student commented that “every expectation was addressed and satisfied excellently”. Another stated that they “obtained a clear perception of what Tech/Voc entails and developed a greater appreciation for initiatives taken, along the lines of tech/voc in our system.” Yet another felt “...motivated to keep on working”.

### **Management - second offering**

The 7 respondents expected to *"have a suitable working base from which to write on any one of the questions from the assignment list"*; *"have interactive sessions"* and *"... be exposed to a lot of the concepts related to educational management"*. The expectations were met to some extent because the tutor asked students to choose questions and only those were discussed *"because of the brevity of time"*. There were fewer interactive sessions than expected and one student remarked that though *"there were opportunities for group work, the number of tasks were limited."* Another student had mixed reactions about the experience and said that though they were *"... satisfied with what was covered, the tutor was a bit inflexible and authoritarian."* Two students of the seven who responded *"felt motivated to read more"* and felt that the *"tutor was quite knowledgeable and did a very good job at meeting their expectations"*.

### **Guidance and Counselling**

The 7 students who responded to this questionnaire expected *"... to learn more about the role of the counsellor and the importance of that [role]"*; to have *"an opportunity to discuss issues related to counselling so that [they] could apply them to work / home life situations"*; to participate in *"productive tutorials which would support [them] in approaching the dissertation"*. All the students except one were very pleased with the

sessions. The satisfied 'customers' seemed thrilled, that they were "engaged in an active counselling session with a colleague" and "the sessions were very inspiring and conducted in a professional way - discussions and personal experiences were encouraged". The one dissatisfied 'customer' wrote that there was "...poor communication with the tutor (tutor did not reply properly on assignment) ... very little support to handle assignment four". Based on the very positive comments from the other participants and the very negative comments regarding local tutorial support, it would appear that this last comment was referring to the local tutorial support - because that is where support is provided from in terms of assignment preparation.

When feedback about this complaint from the students was given to David Thompson, the Sheffield lecturer responsible for teaching on the course, he said that he was quite surprised. The following explains his thinking:

*I was quite surprised with the outcome of the counselling and guidance thing because I had done something quite unusual in the structure of the assignment, which was to ask them to go through a particular piece of counselling in St. Lucia. I had specified as closely as I could, exactly what was meant, with 'at length' kinds of questions. All of them came back perfect and I was amazed that they all came back so precisely and I thought that it looks as though [the tutor] had been working with them in detail to give them this kind of support to do that because I just could not conceive of a group here [in*

*the UK], for example ... being able to follow what I had said so clearly with something that they were unfamiliar with as a process and all of them getting it right the first time.*

The lack of perceived support from the local Guidance and Counselling tutor had devastating effects on some of the students. During one of the study school visits, to St. Lucia, one student who felt that she had absolutely no support, went to visit Dr. Armstrong, the Course Director at the time, to explain her predicament. She had explained both to me and to him that she was in a state of depression for weeks because she felt that she had not performed well on the Guidance and Counselling assignment due to lack of support. When she received her grade from the Lecturer, Dr. Thompson and realised that she had got 88% for her submission, she came to arrange a tutorial for her dissertation, which she had stopped thinking about because she had been so distraught. She then went on to be the only student from that cohort whose work was awarded 100%. She received a commendation.

### **Relevance and Usefulness of the Course**

I have previously remarked that learning at a distance seems to share many characteristics with traditional learning. However, there are also some differences which could prove to be very significant. While the goals of education for both delivery styles may be very similar, there are

some challenges which may become more apparent because of the physical distance or separation of lecturer from student. Because of this geographical distance, students may become more insecure about the quality of his/her work and the amount of progress made. For example, students may not have a proper sense of how far off they are from completion of an assignment at an appropriate standard. This for instance is sometimes evident in the type of correspondence which is received from students who require constant validation but for whom under 'normal' circumstances validation of this sort would not be perceived as being very necessary. This is where, timely responses with regard to assignment feedback is important; because in the physical absence of the lecturer, those comments provide the principle source of guidelines for students.

By looking at the types of difficulties students experience, can infer something about the characteristics and circumstances of the learners. Why is it that these people who signed up to do two separate Distance Learning courses, experienced similar difficulties? Feedback provides some insight into the thinking of the students. For example, after the first study school session with the first cohort of students from St. Lucia, all aspects of the 'Study School' were rated highly with most of the responses being rated towards the upper end of the scale as being either excellent or

very good. However, some attention should be paid in the “support provided for assignment writing”. Nine persons did not respond and 8 persons rated it as ‘good’. In the Caribbean, ‘good’ translates into ‘average’ when options such as ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’ have not been selected. In my view, this could either be a signal that some more support should be given, or conversely, it may simply be a reflection of the internal struggles of the students as they were coming to terms with new concepts and literature, different teaching and learning styles of a ‘foreign institution’.

Since Universities are increasingly being attracted to the provision of distance education, they seem to be also shifted their emphasis from “selling (getting people to buy what producers feel like producing) towards marketing (finding out what people and providing it)”

(Rowntree, 2000 online)

When asked about the usefulness of the course overall, though some students misunderstood and commented on the usefulness of the last Specialist Option, those who responded about the course in general did so positively. Quoted under are some of their comments:

*Helped me to critically question our education system in terms of structure, goals vis-à-vis the reality in the schools and society, and the ways in which I can contribute to the development of a dynamic system.*

*I developed a critical eye towards the curriculum offered in my school. I re-thought my perceptions of the function of education and moved towards re-defining my role as a teacher in today's schools within the St. Lucia education system.*

*It has made me a more critical individual and a more reflective teacher.*

*Useful in my understanding of the analysis of policy documents.*

*The course has given me a chance to refresh my knowledge as well as to gain new knowledge in the field of education.*

Based on Table 10.8 below it would appear that the students seemed minimally less satisfied with this study school. It may have been because they were becoming tired as the course was drawing to a close or it could be that the quality of the sessions had fallen. This was reflected in their responses to the Management Specialist Option. Though it was the same lecturer who was responsible for the Management Option in study schools 3 and 4, some students who participated in this specialist option during study school 4 seemed to be more dissatisfied than those who participated in the Management Specialist Option during Study School 3. The lowest rating then was 'Good' with the rest being described as 'Very Good' or 'Excellent' It should be pointed out that this was indeed that lecturer's swansong because it was her last official teaching engagement with the University before her retirement.



**Table 10.8 : Rated Aspects 1 - 3 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School IV	Specialist Options			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
<b>Introduction of principal themes</b>				
Good	-	1	-	1
Very Good	3	3	1	7
Excellent	4	3	6	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Provision of forum for discussion of identified issues</b>				
Fair	-	1	-	1
Good	-	2	-	2
Very Good	-	4	1	5
Excellent	7		6	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Provision of support for assignment writing</b>				
Fair	-	2	-	2
Good	1	3	1	5
Very Good	3	2	2	7
Excellent	3		4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

Generally the ratings for the support for preparation of the thesis outline and the suggestions for planning the thesis have been positive. However, in the Management Specialist Option, a few (3 or 4) students registered their displeasure by using the 'poor' and 'fair' options. (See Table 10.9 below)

**Table 10.9 : Rated Thesis Aspects 4 - 5 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Thesis Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
<b>Support for preparation of thesis outline</b>				
Poor	-	1	-	1
Fair	-	3	-	3
Good	3	2	1	6
Very Good	3		2	5
Excellent	1	1	4	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Suggestions for planning thesis</b>				
Poor	-	2	-	2
Fair	-	1	-	1
Good	2	1	2	5
Very Good	4	2	2	8
Excellent	1	1	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

The 3 Specialists options were rated positively because the students felt that the sessions provided them with sufficient insight to support them as individuals in the pursuit of knowledge. The majority of students felt that their interaction in their various Specialist Options provided an opportunity to identify their learning objectives (19) as well as a participative learning opportunity (18). (See Table 10.10 below)

**Table 10.10 : Rated Aspects 6 - 8 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School III	Specialist Options			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
<b>Provided an opportunity to identify your learning objectives</b>				
Fair	-	1	-	1
Good	1	2	-	3
Very Good	5	3	4	12
Excellent	1	1	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Provided a participative learning opportunity</b>				
Fair	-	2	-	2
Good	-	1	-	1
Very Good	1	3	2	6
Excellent	6	1	5	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Provision of sufficient insight to support individual's pursuit of knowledge</b>				
Good	-	3	2	5
Very Good	4	3	3	10
Excellent	3	1	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

All respondents felt that the Study School was well organised and was professionally relevant. (See Table 10.11 below)

**Table 10.11: Rated Aspects 9 - 10 of Study School  
Cross-tabulated with Option**

Aspects of Study School	Specialist Options			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
<b>III</b>				
<b>Well - organised Study School</b>				
Good	-	1	1	2
Very Good	3	4	1	8
Excellent	4	2	5	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Professional relevance of Study School for teachers / educators</b>				
Very Good	1	4	1	6
Excellent	6	3	6	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

All the respondents from Management (7) and Guidance and Counselling (7) and 4 of those pursuing Education for Employment perceived that the assignments given were appropriate. However, 1 person from Education for Employment felt that it was inappropriate and 2 from that specialism refrained from responding.

**Table 10.12: Appropriateness of Assignment**

Appropriateness of Assignment	Option			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
Very Appropriate	3	5	3	11
Appropriate	1	2	4	7
Not Very Appropriate	1			1
No Response	2			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

Sixteen of the 21 respondents perceived that the material that they received from the course would have been helpful in completing their fourth assignment. Five persons ( 4 from Guidance and Counselling and 1 from Education for Employment) indicated that they felt that the material was not very helpful. (See Table 10.13 below)

**Table 10.13: Helpfulness of Material**

Helpfulness of material in completing 4 <sup>th</sup> assignment	Option			Total
	Education for Employment	Management	Guidance & Counselling	
Very Helpful	1	1	-	2
Helpful	5	6	3	14
Not very Helpful	1	-	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

One student commented on this aspect and remarked that perhaps material from modules should be adequately referenced so that students could use them in their own work. Again this draws attention to the need for an adequate library and / or library support. Visiting lecturers should also try as far as possible to be as comprehensive in providing material as possible.

### ***Discussion***

Based on the feedback from the various Specialist Option sessions on students expectations and the extent to which they were met, one gets a glimpse of a situation where the quality and appreciation of teaching is

subject to differing personalities, teaching styles and even perhaps states of well-being. Faculty members often share the belief that students learn and develop through exposure to course material. As a result, the content is considered to be crucially important. As lecturers, although our espoused philosophies of teaching and learning may sound radical, many of us have been accustomed to a traditional learning process where the teachers who 'knows' presents some ideas to the students who do not. Many present day academics have prospered under this traditional lecture system yet it may not be a system that works for the majority of today's students.

Students, like the times are changing dramatically, and we need to be responsive to those changes. Sometimes we may have instances where the teaching and the learning are taking place on two different wavelengths and there seem to be no obvious connections. As University lecturers, we need to attempt to understand our clientele and reflect on how best we can present information to them.

Adult learners bring a great deal of life experience into the classroom and they often have high expectations. Enquiring about these expectations before getting into the content would be time well spent because it is then possible to arrive at a negotiated position with the students.

I think that caring and empathy are important qualities which contribute positively to the effectiveness and professionalism of the educator. Poon Teng Fatt (1998: 616 - 625) put it quite succinctly when he said that:

Great teaching demands a kind of a synergy....if teachers have an abiding concern for their students' total welfare and a worried concern for some of their ailing, troubled students, they will not just leave their students in the classroom but continually labor to understand how familial and societal influences have shaped them and ultimately develop the synergy between them.

Hamachek (1975: 241) expressed similar sentiments when he suggested that:

Effective teachers appear to be those who are, shall we say, "human" in the fullest sense of the word. They have a sense of humor, are fair, empathetic, more democratic than autocratic, and apparently are more able to relate easily to and naturally to students on either a one-to-one or group basis.

Research which questions and analyses the perceptions of teachers helps the researcher to reflect on the implications of the findings for teacher education programmes. What these findings seem to suggest is that teachers need to feel that they are well informed about the subject of study, especially as they are operating at a post-graduate level. As lecturers, it is our duty to provide them with sound intellectual bases and encourage them to be reflexive in their thinking.

Doing this with a high level of confidence encourages students to participate and allow themselves to be immersed in the material. Through the various activities which we employ during our sessions we can provide learning spaces where students feel comfortable to explore various concepts and challenge their own roles within their schools, the community and society at large.

Communication is another area in which lecturers may fall short. Sometimes they know their content but experience extreme difficulty in communicating this to students in a manner which makes sense to the students. Bearing this in mind, lecturers should try to present information to students in a manner that is interesting and dynamic so their interest is maintained and they begin to grapple with the issues before them and develop personal meaning out of these experiences.

The concept of taking pupils from the known to the unknown does not only apply to schoolchildren but it is as applicable to teachers on post-graduate courses as well. New knowledge should be integrated with previous knowledge in order to encourage the students to actively participate in the new learning experiences. Lecturers should be able to balance the presentation of new material, with debate, discussion and student experiences. On distance education courses, it is not sufficient to



acknowledge that you are 'clueless' about the students' 'local situation'. It would be worthwhile to engage in a little pre-visit research that looks at the history of the country, the education system and even some current events. These can be used as springboards for conversation or further investigation. This has been made very possible by virtue of the internet.

