

Office of Education and Culture

Department of Human Development Education and Culture

**A REPORT ON ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN
SUB-REGION**

Understanding the Challenges to Promoting Democratic Ideals in Schools

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OVERVIEW

Theorists and researchers have acknowledged that education broadly and citizenship education more specifically have as their central purpose the preparation of students to participate as citizens in the wider society. For instance, Ravitch (2001) in her description of the approaches and philosophies of educational theorists acknowledges the centrality of the principle that education could be consciously employed to shape society. Similarly, Parker (2001) observes that the citizen identity must be nurtured as it does not suddenly emerge fully realized and that educators seek to steer it toward particular purposes that align with the norms and ideals of the overarching political community. Indeed, the debates throughout history about the purposes of education and about the desirable form and structure of the curriculum have been premised on the view that citizens can be prepared for the roles they will hold in society through the values and skills they are taught and exposed to during the process of schooling and citizenship education has been regarded as having this central aim.

This report seeks to examine the challenges schools and teachers face in promoting the democratic ideal in the Caribbean sub-region. The report is premised on two assumptions. The first is that in order to adequately prepare students to participate in democratic society, schools must promote the democratic experience.

The second main assumption underlying this report is the centrality of the role of the teacher in promoting the democratic ideal. Understanding the problems of education broadly can allow for deeper understanding of the challenges in promoting the democratic ideal. Accordingly, the consultations that informed this report adopted the approach of inquiring about educational challenges and issues generally and then seeking to relate those concerns to democratic principles and ideals.

The opening sections of the report provide the background or context for the focus on democratic citizenship education and describe in brief the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices. Included in these sections is a description of the objectives of the report and the sources of feedback for these consultations. The following two sections integrate analytic frameworks derived from literature with feedback from educators in the region. The themes explored by these two sections are 'Democracy and the Role of Education in Promoting the Democratic Ideal' and 'The Role of the Teacher.' The challenges to promoting democratic values and practices through education in the region described by these educators follow. These challenges are presented as eight main findings, including lack of training of a significant proportion of teachers and failure to integrate technology into teaching. The report closes with recommendations proposed by these educators to address the challenges described. These recommendations relate to strengthening the teaching profession, establishing the role of the teacher as professional and providing supports for the teachers in their efforts to adapt their practice.

BACKGROUND

[The Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices](#) (the “Inter-American Program”) was adopted by the Ministers of Education of Organization of American States (OAS) through CIDI/RME/RES. 12 (IV-O/05) at the IV Meeting of the Ministers of Education held in Scarborough, Trinidad and Tobago on August 11 and 12, 2005.¹ The significance of the Inter-American Program for the Caribbean region was underscored at a Retreat of Caribbean Ministers of Education in Jamaica in 2007.

The main objective of the Inter-American Program is to promote the development of a democratic culture through education by encouraging: (i) research and analysis; (ii) professional development and educational resources; and (iii) cooperation and information exchange among member states of the OAS. This report focuses on the second of these three components i.e. professional development and educational resources. Some of the activities and initiatives included under this component of the Inter-American Program have focused on providing teachers with the tools they require to make their classrooms democratic spaces and informing regional education policy in the area of democratic citizenship education. One example of such an activity is the Education for Democratic Citizenship in the Caribbean (EDCC) project. This three-year project, piloted from 2007 – 2010, sought to strengthen the capacity of classroom teachers in the English-speaking Caribbean to teach democratic values and practices in their classrooms. The project also aimed to inform the development of regional and national policy in the area of democratic citizenship education. **A video project highlighting stakeholders’ feedback on the project may be found at <http://vimeo.com/16900273>.**