## **Chapter 11: Collaboration, Partnerships and Alliances: Perspectives on the Development of the Programme**

### *Introduction*

In Chapter 2, it was argued that higher education has irreversibly changed over the past 15 to 20 years. University education has moved from an elite system to a mass system. The frontiers of higher education have expanded more rapidly than they have ever done before by extensively moving across geographical boundaries and accommodating different forms of partnership and collaboration.

Traditionally, universities have sought to maintain their autonomy, establish their own standards and shape their own identities within their own spaces. Those that belong to the elite sphere, have taken great pains to ensure that the uniqueness of their special license will continue to attract students from around the world. However, some of this thinking has been modified over time as various global forces have impacted on higher education institutions. The marketisation of education has been accelerated by economic, social, political, technological and even educational considerations. Whereas notions of interdependence were neither possible nor desirable for universities who fought to maintain

their individuality, prevailing global conditions have increasingly pressured many institutions into mergers and collaborations with other organisations in an effort to maintain economic viability and advance their appeal.

In an attempt at re-creation, Universities and their Departments have moved towards more hybrid models of operation and the walls between departments, programmes and people have become more porous and perhaps even seamless. As a result, they have engaged in collaborative ventures, built partnerships and developed strategic alliances. These special relationships, are usually based on some formal agreement and can be perceived as “active working partnership(s) supported by some kind of institutional commitment” (Neil, 1981:25). They may be between two or more higher education institutions and/or involve businesses, non-profit organisations or non-governmental organisations. Undoubtedly, these strategic partnerships and alliances have developed in an effort to maximize the strengths of individual partners while also creating new opportunities.

This chapter will look at the University’s School of Education experiences of collaboration in Trinidad and St. Lucia and identify the issues and lessons to be learned from both countries. On the one hand the

collaboration could be perceived as extending access to the University for other countries but on the other hand, it could be perceived within the context of an economic rationalist agenda where the University seeks to promote access for economic and prestigious gain within a global market place. I will also look at the views expressed by key Caribbean stakeholders and their experience of the collaboration.

### *The Case of Trinidad & Tobago*

The main impetus for the development of the University of Sheffield's distance education programmes came from teachers in the Caribbean working collectively through non-governmental and governmental organisations to address the shortage of trained teachers. The training opportunities which were provided were based on the teachers' struggle for social justice and their firm commitment to a collaborative relationship which supported their empowerment (Nansoo & Armstrong, 1999).

In Trinidad and Tobago, they formed a strategic alliance with their local Teachers' Union, T&TUTA and lobbied for the Union to form a partnership with the University of Sheffield in the interest of the professional development of their members. In the very early days of the University's collaboration with the Teachers' Union, few people believed that the 'experiment' would work. From the T&TUTA side, no

systems were established to accommodate students either in terms of payments of fees or records of any type of transactions (academic or otherwise). From the University's point of view, one got the impression that the systems in the various departments were operating within a vacuum. Derrick Armstrong, former Programme Director of the Caribbean Programme at the University of Sheffield, expresses the view that:

*the world has changed since 1989 when the programme was first established. At that time few people cared what we were doing but now we are entering into a more profound period of struggle over the values, practices and outcomes of education on the international stage.*

Such is the effect of globalisation, mass education and commodification. There is no doubt that a combination of factors such as the reduction in direct public funding for universities, and the current business rhetoric of market efficiency, economic rationality and market share, are forcing universities into the business of selling products and services related to education to the various 'markets' within the global economy. As such universities are becoming corporations in their own right. They market their brands in the same way as do Nike, Coke and McDonalds in order "...to occupy a central place in ... popular culture, not just the business world" (Ritzer, 2000:5).

Dennis Conrad, in an interview with a former First Vice President of T&TUTA, Jennifer Lavia, speaking about the initial link with the University of Sheffield emphasised the importance of the collaboration as realistic way of supporting 'the cause'. He says:

The partnership between a teachers' union, [a] community based organization and a university, and the focus on teachers shaping and constructing their own professional development, emerged as the first of its kind. The project is evidenced by the commitment of a people to shape its destiny in a collaborative-consultative capacity with a highly respected university. There is a clear policy of mutual respect and regard for each partner in the collaboration. The acknowledgement of the local special educators as experts on the professional needs of special educators in Trinidad and Tobago has been realised through their consultative role in the development of programme curricular and local administration.

(Lavia, 1998)

Such was the intensity of purpose among that first pioneering cohort that some of that momentum and vitality from a shared vision lingers today in the newly formed Caribbean Institute for Research and Professional Education (CIRPE) mentioned earlier in Chapters 6 and 9. This group is by no means 'new'. Rather, it comprises former graduates of the various courses conducted by the University of Sheffield along with longstanding supporters in the field of education who have formed themselves into a registered body. This collaboration though informal at

first, went through the stages of adhocism into a more formally negotiated arrangement.

Armstrong, in his analysis of the Caribbean programme, refers to it as a “...remarkable experiment”. He acknowledges that though it *has* “...taken time to get where it is”, it was that combination of “*patience and determination from all involved*” that made it into a reality. His considered view is that the Caribbean Institute which is housed in Trinidad, has “...the key role to play” in strengthening the collaboration across the region and re-inforcing the support infra-structure. It also has a role to increase its output significantly by building on the academic linkages which already exist and engaging in more research and publication activities. The challenge is that the Institute “... is still a fledgling which could easily fall or be pushed from the nest”. Underpinning all of this is what he describes as, “... an ambiguous relationship between educators in the Caribbean and a first world university”.

Decisions taken at the School of Education within the past year, have suggested that the School of Education sees the emergence of a local agency as a step in the right direction because it is investing in the human resources of the country who are successful products of its programme. Thompson is satisfied that he has seen the programme grow and develop

*... roughly in a way that (he) envisioned it growing – with greater independence from the people in the Caribbean. The recent development of the Caribbean Institute seems perfectly consistent with what would be possible and appropriate on a theoretical level that is, (a) in terms of academic development and (b) also in terms of the changing organisational pattern.*

Armstrong, in expressing his views, is clear in making a distinction between the central administrative departments of the University and the School of Education. He explains that:

*“...the University itself may not, be operating from altruistic motives (though that does not mean that its motives are entirely commercially driven), even less is it operating from a clear understanding of what it is that the School of Education is trying to achieve. This creates tensions in its own right”.*

Thompson, who also served as Dean in the Department of Educational Studies as it was one called, and has had several dealing with the Centre as it is referred to, shares the view that:

*...the central University has never really shared the collaborative model that we were trying to work in the Caribbean. They always stuck with this notion of education being a saleable commodity which is relatively unproblematic and that is a great pity... People have tried to get around the limitations of the institution, but it has been very difficult... they do not see things in pedagogical terms, they see things in institutional structure terms.*

Jennifer Lavia, current Director of CIRPE, former student on the very first Certificate-Diploma Course and former First Vice-President of the



T&TUTA responsible for professional development shared her views in an interview. As a student on the Certificate Diploma course, Lavia recalls "... always having to be in 'battle mode'" either because the venue was less than ideal (with the students having to deal with mosquitoes and sand flies) or from a financial point of view, "... knowing that you were not going to get any increase in salary at the end of it". More important than those very real issues was the fact that "we did not get the type of support from the Teachers Union that we wanted". This is something that I could attest to. In fact, this challenge persisted, even when Lavia became the First Vice president of the Teachers' Union. She shared her challenges by explaining that:

*...the programme was not really recognised by the Union itself at its various levels the Conference of Delegates, the General Council and the Central Executive. For some reason, it seemed as though the main bodies did not fully accept their roles and responsibilities towards recognising the programme. That was hard – it was really hard ... and I felt very alone in that - almost as though it was a personal and singular mission. The whole financial structure and the organisational structure were really in a mess. What it meant was that the records weren't properly kept – there was no proper system the programme had grown and the system just did not keep up with that growth.*

Armstrong echoes those sentiments from another perspective:

*The problems have come with getting teachers recognition for their professional development. Professional development does not in itself advance the cause of teachers. I think this is one of the great*

*sadnesses of the TTUTA/Sheffield relationship; namely that the unions find it so difficult in theorising the role of professional development in relation to teachers' socio-economic interests in ways that radically challenge the political conservatism of politicians and the bureaucratic vested interests in the status quo. Perhaps this is a limitation that is endemic to trade unions precisely because their focus is upon narrow self-interest rather than upon broader political goals and socio-economic reform.*

Concerning her relationship with the University, Lavia compares what happened in the early years with what happened later on.

*In 1993/94 I visited the University with the aim of re-examining the programme – I always felt that there was a lack in the University in terms of getting ready responses to correspondence, requests, and a sense of inefficiency in terms of the recording system. That had impacted on how well the programme itself was running.*

*In 1995/6, the University had changed the Course Director in Sheffield and it felt like starting all over again - because my old suspicions about the lack of recording and the inefficiency with records etc, was played out. The new Director came and almost had nothing to go by. In one sense, it was not a problem because a lot of development was taking place with the programme – the programme was moving forward. I think too, that Sheffield had its own reconsideration going on in terms of the re-organising and reconceptualising of their distance learning unit.*

Having been a product of the Caribbean/Sheffield experience, I would agree with Armstrong's point of view, that the programme helped to:

*Raise the profile of special education amongst teachers in Trinidad and prepare teachers to make a*

*worthwhile contribution to the education of disabled children and children with other special learning needs.*

*The programme has also provided an opportunity for a large number of educators to move forward in their thinking about education and to see the potential that they have individually and collectively to promote change and reform for children. Amongst these, in particular, have been the leaders of the programme who have contributed so much to the cause of education in their country, and now for some in many different parts of the world.*

*I think the university's courses have played a significant role in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago.*

Lavia also thinks that the programme has been a success in Trinidad. She explains further:

*Though it was hard in terms of breaking the barriers against traditional educational practices that were common in the country, and getting people to accept that it was not a programme from the University of the West Indies, the programme started out of a need for teachers to be trained in Special Education. The programme has evolved into the only programme for the training of teachers in Special Education in the country. According to the projection from the Marge Report, approximately 500 teachers were supposed to be trained. The programme has trained close to 200 teachers, if not a little more than that. Over the lifespan of the programme, it has accomplished what it has set out to do.*

The fact that the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago at the time did not fully accept the programme, meant that people doing the course were doing it at their own risk. In spite of this, students

persevered and in 1999, a number new posts were created in the education system in the area of special education and of the 16 persons chosen, 15 came from the programme. Lavia describes this:

*... as a hallmark in terms of determining if the programme has done what it set out to do. Finally, the programme also influenced the establishment of the Special Education elective within the Teachers' College Curriculum so that as an important addition to teacher education.*

Lavia thinks that her most important contribution as the former First Vice President of T&TUTA who served for two terms (6 years) was the “*professionalising and stabilising of the programme*”. The programme provided:

*... a model for creativity and innovation in teacher education. In addition to that, and making sure that the programme was successful, it was important to develop a special kind of relationship with the University of Sheffield which was not based on colonial types of relationships. It was based on mutuality – that was paramount to me – that is what I set out to do. From 1992 the programme expanded. The emphasis was on building, creativity, innovation, stability and on creating meaningful and mutual relationships with the University of Sheffield.*

The remote location PhD was launched in Trinidad in July 1998, a few months before Lavia stepped down as the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice president of T&TUTA. Seven persons registered for that programme. Feedback from tutorials were very positive and students commented on several aspects of that

arm of programme. They felt that “...the presence of the supervisors (at the study school) was very significant. Their presence reflected the respect and regard that the University had for the students and for the programme”.

They also acknowledged the support of the facilitator, Professor Len Barton “... for the tremendous support which was provided in a very profound yet humble manner” as well as the Guest Lecture delivered by Wilfred Carr, the then Head of School. They said, “Professor Carr’s presentation was thought provoking and a fitting summary to the set text “Becoming Critical”. It was polemic and wide ranging. The concept of having a guest lecture is innovative and an excellent opportunity to engage in divergent ideas”.

Bernard, Head of the School of Continuing Studies at the University of the West Indies, shared his experience as a student on the remote location Ph.D. He described his association with the University of Sheffield as a ‘spiritual encounter’ in terms of how he heard about the programme ‘by word of mouth’ and the ground networking to make it happen; and, his experience on the programme. To him, it has been:

*... a novel approach to academic learning at its highest level in a way that we are actually practising co-operative learning in a situation where we can’t even get started in the primary school ... it has been fantastic ... something I feel must be documented, if only for what it has been able to do differently.*

## *The Case of St. Lucia*

The School of Education's experience over the years has shown the importance of NGOs as mediators, negotiating access to that constructive type of collaboration and contributing to the definition of the parameters of that collaboration in a manner which emphasises mutual respect. This has been the case in St. Lucia where the St. Lucia Teachers' Union was instrumental in the negotiations between the government of that country and the University of Sheffield. Armstrong expresses the view that "... *the St Lucia Teachers' Union was certainly the catalyst and in particular its then President, Virginia Albert.*"

The students on the course certainly recognised the contributions of the Teachers' Unions and two of them highlighted the support given by the former President and the General Secretary by praising:

*... the open manner in which the SLTU initiated the programme for all and not a select few; the dynamic encouragement given by the **President Ms Albert and Mr. Jn Pierre (General Secretary)**; the fact that the SLTU gave letters to endorse our acceptance for the purpose of financial assistance.*

*... the encouragement given by the president to pursue the course, through the information handed down from her experience. Also through the continuous dialogue with the Minister of Education for recognition of this new programme.*

The following data provides an overview of students perceptions about the support that they received from the St. Lucia Teachers' Union, and the Ministry of Education. In a survey of the first cohort of St. Lucian students, all 36 persons responded to 'question 21' which sought to determine the perceived level of support provided by the St. Lucia Teachers' Union. Only 1 person felt that this organisation was not very supportive. See Table 11.1 below.

**Table 11.1 SLTU Support \* Gender Crosstabulation**

SLTU Support	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Very Supportive	3	14	17
Supportive	4	14	18
Not Very Supportive		1	1
Total	7	29	36

When questioned about the support provided by the Ministry of Education, 35 persons responded. Four persons felt that the Ministry was not very supportive, 1 person felt that they were not supportive at all and 1 person did not know whether they were or they weren't. See table 11.2 below.

**Table 11.2 MOE Support \* Gender Crosstabulation**

Count - 1 case missing

MOE Support	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Very Supportive		6	6
Supportive	7	16	23
Not Very Supportive		4	4
Not Supportive At All		1	1
Don't Know		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>35</b>

When the data collected according to the 'sex' of the respondents and the perceived support received from the St. Lucia Teachers' Union (SLTU) and the Ministry of Education (MOE), were cross-tabulated, data provided by 32 persons were used. All the men (7) and 19 women felt that both the SLTU and the Ministry of Education was either very supportive or supportive. Four (4) females felt that the Ministry of Education was not very supportive, 1 woman felt that they weren't supportive at all and 1 woman did not know whether they were supportive or not. Only 1 person felt that the SLTU was not very supportive, and she also felt that the Ministry of Education was not very supportive. Though at least four items of data went missing as a result of the cross-tabulation process, we can still conclude that at least 26 persons perceived that both the Ministry of Education and the St. Lucia Teachers



Union have been supportive towards the programme. See table 11.3 below.

**Table 11.3 SLTU Support \* MOE Support Cross-tabulation**

SEX ↓	ST. Lucia Teachers' Union ↓ Support	Ministry of Education Support					Total
		Very Supportive	Supportive	Not Very Supportive	Not Supportive At All	Don't Know	
<b>Male</b>  <b>Total</b>  7	Very Supportive	-	3	-	-	-	3
	Supportive	-	4	-	-	-	4
	<b>Total</b>	-	7	-	-	-	7
<b>Female</b>  <b>Total</b>  25	Very Supportive	3	5	2	-	1	11
	Supportive	-	11	1	1	-	13
	Not Very Supportive	-	-	1	-	-	1
	<b>Total</b>	3	16	4	1	1	25

### **Support from the St. Lucia Teachers' Union**

The course participants identified several ways in which the Teachers' Union had been supportive towards the students on the course. It was clear that they felt that the Union was committed to teacher improvement and were confident that it would make the necessary arrangements to provide support for students in the programme

Thirty-six open ended comments were received and an overwhelming 34 were very positive in their perception of the Union's support. Their comments were based on their observations as well as their experiences on the course and they seem to be very appreciative of the Union's intervention. The comments are so varied that they are quoted extensively below. At least three persons felt that the Union has been supportive "*... in every way and made all efforts to accommodate teachers*". The data suggest that the Union provided support every step of the way. They supported prospective students by first:

*...initiating the programme so that teachers could enhance their teaching skills*

*The Union on behalf of teachers has negotiated with the Ministry to accredit Sheffield University in order to offer teachers an opportunity to pursue studies at home.*

*...providing avenues for professional improvement; providing initial information about the programme.*

*... initiating the programme - a commendable move for making higher education geographically and financially possible / accessible*

*The Teachers' Union approved of the programme and worked with organisers to initiate this.*

*The Union was aware of the difficulties its members face in going abroad to study and also the Ministry's policy on distance education. They worked very hard to present to us a programme that the Ministry of Education would accept.*

*The Union has set the foundation for its teachers to become educated at a very reasonable cost.*

After approval was granted by the Ministry of Education, the students recognised that the Union continued to share information about the course at every forum available. They acknowledged that the SLTU:

*... provided the necessary information on how to access the programme;*

*...accommodated late registration for members and non-members of the Union*

*...communicated information regularly - convening meetings for all participants - processing materials for participants*

*...advertised the programme through meetings. They made announcements at Union rallies. Announcements have been made on the radio*

*... sent out circulars informing teachers of the availability of the course; encouraged teachers at the Annual General Meeting to enrol for the course; informed teachers about dates and times of the interview.*

*The officials have encouraged me to pursue this programme (the advantages of participating were listed and emphasised).*

*... negotiated the structure of the programme; served as a secretariat for the execution of this exercise; facilitated the programme*

The course was officially launched in St. Lucia in July 1999 and the Union continued to provide support for students by:

*... photocopying of relevant materials which make it a little more economical for students; liaising between the University and the students thereby cutting shipping costs; providing office space for a liaison officer.*

*... providing support for financing this programme by making letters available; encouraging persons who were reluctant to participate*

*... sharing of available resources and materials*

*... assisting the facilitators of the programme during study schools.*

*... negotiating time off for teachers to attend study schools whenever necessary*

*... taking a personal interest in dealing with difficulties students may experience by making personal contact with students, dealing with students' anxieties and working along with the Ministry of Education – the Union has been instrumental in students' participation in the programme*

One student, however, at that first study school felt that it was too early to determine the contribution made by the Teachers' Union and said:

*It is too early to adequately assess. However, they have facilitated the application and interview process*

Another felt that the Union should have been able “... *to access a lending institution to at least facilitate funding*”.

### **Support from the Ministry of Education**

When asked about the ways in which they perceived the Ministry of Education as being supportive towards the students in the course, there were 29 responses.

The students recognised that the Ministry of Education's support lay in the sanctioning of the programme. They believed that there was dialogue between the University team, the Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education and this dialogue enabled the group to *"...make the Programme a reality"*. They also felt that the Ministry of Education endorsed the programme by granting *'time off'* for January study schools when teachers would have been back at work after the Christmas break.

The students made reference to the Opening Ceremony at which officials of the Ministry of Education *"...encouraged (them) to make full use of this 'new' and innovative opportunity to further their development in this area"*.

The students also felt that it was important to have *"... the presence of Ministry Officials at opening ceremony where they endorsed the introduction / commencement of programme"*. The following is a sample of the comments made by students about the Ministry of Education. They:

*... have promised to accept / recognise the degree obtained through this course / while they advised us against some others.*

*... have expressed their satisfaction with the programmes offered.*

*... have publicly voiced their approval at the opening ceremony of the Study School*

*... had been working along with the Union, and by all indications have expressed their faith in the programme.*

*... have served as advisors and have given accreditation to the programme.*

*... have endorsed the programme and asked for specific modules to be made as a compulsory part of the programme.*

*... will recognise the certificate / diploma or Masters from Sheffield.*

Two of the course participants were very sceptical about the support given by the Ministry of Education. One said that there was “...very little promotion of the programme” and they “...don’t know of future support”. Another participant acknowledged her hesitation in recognising the support of the ministry by saying, “I am not really sure, except that I feel that they ‘had’ retarded the progress in the first place”.

In terms of effectiveness, Armstrong thinks that the programme in St Lucia has been more effective than that in Trinidad.

*For the most part, this is because of the commitment of the St Lucia government to professional development for teachers. This is not without its problems but the political climate is so different that there does seem to be a greater interest amongst all parties in the potential of education as an agent of social change.*

### ***Comparison of the Cases***

I think that the case of St. Lucia is an excellent example of the way in which the NGO could facilitate higher education and negotiate with the

Ministry of Education to raise the professional standard of teachers' knowledge and understanding.

Relationships like these highlight the importance of entering into genuine collaborations with local agents who have a vested interest in educational development within their own countries, to ensure that local political, economic and development agendas are met, rather than simply a commercial intention of promoting the courses. There are elements of trust and conditions for maintaining this trust. It seeks to provide benefits for all partners especially in the prevailing situation where institutions of learning are faced with the same challenges of rising costs and access to fewer resources as a result. Derrick Armstrong thinks that:

*The strengths of the programme lie mainly in the collaborative relationships upon which it has been built. This has led to the development of a unique and challenging programme.*

It is of importance to note that the very first collaboration that was made between the University and Trinidad was with individuals. It turned out to be an experiment. They had the 'Aha!' experience and decided to pursue it. As a result, this mushroomed into a continued investment in the local people of the region which transcends the boundaries of any formal organisation. Through networking with educators in the Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia, the University has been able to build a cadre of

professionals who in their capacity as local tutors, support the University's capacity to provide depth and breadth of knowledge especially in relation to the affairs of the Caribbean.

As a result of this on-going commitment to professional development, opportunities have been provided for educators to publish their research in the Sheffield Publication of Teachers' Voices in the Caribbean, thus sharing their knowledge throughout the region. This relationship with individuals has helped to raise the profile of local educators, while building a critical mass of scholars within the region. These 'simplistic' collaborations trade on the respect for the personhood of the individuals involved and have been instrumental in the fostering of other relationships.

One such link is with the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College of St. Lucia. A link with one of our local tutors has resulted in a wider research collaboration between the College's Research Unit and the University. This collaborative effort secured funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to look at Special Educational policy and practices in six countries of the Eastern Caribbean States.



Armstrong in reflecting on the current situation in the Caribbean expresses the view that :

*one of the exciting things about the programme is the way it is both allowing and forcing those of us involved to contribute to that debate both through our practice and, more ambitiously, through the impact of our work.*

*I believe that part of what our work is about is redefining the meaning of a university in the 21st century in ways that challenge post colonial histories and barriers.*

*In this respect, what we do at home in Sheffield, in the UK, is just as important because to be effective in meeting the challenge we have to learn from our post colonial engagements about how we take on the politically conservative forces that would take globalised education in a very different direction.*

### ***Collaboration: A Way of Supporting and Respecting the Learners***

In spite of the many successes achieved by the University's involvement in the Caribbean, there have also been many issues and challenges which it has faced in developing its work in that region. It would be naïve to think otherwise. In particular, issues arise from such collaborations.

First changes within the international market place create competing pressures within the mission of the university itself. Secondly, the rapid growth of distance education through globalisation has produced the

possibility of mass higher education. Yet, the globalisation of educational provision through distance learning systems of delivery creates conditions that could support a new-age colonialism with new forms of control. In my interview with Armstrong, he explained his view further by saying that:

*Globalisation is a powerful and threatening influence. I just think it is better to fight for an alternative that brings people together in an equitable, critical and collaborative relationship than it is to bury one's head in the sand and fight a losing battle for the preservation of (perhaps dubious) social and cultural orders through isolationism.*

The third issue that the notion of collaboration confronts is that of knowledge as a saleable commodity which can be traded on the international scale as a result of the contraction of the world through improved systems of telecommunication. Yet, there is always the temptation for developing countries to rely on the 'knowledge' created in the First World thus promoting post-colonial dependencies. Armstrong and Namsou (2000:210) have argued the case for the University of Sheffield by explaining that:

... by contrast, the University of Sheffield's programmes have been built upon local collaborations and contextualised curricula, reflecting on-going debates about the changing character of universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nevertheless they acknowledge that, "... the globalisation of knowledge may reinforce patterns of behaviour born of the history of colonialism which have given rise to 'ways of thinking' that frequently lock people into a dependency syndrome" (ibid: 211).

If the underpinning aim of the courses is to promote a democratic curriculum and pedagogy, then there might be on the part of the planners and deliverers of programmes:

... a recognition of the different social positionings and cultural repertoires in the classrooms, and the power relations between them.

Michael Apple (1996:33)

Where this occurs, involvement in distance education can have a positive impact on first world educators, encouraging support for critical engagement with the challenges and difficulties arising from colonial histories and globalisation within an education community. Moreover, in these circumstances, the 'not invented here' factor which is often identified as a stumbling block to collaboration (Mugridge, 1983; Bynner, 1985) can be effectively challenged. Moran and Mugridge (1993: 5) recognise that among the factors that:

...militate against the success of even the most carefully designed collaborative arrangements [is] the tradition of institutional autonomy among universities. ... Several writers have alluded to the common mistrust

of teaching methods and academic standards elsewhere.

In the Sheffield programme, staff development plans are in place and together with regular meetings and on-line discussions, they ensure that all concerned parties are engaged in the development of the philosophy and practices of the programme. Certainly, more could be done to boost this aspect of the programme, but work has started and plans are afoot to develop it further.

There are several ways in which collaborations could be strengthened in the Caribbean. Some focus on the administrative and organisational aspects of education while others pertain to curriculum and pedagogy. It is important that the Caribbean Institute for Research and Professional Education position itself to play a more active role in the debates on education and research taking place within the region. The University through the continuation of its courses could use the proposed Ed. D. programme as a vehicle to pursue a deeper understanding of education in the post-colonial world.

This programme provides an opportunity to critique Euro-centric notions of curriculum and pedagogy. This would involve a breaking down of the 'cultures of silence' that have historically dominated colonial and

postcolonial education. On the one hand, this is what Freire refers to as the 'culture of dependency' in which voices from developing countries are silenced by the historical weight of their own oppression. On the other hand, the 'culture of silence' represents a culture of uncritical euro-centrism through which educators in the first world are held captive by their own histories of colonial domination and intellectual arrogance. Underpinning this, there has to be an understanding that genuine collaborations break down barriers by crossing the historical, cultural and intellectual borders that impose distances and separate learners.

Challenging the culture of dependency through border crossing demands a step away from 'banking' education and the use of the tools of conscientization, dialogue and praxis to elicit from educators, their issues, concerns, thoughts and ideas on education within their region. Challenging the culture of uncritical euro-centrism demands that notions of first world superiority are rejected and that the 'culture of silence', through which its assumptions are embedded in the world as 'knowledge', are overthrown.

## CHAPTER 12: Future Concerns - Planning For Success

### *The Future - Caribbeanisation*

*Caribbeanisation is a consciousness building process which allows us to look within and see how we can develop indigenous-type materials to meet our everyday needs. It in part suggests that we create some of our own theories and apply our own areas of research with a greater sense of scholarship.*

(Bernard, 1999)

Caribbeanisation as defined by Bernard, in an interview with me in 1999 is the dream of a few inspired Caribbean people who believe that collectively, we do have the expertise to develop our own educational theories and systems in order to develop a more informed population. As a Caribbean educator, who as a student experienced the devastating effects of colonialism, I must admit that I would appreciate a more student-centered approach to education and in this instance, distance education.

However, I recognise that this is not always possible or feasible for several reasons - some of which are economic while others may be political. For example, larger class sizes and greater control from the centre would mean that the courses become more economically feasible and be more politically acceptable to the central University management team of a traditional university such as Sheffield who may have entered the

distance education arena because it represented progress, more international recognition, and increased profits (Verduin & Clark, 1991). Rumble (1986), recognised that some universities unlike the Open University of the UK, whose sole responsibility is open learning, operate as mixed mode institutions where both distance and conventional education occur. The University of Sheffield is one such example.

At this University, several departments offer distance education courses. However, each department administers its own programme. This mixed mode approach may have the advantage of being able to draw upon the resources of the resident faculty and services, but a disadvantage is that some faculty and administrators may consider distance education to be less effective and less important than campus-based instruction. The School of Education for example conducts distance education courses in 5 overseas locations (Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Trinidad and St. Lucia) and may have to close at least two because its expenses in those locations are far too high. Although the main objective of the School of Education is not to make a profit on its distance learning programmes, they must be realistically cost-effective so that all operational costs can be comfortably met.

This highlights the importance of entering into genuine collaborations with local agents who have a vested interest in educational development within their own countries.

### ***Future of Teacher Professional Development in Trinidad and Tobago***

In June 2000, one student who were participated in the M.Ed. in Educational Studies felt that the “..programme benefits all educators who seek to improve our education system. All tutors are excellent and the course was well developed and delivered”. Another described it as “relevant, well organised.” Though they were not asked about the viability of the course for the future, their comments suggest that they were so very satisfied because the course met their needs that it would no doubt meet the needs of other educators in the system. Students indicated that:

*The content, structure and methodology was well suited to adult education and the payment plan allowed for working parents to finance studies.*

*All in all I am happy that I chose to pursue this course of study. I would recommend this programme to other teachers willingly.*

### ***Future of Teacher Professional Development in St. Lucia***

I sought the views of the teachers on the programme about the feasibility of the programmes that were being offered and whether they felt that the



programme now offered by the University of Sheffield had a role to play in the future of teacher professional development in St. Lucia. In spite of the few hiccups which some had experienced in terms of inadequate library support and challenges with the presentation of some aspects of the Specialist Modules, the students were very supportive in their comments about the course. In their words,

*It presents an opportunity for St. Lucian teachers to become more qualified. Because of the quality of training, teachers in St. Lucia will have acquired skills and developed personalities which will motivate them to bring about new changes.*

One student attested to the affordability and financial viability of the programme and praised the structure because it provides on-going support for students.

*This is the only affordable programme that will take a teacher beyond the degree programme. It is also the best structured distance learning programme. The frequent tutorials and study schools give the programme a clear advantage.*

*It enables teachers who are not able to finance their studies otherwise an opportunity to do so at a reasonable fee; it enables teachers to improve on their academic standards.*

*Of significance is the economic factor. Of greater importance is the courses offered which are relevant to the profession; that of teacher as a researcher, exploring the many issues in the education system which is not limited to personal gratification but the entire system; policy makers, colleagues and other key stakeholders.*

There was a comment which suggested that there was a shortage of professional post-graduate courses available for teachers on the island and that upgrading one's skills was necessary in these times. The comment is quoted below:

*After a teacher has acquired a first degree, there are not many courses being offered, so that those persons can keep up with whatever changes.*

The programme also seemed to have positively affected not only the confidence levels of the participants but also their ability to be reflective practitioners. They alluded to the positive impact that the participants in the programme had been having on the teaching profession nationally.

*We have all been working hard to achieve our goals. We have developed more confidence.*

*It is a form of educational advancement. It is a form of empowerment. You can develop insights into the education system and one can become more critical and reflective, thus in the process improving the education system.*

*One has a different perspective on education and teacher professionalism.*

*At least it creates an awareness of what teaching and learning is all about. Staff behave quite professionally and this does have an impact on teachers here in St. Lucia.*

Recognising that research is vitally important to education and that it could impact significantly on the education system was an important acknowledgement for them. They shared the following comments:

*It has encouraged a deeper desire to want to do research and study in general.*

*Our teachers are dormant. They are not reflective of their profession and neither are they engaged in on-going learning and research. Such a course is a wake-up call that I think many are eagerly waiting for ... to make themselves more proactive.*

About the programme itself they said,

*The Sheffield Programme offers a global view of teacher professionalism.*

*It has offered teachers an opportunity for professional development locally.*

*They have provided teachers with very worthwhile information in dealing with their lives as teachers as well as in dealing with their students and other stakeholders.*

One teacher declared that professional development is the key to the reforming and restructuring of education and another suggested that:

*all teachers should have some sort of training in counselling skills. Also, I believe the entire course will go a long way in changing attitudes of teachers towards teaching.*

Teachers clearly feel that the course is supporting the country in national development , especially in the field of education.

*The course allows you to study/research your own area. I like to refer to it as site specific. It allows you to develop yourself and the education system in your area.*

## **Role of the Course in the Caribbean**

Fewer persons responded about their perceived role of the course in the Caribbean. However, those who did respond felt that it would have a similar effect in other Caribbean islands to that which they described for St. Lucia, namely: *development of teachers' skills in the context of Caribbean culture and educational experiences.* One teacher explained that *"the course work took into consideration the Caribbean viewpoint and the tutors encouraged this."* As a result, *"it has helped teachers to reflect on the Caribbean perspectives."* Others believed that:

*This programme will over time develop a cadre of professional teachers that will lead the future direction of education policy and theories in the Caribbean.*

*Yes, it can help teachers to strive for a level that is comparable to that of the developed countries.*

*Teachers in the Caribbean are starved for knowledge in education. If there is an avenue open where teachers do not have to leave their homeland, they will grasp at it.*

*Teachers (particularly me) have been better able to understand their demanding roles as well as the education system in which they work; this is necessary in empowering teachers to make the changes that is most needed in the system.*

## **Challenges of Communication**

If distance education is to be successful in such an environment, there must be both effective communication systems in place along with

organizational and administrative structures which support this mode of operation. Because modern-day practices of distance learning have practically collapsed the notions of space and time, it is important that systems are developed to ensure that the various administrative stakeholders (heads of departments, administrators, lecturers, secretaries) are included in the information loop and updated at appropriate times. In that same light, systems should be established so that students can be contacted fairly easily and that general information and instructions can be delivered on time. Basically, information should be able to flow within a system where all persons and departments involved are aware of the common goals, activities and procedures. This should also include a built-in mechanism for constructive and appropriate feedback whenever this is necessary (Verduin and Clark, 1991).

### *Administrative Challenges of Distance Education*

One problem that I have encountered while being involved in the programme relates to administration. Kaye and Rumble (1981) refer to some of the problems experienced by traditional educational institutions when they begin to introduce distance learning programmes. A major issue lies in resolving the management conflict between distance education and traditional academic programmes. Distance learning programmes often require the management and structure of a business

enterprise, while traditional academic courses require a completely different style of governance. These differences "often find expression in a conflict between academic 'freedom of action' and the necessity for maintaining effective production mechanisms" (Kay and Rumble, 1981:179) necessary for distance education course development and distribution.

For example, at Sheffield, the financial regulations seem extremely rigid and do not make allowances for simple situations like: the payment of laundry bills, when lecturers have been out teaching for two weeks; or taxis when drivers do not give receipts or, the purchase of street food where no receipts are available. These regulations have been developed for UK situations where persons travel to various meetings or conferences and are not expected to stay more than a couple of days.

When on teaching or research trips abroad, you are expected to pay expenses out of your own pocket with the expectation of some reimbursement upon your return. This however, is at your own risk because of fluctuating foreign exchange interest rates. No consideration has been given to the granting of a per diem in advance of the expedition. It is expected that lecturers will be solvent and be able to accommodate, sometimes substantial outlays to support the University's work overseas.

If a personal credit card is used, then staff are responsible for any interest which may accrue as a result of the use of their card on University business.

No where in the Financial Regulations is there mention of provisions for the teaching of distance learning courses overseas or, worse yet, in developing countries where high tech systems have mostly not been implemented.

Distance education courses in developing countries frequently face difficulties because of the under-development of the infra-structure necessary to properly support such programmes. There have been instances where Course Directors have had to pay for equipment rental and photocopying from their personal funds because the financial regulations do not accommodate such transactions. Their systems are basically to deal with UK transactions and of course they have their preferred buyer and purchase order systems which may work well for the UK context but only hinder operations in developing countries. One has to be seriously interested in the professional advancement of teachers, if one has to continue performing as a Course Director in the Caribbean because one can often be found 'out-of-pocket'.

Staff from the region who are employed by the University to support distance learning students frequently find themselves 'out of pocket' because of unpaid expenses and salaries that can take up to three months to arrive from the time when a claim has been submitted. It is almost as if the distance learning courses and the central financial administration of the University are dancing to the beat of different drums.

Reflecting on the challenges, it would be fair to state that creativity and originality are in direct conflict with institutionalisation. Yet these challenges must be resolved and the boundaries of thinking about situations expanded if the University is to move forward into a new learning age. While some may be eager to pursue a meeting of the minds, others, who may be steeped in traditional methods of teaching and learning and traditional systems of managing academia, may resist any integration process at all costs. Negative attitudes and rigidity of mind are often the major institutional barriers to progress.

### *Networking*

Undoubtedly electronic networking is an important tool for distance education, but a proper people network is as equally important if one needs to get a new idea accepted and implemented. In every organisation there are the primary forces of power and politics at play.



Understanding where the various power bases are, and being able to establish adequate communication networks which incorporate these bases are often an integral step to implementing innovative ideas. Very often these are dependent on personal contacts and on who knows whom. One cannot under-estimate the importance of building supportive relationships.

Although there may be clear strategies for implementing innovations, educational change is socially complex and is often at the mercy of organizational culture. What is clear is that there must have been some shared vision for distance education programmes in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield because they now account for the majority of School's teaching programme.

Shale (1985: 11) suggests that it is important to understand the practices which are imbedded within traditional universities. For example, do they allow for change and innovation? Universities which specialise in distance and open learning usually have a different view of education. They may perceive it as fluid in nature easily packaged and transportable while traditional universities are regarded as institutions where there is due process, academic staff, and research. In education, what really matters is whether the education that that is being delivered can be rated

internationally as 'academically excellent'. I believe that courses run at a distance can be just as personally rewarding and can achieve comparable academic excellence as is the case with courses run via the traditional setting. What is crucial is that the necessary structures are in place to support that type of learning.

From my research, I would conclude by recommending nine basic rules of engagement which should be actioned out, if courses in distance learning in small island developing states are to be professionally managed and academically successful:

- Recognising that technology is not a panacea for distance learning.
- Any equipment that is available for use must be reliable.
- There should be a high degree of sensitivity to cultural diversities when designing the course.
- The instructional design should be student-friendly and unambiguous.
- Distance learning instructors and tutors should be exposed to pedagogical training.
- A supportive management/administrative system is absolutely essential.
- Attention must be given to learner support services.

- A culture of research must be developed through the programme.
- There should be an on-going evaluation of 'quality' over the life of the programme.

### **Recognising that technology is not a panacea for distance learning.**

Too often, distance education is equated with state-of-the-art technology. This is not absolutely necessary. Clark (1983) claims that media are simply vehicles that are used to deliver instruction to the learner, much in the same way that a delivery van would be used to deliver vegetables to the supermarket. This transportation does not affect the nutritional value of the produce, it simply delivers it. Clark (1983) admits that though the new media are advertised as being operationally superior and possessing very attractive features, 50 years of research has shown that there are no real learning benefits to be derived from the installation of these. He suggests that because the technology has revolutionised industry, advertisers use that lead to lure potential consumers into believing that the machines can do wonders so that higher expectations are set up for what the technology can deliver.

While the new technological developments are exciting and innovative and appear to promise increased accessibility to information at cheaper

rates, sometimes this in itself is a fallacy. Hidden costs are built in everywhere. This new and improved technology may be entirely feasible for the developed countries where the economic power resides but, the fact is, an entire distance learning system need not be built mainly on the technology of tomorrow today. It would be entirely possible with some economic rationalisation to devise a simpler and more practical solution by using less complicated and readily available technology. One of the top priorities in the area of education for many developing countries is to ensure that the education that is provided is cost-effective and is meaningful for the needs of the country as a whole and not just those of the students enabled on the course.

I agree with Perraton (1993:3) when he suggests that 'distance education' is a misnomer. Like him I believe that

The most effective [distance learning teacher education] programmes include an element of face-to-face teaching as well as using correspondence and mass media. Open Universities, for example, encourage or require students to attend occasional evening sessions or short residential courses. Colleges of education teaching students at a distance sometimes include a one-term residential course as part of a programme of distance education.

The selection of a distance learning system should be the result of a careful planned process that evaluates the learning needs and objectives

of the people to be taught. This would include sharing ideas with key stakeholders in the area. For example, in St. Lucia discussions were held with the Teachers' Union as well as the Ministry of Education. The system should then be designed to best address those needs and objectives.

**Any equipment that is available for use must be reliable.**

When choosing equipment for distance learning projects, it is important to consider not only the performance of the item, but also its compatibility and inter-operability with the equipment in the other countries which are being served. Other considerations would be the upgrading capability of the equipment. This is a particular challenge with technology because at the moment it is evolving at such a rapid rate. Equipment become obsolete within as little time as six months. There must also be adequate technical support available as part of the package otherwise providers and students will be left with only useless hardware with faulty or no connections.

**There should be a high degree of sensitivity to cultural diversities when designing the course.**

Calder (1999) points out that there is some recognition of a range of challenges which are faced by those who are making attempts to design

and institute suitable open and distance education practice. It would appear that sufficient consideration has not been given to the important and deep-seated differences in culture and ethos which are present among various organisations, institutions of academia, countries. Added to this there are a myriad of training philosophies, teaching and learning values and traditions which abound within different cultural groups. It is a tragic flaw made by designers and administrators of distance learning courses to not sufficiently recognise these and in their short-sightedness attempt to transplant models of distance learning into one culture when it was clearly designed within and for another culture.

Robinson (1999:45) has recognised that distance educators need "...to understand more fully the cultural contexts of learners and to build better bridges into and out of cultures of learning." In these times when there is a proliferation of distance learning programmes world-wide, distance education should be more than just a symbol of globalisation like the ubiquitous 'cup of coffee', there should be some recognition and valuing of the very different demands of distance teaching from conventional face-to-face teaching. Calder (1999) argues that a lack of valuing can place unrealistic demands on the staff and the organisational systems of the provider institution.

**The instructional design should be student-friendly and unambiguous.**

It is important to ensure that the staff who are charged with the responsibility of designing and developing distance teaching materials should have some background in distance education. This should certainly help them to identify and articulate possible challenges which may arise as well as areas of support which the students as well as the teachers may require (Abdullah 1998). Calder (1999) argues that staff development in this area is essential.

The design of instruction for distance learning should pay special attention to the needs of the distant learners. Design issues will address the challenges of interaction with remote learners, effective visual graphic support materials, and comprehensive evaluation procedures.

Also at the onset of the course, course providers should initiate a frank discussion to set rules, guidelines, and standards. Once procedures have been negotiated they should be consistently upheld. This will ensure some measure of consistency in the students' learning experiences throughout the course.

**Distance learning instructors and tutors should be exposed to pedagogical training.**

Distance learning instructors must develop instructional strategies that ensure effective learning in the distance learning environment. While curriculum is important, the pedagogy that is used in distance education courses will determine whether the course will succeed or be an abysmal failure. It might be useful to take a holistic view and like John Dewey aim for a fusion between curriculum and pedagogy using pedagogy as a catalyst to engineer that fusion rather than simply as an instrument of theory. It is important to initiate and continue dialogue around the meaning and appropriateness of pedagogies for distance learning.

It might be instructive to consider the link between scholarship and pedagogy rather than treating them as being very different. In distance learning, if scholarship as research was perceived as 'learning' (Rawlins, 1996), then it would be clear that both scholarship and pedagogy would serve to inform and sustain each other. Like Rawlins (1996: 190), I agree that research is about "co-learning ... about others and with others" and would advocate that educators take the time to recognise and promote the reflexive relationship between teaching and research, because both must be considered as processes of 'co-learning'. Rawlins (1996: 190) explains that:



... closely related, is the learning of teaching, how we learn to teach by engaging in teaching with students and paying attention to their responses, their teachings about our teachings, their learning of our learning. In all these learnings of teaching, our students help us to learn to teach and hopefully teach to learn. Teaching is co-learning.

In this way teaching becomes a pathway that celebrates our potentialities and diminishes the fragmentation between theory and praxis.

**A supportive management / administrative system is absolutely essential.**

Distance Education projects are partnerships because they can only become successful if the various integrated components work together towards a common goal (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994:4). This partnership becomes even more significant when institutions are operating as dual-mode entities, because it is important that there is a supportive management / administrative system in place. Care must be taken that planning is not based upon the systems of the traditional programmes but should have an operational strategy of its own which could be linked to the traditional programmes but which must be shared among the various distance learning stakeholders.

It is strongly advised that there are sufficient linkages with the strategic and operational plan of the department or organisation as well as with

the finance department. Planning, should also take into consideration the political climate within which the institution has to operate both at home and abroad, and the availability, as well as limitations, of resources and funds (Rumble, 1986). Prices should be set so they are affordable for the target group. It makes no sense pricing yourself out of the market or conversely running a programme with heavy cost over-runs.

These precautions are necessary to ensure that the strategies which are to be put into place for programme development and promotion, instructional development, inter-institutional coordination, and resource allocation will be effective. There are also personnel issues, with clerical, technical, and educational support staff forming a vital link between the teaching team and the students.

### **Attention must be given to learner support services**

Learner support has been identified by Simpson (2000); Tait and Mills (1999); Rowntree (1992) Cookson (1990) as an important factor if one is endeavouring to measure the quality of the service provided to the learners. Learner support issues such as promotion and registration, academic advising, distribution of course materials, access to library resources, "office hours" with instructors/tutors, feedback on assignments, and onsite learning facilitators are important in the lives of

students and in retrospect they do make reference to these when referring to the levels of support that they received during the course.

If course materials are sent by mail, then it is incumbent on the provider institution to ensure they are dispatched at least three weeks before classes begin. To help students keep materials organised, consideration should be given to binding the syllabus, handouts, and other readings prior to distribution.

To function effectively, students must quickly become comfortable with the nature of teaching and learning at a distance. Efforts should be made to adapt the delivery system to best motivate and meet the needs of the students, in terms of both content and preferred learning styles.

Students could be assisted in becoming both familiar and comfortable with the mode of delivery and any technology which may be involved. Every effort should be made to make students aware of and comfortable with new patterns of communication which are to be used in the course (Holmberg, 1985). There should be continuous dialogue about the types of personal, organisational and technical and professional challenges which they should be aware of as students participating in a part-time distance learning course. There should also be a special focus given to

joint problem solving, as opposed to the ascribing of blame for the occasional challenge that may arise.

A person's history and cultural background are important because they help to position that person in the world. It would therefore be advisable to learn about students' backgrounds and experiences and also for lecturers to discuss their background and interests, because both are valid and equally important. It is also an appropriate way to 'break the ice'. If it is at all possible, some research should be done on the various communication styles which are associated with various cultural backgrounds. Sensitivities to these are important because humour is culturally specific and may not be perceived in the same light by all the participants. Students may also have different language skills, and that could lead to intricate levels of misunderstanding.

While everyone does not possess the discipline and high levels of motivation that distance learning requires, the support systems that are provided by the University of Sheffield for the Caribbean suit the culture, learning styles and the state of the development of the region. As a result students feel supported and make every effort to complete. This programme which began as a tiny course trying to meet the needs of its clients within their natural setting, continued to develop over the past 15

years with that basic philosophy of cultural respect and appreciation at the very heart of all the ensuing actions.

Students are required to take an active role in the course in which they are enrolled, by independently taking responsibility for their learning. However, as designers of programmes and instructors we also need to be aware of students' needs in meeting standard university deadlines despite the time lag often involved in rural mail delivery services.

While some things can be pointed out by students through the use of feedback from questionnaires or interviews or focus groups sessions, there are some things which can only be developed by the distance education administrators and tutors after reflecting on the various situations and encounters. After all, students can't miss what they have never had, nor can they expect things which they never envisaged were possible.

### **A culture of research must be developed through the programme**

In developing countries, distance education programmes with their related delivery systems are often called upon to support national educational priorities and the current political system. Besides, expecting that the programme will promote 'good' citizenship, sometimes the senior

civil servants will make specific requests of the course administrators to promote a certain thrust as in the case of St. Lucia when there was a specific request to develop the research skills of the students.

**There should be an on-going evaluation of 'quality' over the life of the programme.**

Education programmes should be designed to meet specified aims and objectives which become pivotal to the debate which focuses on the evaluation of 'quality'. Quality teaching is as relevant an issue in a distance learning programme as it is for teaching in a traditional classroom setting. As such, I would advocate that there should be a compulsory, systematic, on-going evaluation over the life of the programme in relation to quality. However, important factors to be included in any review are the cost and availability of resources. Rash judgements should be avoided because, it is also very easy to amplify the negative and down-play the positive elements as well as the inherent potential. With changing societies like those within the Caribbean, distance education educators and administrators need to become sensitive to the changes, reflect upon the implications of these and develop a response to them which is both considered and thoughtful.

In this discourse on the evaluation of 'quality' however, one has to consider the differences between the aims and objectives set out by the distance learning providers and those of the course participants. There are two scenarios which could play themselves out. One, in which the course, based on the measurement of outcomes according to its aims and objectives is successful but leaves the learners feeling dissatisfied or worse yet, disenfranchised. The other scenario, is where the learner may feel totally satisfied with the programme, because it meets their needs but fails when it is assessed by measuring the officially specified aims and objectives.

Because the student population of a course may be extremely diverse, students may participate in a course for a wide variety of reasons. One consideration for providers is whether, their aim is to satisfy all or most of their participants all of the time or some of the time. The second consideration revolves around about whether quality assurance expects providers to satisfy all learners all the time, most of the learners most of the time, or some of the learners some of the time. Now it become complicated if the aim is to satisfy most of the people most of the time because a few of the people will inevitably become disgruntled and cry 'a lack of equity'. Learners are not a homogeneous bunch and as such each will begin a programme with differing skills and abilities. The aim is to

provide everyone with a chance to arrive at the ultimate goal - the successful completion of the course. If this is to be done successfully, there should be a range of learning support which can be provided in addition to the prescribed curriculum that all students could access though they may be ultimately directed to those who have had negative experiences of learning or who may have fewer resources themselves. In the eyes of all, the provision needs to be seen as equitable.

The world-wide expansion of distance learning and global knowledge networks has opened up new opportunities and new challenges for Universities and well as learners. In all of this there is an important need for viable world-wide knowledge networks that challenge the market driven programmes of distance education that are mushrooming. The University of Sheffield, through its lecturers, local tutors, and students are well placed to use the experience garnered to theorise globalisation in ways that further open up alternative forms of working together and engaging with education in critical and progressive ways.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

From my perspective, the University does not appear to have undergone much change over the past fifteen years. I am sure that it will be forced to change if it expects to operate within a global market in the future.



Such is the nature of globalisation and marketisation. It is quite possible, however, that long standing traditions will prevail, and it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the University will be 'led by the nose' of marketisation in its future development. This however, will not diminish the fact that marketisation will have a dramatic impact on education provision in the future.

In spite of all the challenges, I would like to see the University's intervention in the Caribbean grow . I would like to see a development of the programme which focuses both on a cadre of leaders in educational thinking (through the PhD/EdD programmes) and upon continuing the work already started with a broad cross section of teachers. I also think the School of Education has to make a commitment to development education as one of its research priorities. In practice, this will only happen as a bottom-up initiative.

## CONCLUSION: A Return to the Questions

As I come to the end of this thesis, I cannot help but reflect on the elements which must come together to ensure success. The one that seems to resonate most with me is 'long term commitment', because it is that firm determination which is necessary for the achievement of sustainable results. In this final chapter, I want to draw this thesis to a conclusion by returning to the research questions and responding to them individually.

### *Question 1:*

*Is there a future for teacher professional development in the Caribbean using a distance learning mode?*

This research has shown that distance learning can address the need for the professional development of educators and opens up opportunities that are not available locally. However, care needs to be taken in establishing such programmes to ensure that the culture and professional experiences of the people are respected in the process of programme development. The provision of induction programmes and investigative research cannot be over-emphasised. One also has to acknowledge that learners who have been taught in the traditional face-to-face lecture mode would experience a

paradigm shift when they are first exposed to mixed modes of distance learning because this approach focuses on developing the self-directedness of learners. Students and local support staff alike must be supported through such 'new' approaches. There is also a need to develop effective support systems to guide and facilitate learning. This has been dealt with in detail in Chapters 8, 9 and 12.

*Question 2:*

*Can collaborative relationships based on distance education paradigms ever develop to ensure that as far as possible the host country accepts the challenge of 'ownership' of such programmes?*

Yes, but only if there is a radical philosophy of education to point the direction for future developments in Caribbean education. Breaking the 'culture of silence', we as educators, should be concerned with understanding and also with contesting the role of education through the notion of collaboration. Collaboration in this sense means much more than co-operation and sharing. It is about challenging our own histories and constructing our own futures. It had been argued in this thesis that the collaboration between the University of Sheffield and its partners in the region has provided a model for critical engagement with educational issues.

Distance learning is about crossing cultural, historic and economic borders. This can only be successfully accomplished by subjecting to critique the intersections between those colonial histories and post-colonial futures. It can't be simply about 'banking' knowledge from one setting into another.

***Question 3:***

***How appropriate is it to import distance learning models from developed Western Countries like the UK, especially when those countries were until quite recently colonial powers who built their nation on the slavery of others?***

The simple answer is - it isn't. However, it is clear from the evidence reviewed in this thesis that the intention was never to export a model from the UK or vice versa to import a UK model to the Caribbean. It was, and continues to be based on establishing relationships with other educators that celebrate their contribution to education within their indigenous settings. The significance of the early days lay in the exchange of ideas and was reflective of a people who were developing articulated responses to human rights and social justice for educators and for students with special educational needs.

Importation of educational ideas and values has not characterised the programme developed by the University of Sheffield. In both its major locations (Trinidad and St. Lucia) the programme has been introduced and developed through the initiatives of teachers in those countries and their organisations. Therefore, the programme cannot be understood as an importation. It is fundamentally concerned with alliances which are not inspired by the desire to cross geographical borders but rather to cross the borders of experience. They have not been founded upon the imperatives of marketisation. They are not about the institutional penetration of one (under-developed) country by another (developed) country. The history of this programme, as is evident from the research findings of this thesis, bears testimony to the fact that the Sheffield programme is NOT the University of Sheffield. As Clough (1995) wrote, "Is We course! Mistah Moderatah, Dis course, We!"

The collaboration challenges the identity and mission of the University every bit as much as it challenges the 'culture of silence' which has been imposed through centuries of colonial education. Universities in the UK face an uncertain future as both their role and their funding have come under scrutiny. Universities are both more constrained by the 'audit society' and empowered by their new entrepreneurial role in the market place of information and knowledge consumption. What has been

happening in the Caribbean, under the name of the University has not been driven entirely, or even principally, by the University's own mission and goals. Yet, changes in the traditional role of Universities in the UK have opened a 'window of opportunity' for radical educators who have believed in the importance of collaboration across distance as a means of mutual empowerment. A consequence of this has been the development of a practical philosophy which reconceptualises the 'political' character of the University, not as the producer of knowledge for consumption but as a partner in critical enquiry and transformative action.

***Question 4:***

***To what extent has the programme been able to develop a curriculum which is appropriate for the needs of educators in the social and cultural contexts of the Caribbean?***

This has been achieved to some extent but it remains an on-going challenge. The curriculum is not a static thing to be applied; it is dynamic and is created through engagements across borders, intellectual as well as geographical, critical as well as experiential. Examples of this process have been highlighted in this research. For instance, from the earliest days of the work with special educators in Trinidad and Tobago the curriculum was developed in collaboration with 'The Association of

Special Education in Trinidad and Tobago' around needs and concerns of teachers in that country. The work of the St Lucia Masters students in writing a history of education in that island as part of the methodology of their own curriculum is now feeding into the substantive elements of the educational studies curriculum.

Similarly the research work that has been undertaken in collaboration with the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College on the regional Education Reform Strategy has provided a basis for curriculum development around the themes which include 'education for all', 'national, regional and international policy formation', and, 'special and inclusive education'. These innovations have been important not just because they have taken place in the Caribbean but rather because the cross cultural debates that are necessitated by this type of programme have also challenged traditional notions of curriculum development as tied into models of the transmission of existing knowledge.

***Question 5:***

*In what ways has the programme through its pedagogy been able to engage with the needs of the educators in the social and cultural contexts of the Caribbean?*

Curriculum innovation cannot be separated from innovation in respect of pedagogy. The pedagogical challenge is not simply in interpreting pedagogy as something that is about the technicalities of 'good' teaching and learning. It is more of a political concept. It is about praxis, and conscientization. It is about breaking through that culture of silence into a culture that promotes open and honest dialogue which respects the personhood of the other. Pedagogy is political because the historical context in which teaching and learning takes place is burdened with multiple understandings of colonialism in the Caribbean. Understandably, there are particular connotations of that heritage for post-colonial relations between developed and developing countries.

I think that in a region such as the Caribbean, pedagogy needs to be interpreted and developed within a political context. Only then can there be recognition of pedagogy as a political concept. For the most part, this aspect of pedagogy is not addressed in the pedagogical literature of distance learning. Yet, if the countries and the education system are to move forward, it must be addressed. The University of Sheffield's



programmes in the Caribbean have been making inroads towards this end. Two such examples of such engagement are through the Social Histories project in St. Lucia and the School Teachers and Action Research (STAR) project in Trinidad. Both use innovative approaches to deal with the historical issues, empowering teachers and positioning practical research at the centre of their educational practice. In the process, they are constructing their own education through their own practice. They are in fact creating education through research and that is pedagogically empowering. This approach moves away from notions of transmission teaching which intrinsically is a pedagogy of denial of voice. It cannot be anything else but oppression in that context because it stifles expression.

At the moment, there are limited opportunities for pedagogical critique within the region and there is a limited appreciation of the subtle and fragile relationship between curriculum and pedagogy. The curriculum may change but unless the pedagogy changes with it, there will be NO change. The thrust needs to be focused on further developing a pedagogy of participative critique where people construct their own identities and frame their own futures.

*Question 6:*

*How effective are the programmes of distance education implemented by the University of Sheffield in the Caribbean?*

The concept of effectiveness cannot be judged simply at face value. Effectiveness is itself a political term which is value laden and can only be understood in terms of outcomes that are valued. The issue is, whose values are we talking about?

Retrospectively, one can say that it has been effective based on the feedback from students. It continues to be effective because the programme continues to recruit and develop. There is a demand for it; and, it has also been effective because it has survived against the odds, the intricacies of which have been explained in Chapters 3 and 4. The University of Sheffield, together with the Local tutorial and administrative staff, are providing opportunities to educators which are positive at many levels. The courses are economical, promotes sound educational practice and are geographically accessible. The courses have provided people with tools for self-empowerment and a forum for active debates and engagement with current issues pertinent to the Caribbean identity within the world arena.

### *Final statements*

The commitment of the university to distance education in the Caribbean provides a context within which different individuals (in both the UK and in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere in the Caribbean) have been able to engage with educational development in their own different ways. It is difficult to say whether this has led to the needs of teachers being addressed. But I would argue that these needs do not exist in isolation from the programme. In one sense, if the test is that of whether or not the programmes recruit; yes they do, so there is a demand. But the question remains 'A demand for what?' Teachers will have a view of this when they join the programme: professional development; promotion opportunities; salary increments; personal learning; better, more effective ways of engaging with and supporting the learning of pupils in their charge; and so on. In addition to all of the above, and equally important, however, is their exposure to, and participation in, radical thinking about the role, purposes and future of education in the region.

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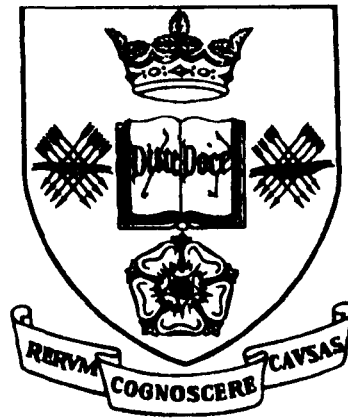
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# **COURSE GUIDE**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION  
Educational Studies**

**St Lucia**

**1999- 2001**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

**Distance Learning  
Programme**

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
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WEST INDIES

## **- SECTION ONE -**

### **Introduction to the Course Guide**

The purpose of the Course Guide is to provide information about the general nature of the course, the procedures that you and we shall follow, and the different stages of your study. We have tried to include all that is relevant, but if you believe we have left something useful out, please let us know!

The Certificate/Diploma/MEd course for which you have registered is an advanced qualification in education. It is intended for teachers and others concerned with education who have already acquired an initial qualification and some teaching experience. The Course goes beyond the initial stage of training in two ways. First, it aims to provide further and more detailed analyses of teaching and learning in order to advance your understanding of the job you do. Secondly, it seeks, not only to influence your thinking, but also to influence your behaviour, to make you a more effective worker within the field of education. Now, these aims have determined the ways in which the Course has been developed, particularly in the manner in which the various Modules have been written and the forms of work and assessment designed. The Modules and supplementary reading will provide you with much detailed information and it is necessary that you complete the required reading and, of course, understand what you read. But our major priority is not to provide you with information that can be simply repeated. We want you to relate that information to your own practice. This is why throughout the Course there are opportunities for you to consider the relevance of what you have just read to your own situation. Sometimes, these opportunities will consist of your thinking and making brief notes on your own practice; at other times we ask you to make some observations and record them, and occasionally you are asked to carry out a small-scale study. Finally, you will complete your study for the MEd degree by submitting a research-based dissertation. You will receive detailed guidance for this.

We hope that this course will help you to think independently about education, to develop your abilities to share ideas with colleagues and work more effectively with them, and to evaluate what you do. We are very much aware that to help you succeed in these aims, you must receive clear guidance. You must be sure about what is expected of you and gain adequate feedback after completion of your assignments. This Course Guide is designed to show what resources you can rely upon during your study and how we are to maintain good communications with each other. You should read it carefully and keep it in a safe place as a source of reference throughout the Course.

**- SECTION TWO -**  
**The Nature of the Certificate/Diploma/MEd Programme**

**The Certificate/  
Diploma/MEd  
qualification**

The qualification you receive upon successful completion of the work of the Course will be identical to that gained by students studying at Sheffield. There will be no additional specification on the Degree Certificate to distinguish it from other Certificate/Diploma/MEd qualifications gained at this University. The Certificate is awarded to those students who satisfactorily complete assignments for 2 taught modules. The Diploma is awarded to those students who satisfactorily complete assignments for the 4 taught modules but who do not wish to continue with the dissertation. Students who satisfactorily complete both the taught and dissertation elements of the course will be awarded a Master's degree.

**A Modular  
Course**

The Course is modular in nature. Candidates for the Certificate study 2 modules ("Foundations of Educational Studies" and "Methods of Educational Enquiry"). Students who continue on to the Diploma will take a further two modules from a range of options. Masters students will then complete a dissertation study. Further details about the modules are given in Section 6 and guidance for the dissertation in Section 8.

**Extension of  
Study**

The Course is designed in such a way that the Certificate will be completed in one year and the Diploma/Masters in two years. In special circumstances, the Course Regulations allow you to take longer than 2 years to complete the Course. This is primarily intended for candidates who, through unforeseen circumstances, such as illness, are unable to finish all their work by the set times. An extension of one year is possible if agreed by the Course Director. Any further period of extension would be dependent upon a special case being made to the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Sheffield.

### - SECTION THREE - Forms of Study

#### **Academic Plan and Course Materials**

Included in this Course Guide is an Academic Plan, which illustrates the programme for the course together with approximate dates for submission of work (these will be given in detail at the first summer school). You will also receive the Modules themselves. These Module packs are the backbone of the Course, presenting reviews of literature and considering the issues that arise. In addition you will receive a folder of readings, and key textbooks. However you will be expected to read widely beyond the core materials provided by the University and you will be expected to make full use of the library facilities available to you in St Lucia.

#### **Hours of Study**

You should, probably, aim to study for 6 to 8 hours a week, although, as people differ in the time they need to assimilate information, this can only be an approximation. This study time includes reading your unit and supplementary materials and making any notes.

#### **Tutorials and Study Schools**

Throughout your period of study there will be regular tutorials and study schools. The purpose of these tutorials, led by your local tutor, is to clarify and explain further, when necessary, the ideas associated with the Units, to discuss as a group your different experiences, and to prepare for the assignments which will count as the assessment for the Modules. When you are working on your dissertation you will be guided both by your local tutor and a Sheffield University tutor.

There will be two study schools in each year of the course. The first school is held over one week in July during the school holidays. The second will take place in January and will be held over two evenings and a weekend. These schools are to be regarded as extension of your tutorials. They will provide direct contact with Sheffield staff:

- to explain and further clarify the work contained in the Modules
- to discuss key issues and share experiences
- to engage in exercises which expand upon the work of the Course
- to provide help and guidance with assignments and the Dissertation
- to provide feedback on work submitted
- to raise any matters, administrative or academic, relating to your successful completion of the Course.

**- SECTION FOUR -**  
**Assessment**

**Course  
Philosophy**

Professional development programmes in the UK have moved away from exclusive reliance upon traditional examinations, and along with other prestigious UK courses at universities such as Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, East Anglia, Exeter, Hull, Liverpool, Nottingham, Southampton and Sussex, assessment is largely through course work and research project.

This is because:

- a** traditional examinations alone do not assist the development of the skills which the courses aim to foster. Our Course, in particular, aims to develop skills of analysis and investigation and to change the behaviour of course members at their place of work. Repetition of acquired information in any context of a written examination does not assist these aims and, indeed, may contradict them. Moreover, our course philosophy entails the objective of developing problem-solving skills in learners; assessment by course and project work is compatible with this objective. In short, you will learn more of lasting value if your assessment is made part of your learning;
- b** the Course aims to build upon your experience and knowledge. We assume that you should share this with us and your colleagues. We seek to make explicit this process of learning together;
- c** in general the Course aims at developing the critical and investigative skills necessary for research and the understanding of research;
- d** you will receive early feedback about your performance and you will not have to wait for 2 years to find out how successful you are going to be!  
This form of assessment does not present an easy option. Your work will be carefully graded. You are permitted to fail one assignment on first submission; you may repeat this, after receiving guidance, and re-submit it.

**Assignments**

There is an assignment for each Module. Each assignment should normally be between 5000 and 6000 words in length, and, preferably, typed or word-processed.

**Presentation**

In writing your assignment, it is important to have a clear objective in mind, state this at the beginning of your report,



and after consideration of it, return to it explicitly as a conclusion. This may seem obvious to you, but you would be surprised at the number of essays which appear to have no definite purpose and, therefore, come to no clear conclusion! A piece of writing extending to 6000 words will require careful organisation. Think about the general framework before you start to write, and use sub-headings to identify the different sections.

For those students proceeding to the Masters, in addition to the 4 assignments, you will be assessed through your writing-up of an account of an investigation. This will be approximately 20,000 words in length. This project is also known as a dissertation or thesis. The choice of area of investigation is yours; you will be asked at the end of your First Year to think about the subject of your project, and you will then be able to discuss this further with your local tutor and Sheffield staff. Further details are given in Section 8.

## **References**

All the sources (journal papers, books etc) that you refer to in the text should be listed at the end of the assignment. If you cite or quote references from any source you should provide the reader with sufficient information to locate it and check it out. List references alphabetically by author's name, followed by year of publication in parentheses. Thus, if you make use of Smith's work without directly quoting from the work, you should write "Smith (1985) has argued that . . . ." If you quote directly what Smith has said then at the end of the quotation you should put (Smith, 1985, p.13). This system of referencing is known as the *Harvard System*, and full details of it are contained in Section 7.

## **Grading of Assignments**

You will receive detailed comments on your assignments which will also be graded on the University's 16 point scale. Grades are given on a scale from Eight (bare pass) to Sixteen. This is a common scale for all postgraduate taught courses at the University of Sheffield. Grade criteria descriptions can be found in Appendix I and will be discussed at the first Study School.

The purpose of our grading your assignments is to give you feedback on the general level of your work. Of course, you will also receive detailed comments upon your assignments. The University does not issue any transcript of grades obtained during a course in addition to the degree/diploma certificate; however, should you wish to

receive a transcript of modules studied and grades obtained, the Department of Educational Studies will provide one for you.

Allocation of grades is the responsibility of the University of Sheffield. If you believe that an assignment has been unfairly graded, you can ask (through the Course Director) for the opinions of a further reader. The judgement of that reader will be final, subject only to the validation of the Board of Examiners.

**Plagiarism**

If you 'plagiarise' you take on the writing of someone else and present it as your own. Such 'copying' is not as dishonest as it sounds and many of you, understandably, will be tempted to do this. You may read something and think you could not explain it or write about it in such an effective way. You may be right! However, remember why you are writing. Education demands the application of theories and ideas in relation to your own individual work contexts. What you do need to do is to show that you have grasped the ideas of different authors and can relate them to your own context.

**- SECTION FIVE -  
Communications and Procedures**

**Point of Contact**

If there are any questions or problems associated with the arrangements for your course of study the Course Director, Dr Derrick Armstrong, is your point of contact.

**Tutors**

You will have a Local Tutor, who will conduct tutorials, comment upon your assignments, and assist at the summer schools. The local tutors are an important link. They are all experienced educators and many of them former MEd students who have recently completed the Sheffield degree. In addition you will have a Sheffield University tutor, who will mark your work and be available for advice. Your Dissertation Supervisor will be identified once you have decided the area of investigation (See section 8).

**Academic Plan**

At the beginning of the course we will give you an academic plan which will include such matters as timetable, tutorial dates and details of study schools.

**Copies of Work**

You will send two copies of your assignments to the Distance Learning Unit at the School of Education, University of Sheffield for comments and marking. We will return one copy to you along with detailed comments. The other will be retained by ourselves. Two copies of your Dissertation should, similarly, be

submitted by the due date to Sheffield.

**Board of Examiners**

When your Dissertation has been assessed, it is considered along with all your assignments at a Board of Examiners, consisting of all University of Sheffield staff involved with the Course, and an External Examiner. This Board makes recommendations to the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences. You will be notified of your results by post as early as possible.

**If you have difficulties**

The School of Education and the Examiners are well aware that some course members may have serious problems during their study which make it difficult or even impossible for them to satisfy the demands of the course. A sympathetic view is invariably taken of genuine difficulties but it is most important that these are brought to the attention of the Director and your tutors at the earliest possible stage. Very often ways can be found to ease difficulties.

**Graduation**

On successful completion of the Certificate, Diploma or MEd course, you will be given the opportunity to attend a Degree Congregation ceremony in Sheffield, if you so wish. However, bearing in mind the distance and costs involved, you may opt not to attend. The University may organise a function in the Caribbean for such graduates.

## - SECTION SIX -

### Modules and Module Outlines

#### **Module Outlines**

The Certificate/Diploma/MEd course is primarily designed for teachers and others involved in the education service. It provides opportunities for course members to reflect on their practice as educators and to examine issues relating to the process of teaching and learning. Specialised options are available to enable course members to pursue their own particular interests and concerns.

#### **Foundations of Educational Studies**

This Module provides an introduction to recent research on teaching, learning and the curriculum. It draws on a range of perspectives from Sociology, Psychology and Philosophy to provide a useful platform for further study. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their current understandings of teaching and learning processes, undertake practical investigations and engage critically with the literature

#### **Methods of Educational Enquiry**

This module will introduce students to principles and techniques of practical educational research and will provide guidance on planning and carrying out small projects in students' own institutions and organisations. Different styles of research are discussed and the strengths and weaknesses of each are considered. Particular attention is paid to the importance of planning projects, keeping records, making notes, analysing information and reporting results. Practice is given in the design and use of data collecting instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, diaries and observation schedules. This is an essentially practical module. The expectation is that on successful completion of the module, students will be in a position to plan, carry out and report on individually-devised projects which, it is hoped, will be of practical use in their work.

**Specialist Options** (two options to be taken from the following list of Modules which may be available depending on student interest)

#### **Child Development and Education**

The study of child development has many significant implications for teaching. This Module examines recent advances in our understanding of intellectual and social-personal development in order to consider their relevance to educational practice. Cognitive, moral and social development, and their interaction, provides the focus for the whole Module.

**Module  
Outlines****Design and Development of the Curriculum**

This Module reviews different perspectives on the meaning of 'curriculum' and traces major areas of debate concerning how and what children should be taught. An action research framework is adopted to examine the process of curriculum design and development and to encourage students to carry out a small-scale investigation in their own institutions.

**Early Education**

The Early Education Module considers the education of young children from birth to the early years in school. Students may choose the focus of their studies from a number of contemporary issues including child development; the history of childhood; early intervention studies; curriculum; children's learning; assessment of children's learning; parental roles in children's learning special educational needs; equality of opportunity and children's rights. Chosen topics will be investigated through supported small-scale research studies using a variety of research methods.

**Schools, Teachers, Management and Change**

The aim of this Module is to provide an understanding of the process of educational development and change and of the role of teachers in managing this process. In order to pursue this aim it focuses on a range of topics. These will include:

- Educational change and social change
- Schools as agents of educational change
- Teaching as a profession
- The management of educational change
- Action research and educational change

**Literacy, Learning and Education**

This Module looks at how children and also adults develop and use the skills of reading and writing and examines the social contexts of learning. Consideration is given to the place given to developing literacy in the school curriculum and traces the major areas of debate concerning how and what should be taught. In doing so it also examines the wider social, political and cultural frameworks in which literacy can be analysed.

**Information Technology in Education**

This Module considers the impact of IT on classroom practice. A consideration of how various forms of software and hardware can be integrated into the curriculum and the implications they have for styles of teaching and learning will be made. This Module begins from a theoretical base but moves quickly to a practical approach involving teachers in using and exploring appropriate applications of IT within their own setting.

**Module  
Outlines****The Adult Learner**

This Module looks at the general conditions for effective learning for people after school age, with particular reference to how their interests and ways of learning are heavily influenced by their family groups, work groups and personal histories. In addition, we will discuss how learning occurs naturally for adults, their aims and expectations when they come to particular colleges as adults to learn, and the relationships between the courses they take and their vocational and personal development.

The Module also considers the adult learner through the eyes of the adult educator, asking how adults are best taught and assessed, what are the best principles of curriculum design for adults, and how college-based learning can transfer to the outside world.

**Guidance and Counselling in Education**

This module looks at the stresses on children and families as the young people grow up in the new century, and at the ways parents, schools and the wider community can provide a stable supportive world for them. It will also consider the special counselling and guidance methods sometimes necessary when young people develop minor mental health problems or come into conflict with adult society. Most parents and teachers intuitively understand much of what young people need, and the module will carefully consider the usual family and school situations and the ways they may need to change to help young people grow into responsible and effective adults.

**Comparative Perspectives on Special & Inclusive Education**

Too often our conception of, and policies relating to, special education are based on narrow, ethnocentric assumptions. This module will use specific case studies of other societies in order to raise questions and seriously examine our existing values, policies and practices.

**Education of Employment**

This Module will explore the nature, role and purpose of education for employment. At a policy level, the relationship between education and economy will be analysed. In the light of rapid changes in work practices and the impact of economic globalization the Module will consider how an education curriculum, appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, might be constructed.

**Tutorial staff will provide guidance on the selection of a suitable topic for investigation and advise throughout the execution of the project.**

**- SECTION EIGHT -  
The Dissertation**

The Dissertation is a major part of the MEd and for students is often the most challenging and rewarding part of the course. A very wide variety of study is possible, including empirical studies involving one or more of a range of research methodologies, theoretical reviews, and historical, literary or philosophical investigations. Almost always studies have direct relevance to students' professional concerns, and in many cases a topic is chosen which is also a concern of the course member's own institution or employing authority.

**Choice of  
Topic**

Because we believe that it is important that the topic you choose is one that motivates you, we ask you to play a major role in the selection of the topic of the project. Of course, you will be provided with assistance in your tutorials, study schools, and through correspondence with your Sheffield tutor. You should remember that the completed work will be housed in the University Library and you should aim, therefore, at the production of a piece of work that educationalists will find interesting and relevant.

**Appointment  
of  
Supervisors**

Once you have indicated a possible area (or areas) of study, you will be given assistance in the identification of supervisors. The procedure for this will be as follows. The Director of the MEd will take overall responsibility for the identification of appropriate supervisors and will set aside time as study schools for the discussion of dissertations with individual course members. You will be asked to write a 400 word outline of your proposal and, once this has been approved, the Director of the MEd Programme will arrange for your supervisors, the local tutor and one Sheffield tutor, to be appointed. You will be informed of their names.

**Relations  
with  
authorities  
and  
colleagues**

In all cases where the dissertation is based upon investigation within an institution (school, college, etc), permission must be obtained from the appropriate authority. It is your responsibility to seek that permission, although, when necessary, the Director of the MEd Programme will write in support of your study. No institution or person should be named; fictitious names may sometimes be a convenient way of

preserving anonymity. Sometimes those involved in a project, eg the employing authority, colleagues may ask to see a copy of the dissertation. You should consider this request sympathetically, especially if feedback of your work can be of value to those concerned. Sometimes it is sufficient to make an abstract; on other occasions more is needed.

- Submission** Completed dissertations must be typed and should be submitted by the end of the Second Year. Your Academic Plan will provide the exact submission date. The Board of Examiners meets when all dissertations have been assessed. This means that if there should be some delay in submission of your dissertation, it might miss the relevant meetings of the Board and Faculty and the award of your degree will be delayed.
- Presentation** Dissertations are intended to be documents available for study through the University Library. Therefore a high standard of presentation is required.

**- SECTION NINE -  
Academic Plan**

**YEAR ONE**

**First Intensive Study School (July 1999)**

Foundations of Educational Studies

ASSIGNMENT ONE Submission 20 November 1999

**Second Intensive Study School (January 2000)**

Methods of Educational Enquiry

**Local Tutorials** January - May

ASSIGNMENT TWO - Submission 20 May 2000

**YEAR TWO**

**Third Intensive Study School (July 2000)**

Specialist Option (1)

Dissertation

ASSIGNMENT THREE - Submission 18 November 2000

**Fourth Intensive Study School (January 2001)**

Specialist Option (2)

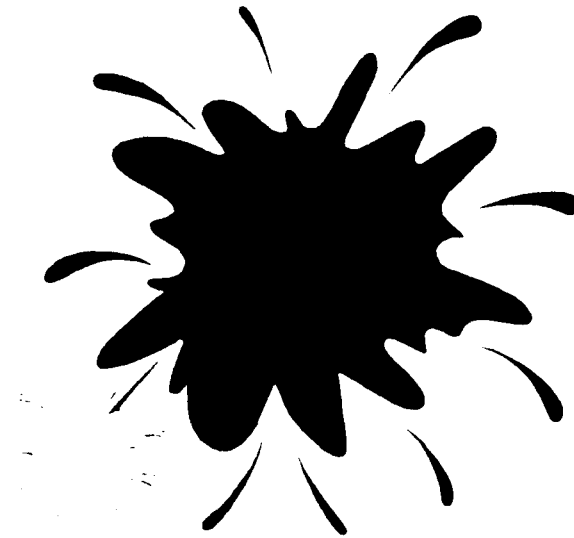
Dissertation

ASSIGNMENT FOUR - Submission 19 May 2001

Dissertation Submission - 31 August 2001



# Research Information Brochure



RESEARCH PROJECT:

**Distance Education and Teacher  
Professional Development in the Caribbean -  
A Case Study of Programme Development**

## Purpose of the Study:

Among other things the research will seek to:

- ★ trace and document the development of events which led to the University of Sheffield's collaborative effort with the Teachers' Union of Trinidad and Tobago to provide courses in Teacher Professional Development in Trinidad and Tobago.

It will also attempt to answer the following questions:

- ★ Is there a future for teacher professional development in the Caribbean using a distance learning mode?
- ★ Can collaborative relationships based on distance education paradigms ever develop to ensure that the host country accepts the challenge of ownership of such programmes?
- ★ What conditions would need to be met for Caribbean educators to provide programmes of their own?
- ★ Is there a need for a radical philosophy of education to point the direction for future developments in Caribbean education?
- ★ How does one balance the influences of globalisation with the need for a radical philosophy?

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The project will adopt a case-study methodology and will review the introduction and increased demand for teacher professional development in the Caribbean through distance education programmes offered by the University of Sheffield.

An eclectic case-study approach to data collection will be adopted to support the researcher in identifying the interactivity of the various processes at work and to identify possible projections for the future.

The questionnaires as well as the interviews are specifically designed to obtain an insight into:

- ✓ the experiences of:
  - ✱ distance learners.
  - ✱ past and present support staff in the UK and the Caribbean.
  - ✱ past and present administrators in the UK and the Caribbean;
- ✓ their expectations of the programme;
- ✓ the extent to which their expectations have been or are being met; and
- ✓ their projections for the future.

## ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS

1. Potential participants can choose whether or not they want to become involved in the research, having been given information on the methods and likely uses of the research.
2. Participants can withdraw at any time and for any reason.
3. The sources of information will remain confidential where informants identify disclosure as a concern following discussions with the researcher.
4. Those who consent to being interviewed will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts to determine the level of accuracy before they are used as part of the data.
5. Permission for use of the information will be sought from the participants.
6. Names of persons who respond via questionnaires or interviews will not be identified in the final thesis unless their informed consent has been given.

## Acknowledgement

I wish to thank all those who have been involved in this project. It is only through your participation and support that any progress can be made towards the continued development of adequate professional development programmes in the Caribbean.

*Ann Cheryl Namsee*

November, 99

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD  
M.Ed. Educational Studies (St. Lucia) 1999 - 2001

SECTION A - PERSONAL DATA

- 1. Gender a. Male ( ) b. Female ( )
- 2. Age
  - a. 18 - 24 ( ) b. 25 - 30 ( ) c. 30 - 35 ( )
  - d. 36 - 40 ( ) e. 40 - 45 ( ) f. 46 - 50 ( )
  - g. 51 - 55 ( ) h. 56 - 60 ( ) i. 61 - 65 ( )
  - j. Other .....( )
- 3. Why did you enrol on the programme? (Tick as many as are applicable)
  - a. to get a promotion ( ) b. to gain qualifications ( )
  - c. to gain more professional knowledge ( ) d. to meet other people ( )
  - e. other .....

4. What are your expectations of the programme?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

SECTION B - STUDY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- 5. Did you encounter any significant problems with the programme during the study school?
  - a. Yes ( ) b. No ( ) c. Don't know ( )
- 6. If 'Yes', please explain further:  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. On a scale of '1' to '5' with '5' being EXCELLENT and '1' being POOR, please rate the following aspects of the programme:

**Study School**

Introduced principal themes	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided a forum for discussion of identified issues	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided support for assignment writing	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided you with an adequate opportunity to re-define or identify your own learning objectives	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided you with a participative learning opportunity	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided sufficient insight/information to allow you to pursue the subject on your own	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
The study school was well organised - things went smoothly	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

**Course Style and Organisation**

I received full information on course aims, and assessment procedures at the onset of the course	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
I received Course Units and other reading material at the beginning of the programme	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Lecturers and other staff seemed to work as a team	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

8. Is there a Module that you wanted to do but was not offered?  
 a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )

9. Please explain further:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

10. Was the study school of the academic standard that you expected?  
 a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )  
 d. Don't know ( )

11. Did the study school adequately reflect the context of St. Lucia?  
 a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )

12. Did the study school adequately reflect the context of the Caribbean?  
a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )

**LIBRARIES**

13. Will you have access to a library while you are on the programme?  
a. Yes ( )    b. No ( )    c. Don't know ( )

14. If 'yes', which library will you use?  
a. .... b. ....  
c. .... d. ....  
e. .... f. ....

15. Do you envisage having any difficulties accessing libraries?  
a. Regularly ( )    b. Occasionally ( )    c. Seldom ( )  
d. Never ( )

16. Please explain further:  
.....  
.....  
.....

17. What other strategies will you adopt in order to access learning materials?  
.....  
.....  
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.....

**ASSIGNMENTS**

18. How appropriate are the assignments to the work that you are engaged in?  
a. Very appropriate ( )    b. Appropriate ( )  
c. Not very appropriate ( )    d. Don't know ( )

19. Is there a relationship between the Course Material and your first assignment?  
a. Yes ( )    b. No ( )    c. Don't know ( )

20. Will the information provided in the Course Material be helpful in answering your first assignment?  
a. Very helpful ( )    b. Helpful ( )    c. Not very helpful ( )d.  
Don't know ( )

**SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

21. Do you feel that the Teachers' Union has been supportive to the students in the Programme?

- a. Very supportive ( )
- b. Supportive ( )
- c. Not very supportive ( )
- d. Not supportive at all ( )

22. If the answer to the above was 'a', 'b' or 'c', in what ways has the Teachers' Union been supportive towards the students in the Programme?

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23. Do you feel that the Ministry of Education has been supportive of the students in the Programme?

- a. Very supportive ( )
- b. Supportive ( )
- c. Not very supportive ( )
- d. Not supportive at all ( )

24. If the answer to the above was 'a', 'b' or 'c', in what ways has the Ministry of Education been supportive of the students in the Programme?

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**FUTURE PROJECTIONS**

25. Do you feel that the programmes now offered by the University of Sheffield have a role to play in the future of teacher professional development in St. Lucia?

- a. Yes ( )
- b. No ( )
- c. Don't know ( )
- d. Too early to say ( )

26. Please explain further:

.....  
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.....

27. Do you feel that the programmes now offered by the University of Sheffield have a role to play in the future of teacher professional development in the Caribbean?

- a. Yes ( )    b. No ( )    c. Don't know ( )  
d. Too early to say ( )

28. Please explain further:

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29. Are there any recommendations that you would like to make for the future development and management of the course?

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30. Is there any other issue which was not covered in this questionnaire but you feel that it is important to share?

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*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. It is greatly appreciated.*

*Ann Cheryl Namsoo (July, 99)*



**UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**  
**Certificate/Diploma/Masters in Educational Studies**  
**(St. Lucia) 1999 - 2001**  
**Evaluation - Methods of Educational Enquiry**

1. What were your expectations of the study school?  
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2. In what ways have those expectations been met?  
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4. Did you encounter any significant problems with the programme during the study school?  
a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )                      c. Don't know ( )
  
5. If 'Yes', please explain further:  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
6. Was the study school of the academic standard that you expected?  
a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )  
d. Don't know ( )
  
7. Did the study school adequately reflect the context of St. Lucia?  
a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )
  
8. Did the study school adequately reflect the context of the Caribbean?  
a. More than adequate ( )    b. Adequate ( )    c. Inadequate ( )

9. On a scale of '1' to '5' with '5' being EXCELLENT and '1' being POOR, please rate the following aspects of the Study School:

Introduced principal themes	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided a forum for discussion of identified issues	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided support for assignment writing	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided you with an adequate opportunity to re-define or identify your own learning objectives	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided you with a participative learning opportunity	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
Provided sufficient insight/information to allow you to pursue the subject on your own	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
The study school was well organised - things went smoothly	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
The study school was professionally relevant to you as a teacher/educator	[ 5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

10. How appropriate is the assignment to the work that you are engaged in ?  
 a. Very appropriate ( )      b. Appropriate ( )  
 c. Not very appropriate ( )  
 d. Don't know ( )

11. Is there a relationship between the books and material and your assignment?  
 a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )                      c. Don't know ( )

12. Will the information provided in the books and material be helpful in completing your first assignment?  
 a. Very helpful ( )      b. Helpful ( )      c. Not very helpful ( )  
 d. Don't know ( )

13. Any other comments?  
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 .....

*Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us.  
 Ann Cheryl Namsoo*

**01/11/200**

**UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**  
**Certificate/Diploma/Masters in Educational Studies (St. Lucia)**  
**1999 - 2001**  
**Evaluation - Specialist Options 2**

1. What were your expectations of the last study school?

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3. In what ways have those expectations been met?

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4. What option did you pursue during that study school?

- a. Education for Employment ( )      b. Management ( )  
c. Guidance & Counselling ( )

5. Did you encounter any significant problems with the programme during that study school?

- a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )                      c. Don't know ( )

6. If 'Yes', please explain further:

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6. Was the study school of the academic standard that you expected?  
 a. More than adequate ( ) b. Adequate ( ) c. Inadequate ( )  
 d. Don't know ( )
7. Did the study school adequately reflect the context of St. Lucia?  
 a. More than adequate ( ) b. Adequate ( ) c. Inadequate ( )  
 d. Don't know ( )
8. On a scale of '1' to '5' with '5' being EXCELLENT and '1' being POOR, please rate the following aspects of the Study School:
- |   |      |      |      |      |      |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| Introduced principal themes   | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided a forum for discussion of identified issues  | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided support for assignment writing   | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Supported you in the preparation of your dissertation outline                                   | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided you with practical suggestions/methods of planning your dissertation                   | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided you with an adequate opportunity to re-define or identify your own learning objectives | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided you with a participative learning opportunity  | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| Provided sufficient insight/information to allow you to pursue the subject on your own          | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| The study school was well organised - things went smoothly                                      | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
| The study school was professionally relevant to you as a teacher/educator                       | [ 5] | [ 4] | [ 3] | [ 2] | [ 1] |
9. How appropriate was the assignment to the work that you are engaged in?  
 a. Very appropriate ( ) b. Appropriate ( )  
 c. Not very appropriate ( ) d. Don't know ( )

10. Do you think that the information provided in the books and materials has been helpful in completing your fourth assignment?  
a. Very helpful ( )    b. Helpful ( )    c. Not very helpful ( )  
d. Don't know ( )

11. How useful has this course been to you?

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12. Please comment on the following:

a. effectiveness of the module tutorials done by Caribbean Tutors.

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b. effectiveness of the dissertation tutorials done by Caribbean Tutors.

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c. the available library services.

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**FUTURE PROJECTIONS**

13. Do you feel that the programmes now offered by the University of Sheffield have a role to play in the future of teacher professional development in St. Lucia?

- a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )                      c. Don't know ( )

14. Please explain further:

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15. Do you feel that the programmes now offered by the University of Sheffield have a role to play in the future of teacher professional development in the Caribbean?

- a. Yes ( )                      b. No ( )                      c. Don't know ( )

16. Please explain further:

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17. Are there any recommendations that you would like to make for the future development and management of the course?

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18. Is there any other issue which was not covered in this questionnaire but you feel that it is important to share?

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*Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us.*

Ann Cheryl Namsoo      24 April 2001

### UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Certificate/Diploma/Masters in Educational Studies  
(St. Lucia) 1999 – 2001

**Module 2: METHODS OF EDUCATIONAL ENQUIRY**

**PROJECT:** A Social History of Education in St Lucia – Life-Historical Perspectives

#### **Group Project:**

**Assignment Title:** Critically review your group research project and reflect upon the experience of the research process in which you engaged.  
(5,000 words)

#### ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with an opportunity to reflect upon the process of research as well as the issues and challenges that researchers face in designing, conducting, analysing and disseminating research. The group project (5,000 – 7,000 words) on which you have been working (which will not itself be assessed) is a real life experience of research. It is a prerequisite for this assignment because it constitutes the subject of your critical reflections. It is expected that the various projects will no doubt differ in some essential respects. However, the important concern here is the quality of your reflection on the process that was adopted. In this review you should evaluate your group project, reflecting critically upon:

- the teamwork involved in designing and conducting the research – the issues and challenges face by the group at different stages and how these were resolved.
- how you dealt with the issue of personal values. Critically reflect upon the ways in which these affected the research in both positive and negative ways.
- the aims and objectives of the project
- the research questions that your group arrived at and the rationale for this decision.



- the research methods used in the study - their strengths and limitations.
- ethical issues that arose during the project and how these were dealt with.
- the principles and methods of data analysis and how these were linked to your research questions and methods of data collection. Consider how effectively you used triangulation techniques within your research.
- your proposals for disseminating the research and its potential value for other educational stakeholders
- the outcomes of your project and upon the strengths and limitations of your analysis.
- the philosophical perspective underpinning the research (e.g. positivism, phenomenological, critical theory, etc) and what the implications of this perspective were for your research design and analysis.
- your role as a researcher. How did your own biography , personal experience and values influence your approach to the research and your interpretation of the data your group collected? In what ways has your involvement in this research project impact upon your professional practice as an educator?

**DEADLINES** - For assignment - as identified in your Course Booklet  
 For the group project - Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2000.