The activities and initiatives undertaken as part of the professional development and educational resources component of the Inter-American Program have produced significant benefits including, promoting a community of practice among teachers within countries and across the region and helping teachers recognize the importance of more student-centered approaches to teaching. However, there have also been challenges. One of the most significant of these has been sustainability of these initiatives and activities. The following two² factors are particularly relevant in explaining the challenge of sustainability. The first is the difficulty of changing teaching practice. OAS/OEC’s experience illustrates that teachers often experience great challenge implementing new approaches to teaching. The teacher-centered nature of typical classrooms in the Caribbean sub-region poses a significant challenge to the open, student-centered approaches demanded by democratic citizenship education. The second related factor is the need for support systems to assist teachers in sustaining change in their teaching practice. Systemic change requires wider systems of support and acknowledgment that

¹ See <http://www.educadem.oas.org>

² There are of course other challenges, including lack of funding (at the local and national levels) to support educational reforms and in some instances, higher priorities overtake educational reform efforts. See the Final report for the EDCC project – [“The Effectiveness of the Education for Democratic Citizenship in the Caribbean Project”](#)- for a comprehensive discussion of findings and challenges.

teachers cannot effect change alone. The importance of addressing these two challenges is borne out in the responses of the educators interviewed for this report.

At this juncture, the OAS through the Office of Education and Culture (OAS/OEC) is seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges to educators' abilities to incorporate democratic values and practices in their teaching in the Caribbean sub-region. Deeper understanding of these issues will enable OEC to develop, in conjunction with stakeholders from the sub-region, professional development programs and educational resources that address key needs and concerns. These concerns are the focus of this report.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

This report presents feedback from stakeholders in the Caribbean sub-region on the challenges to promoting the democratic ideal through education in the region. This feedback will be used to inform:

- (i) **the agenda for the Inter-American Ministerial meeting to be held in Suriname in March 2012, and other policy forums; and**
- (ii) **professional development and education resources extended by OAS/OEC.**

It should be observed that the focus of this report is on describing challenges and troubling issues. Accordingly, the report should be read in this light without construing the findings as negative or pessimistic in their outlook on the role or work of teachers in the region. **All the educators interviewed for this report expressed understanding of the tireless efforts of many teachers across the region in their work to educate their students.**

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The data for this report was gathered through a round of consultations with ten teacher educators from seven countries across the Caribbean sub-region. The consultations took the form of in-depth interviews lasting between one and two hours long. Past efforts by OAS/OEC to ascertain stakeholder needs in the region utilized questionnaires which were completed on a voluntary basis. However, the use of in-depth interviews (as opposed to questionnaires) allowed for deep exploration of themes, issues or lines of inquiry that arose in real time.

Selection of participants was based on the desire for: (i) a mix of professional experience and employment of teacher educators (i.e. policy makers, teachers colleges, private consulting); (ii) geographic spread of participants across member states³; (iii) gender mix; and (iv) a balance of participants with historical involvement in the Inter-American Program and newcomers with no prior connection to the Program or its projects. The seven countries from which participants were drawn included Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and

³ The use of a qualitative approach and limited resources prevented participation from teacher educators across all member-states.

Trinidad and Tobago. The ten educators participating in these consultations offered a mix of regional and country perspectives based on their professional experience, having served between 16 and 56 years as educators and with experience as teacher educators ranging from 6 to 33 years. Their professional experience is varied as they are employed with Ministries of Education, teachers colleges, universities, regional multilateral organizations and as private consultants.

The consultations that informed this report were based on a semi-structured interview protocol (See Annex A). In preparing the questionnaire a broad approach was adopted as an entry point for the interview. Therefore, rather than relying on the technical term 'democratic citizenship' as an entry point for the interview, educators were first asked about challenges they perceive for education and teacher education in the region (e.g. What are the most pressing issues you perceive for education in your country/the region now and in the near future?). These concerns were later linked to the concepts of democracy and democratic citizenship (e.g. We talked earlier about challenges and issues for education in your country/the region. What are implications of those challenges and issues for your country as a democracy?). Interviews were recorded and the audio recordings were subsequently transcribed following which commonly occurring themes were identified. Development of the questionnaire was guided by:

- The function of the school and/or classroom as a microcosm of society
- The concept of the school and/or classroom as a democratic space – what that space might look like ideally and the challenges to achieving it
- The role of the teacher in promoting the democratic ideal and preparing students for their roles as active adult citizens in democratic society
- The role of teacher preparation and teacher professional development programs in achieving democratic outcomes, including but not limited to, enacting the classroom as a democratic space and preparing students for their roles in democratic society.
- The challenges and issues facing education in the Caribbean sub-region

DEMOCRACY AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL

In order for citizenship education to accomplish the purpose of preparing students to fill their role as adult citizens in a democracy, it must necessarily promote the democratic experience. The challenge that arises in this regard is that there exists no clear definition of democracy and hence of the 'democratic experience.' Therefore different conceptions of citizenship are reflective of the different theories of democracy (Myers, 2007). There is wide support among theorists and researchers for citizenship education to be reflective of more than the notion of representative democracy. Alsayed (2008) observes this when he proposes that emerging theory in civic education generally supports a notion of democracy that is broadly participatory and highly engaged. He contrasts this with forms of democratization that are "more representative and superficial, focusing on the mechanics of political choice than on fundamental change in political systems" (p. 78). Lund & Carr (2008) also argue that the democratic experience does, and must comprise more than a focus on electoral politics and that it should be concerned with *doing* democracy. And in a similar vein, Gutmann (2001: 50-51) appeals to the one of the central features of deliberative democracy when she proposes that education should not only

promote the development of capacities for criticism, rational argument and decision-making through logical thinking but that it should also promote “the capacity for deliberation to make hard choices in situations where habits and authorities do not supply clear and consistent guidance.”

There is no shortage of literature examining the relationship between education and democracy. Levinson (2008: ix) underscores the importance of education as a means to “achieve and consolidate and deepen democracy” noting that “only education can shape the values and cultures that turn governance into a more far-reaching and deeply rooted form of life.” Indeed, an educated citizenry has long been viewed as central to the development and propagation of a democratic society. Therefore, the role of education in impacting the development of the ‘democratic person’ and in turn shaping democratic society assumes great significance.

Academic scholars propose that democratic values and practices are not innate and that they must be consciously and purposefully passed on from one generation to the next (Gutmann, 2001; Held, 2006; Reich, 2002). Gutmann (2001) focuses much attention on the ways in which schools develop or fail to develop democratic character. She acknowledges the role of the family in preparing children to participate in democratic society by teaching them democratic virtues and fostering the development of character and moral reasoning. Schools, she proposes, play a role by building on this foundation provided by parents and the family and assuming shared responsibility together with churches, friendships and civic organizations for the education of children.

This broad view of democratic education as part of the curriculum and school environment has been expressed more specifically through approaches to schooling which address education for citizenship, including citizenship education, civics, and social studies. Anderson et al., (1997) note that citizenship education has long been regarded as one of the fundamental purposes of schooling and cite citizenship education as one of the goals of social studies education. Levstik (2001) also highlights one of the purposes of social studies advanced by its proponents as “the development of democratic understanding, civic dispositions, and social participation skills” (p. 2).

How do Educators Describe Democracy, Democratic Values and the Democratic School and Classroom

Almost half of the educators interviewed utilized the broad description of “government by the people for the people” to describe the concept of democracy. Additionally, they proposed that a democratic society is one in which every person is valued, treated with respect and has a voice, the ability to express concerns they might have, and is able to participate in the process toward solving their concerns. While these educators acknowledged that their societies were organized as *de facto* representative democracies, they all (without exception) doubted that democratic principles and values were truly at play in wider society. Six of the ten educators cited corruption in government and failure of government to acknowledge or honor the will of the people once elected to office. Another factor cited by these educators to illustrate the challenges to deep democracy in wider society was differential treatment of persons in society based on race or socio-economic status. These inequities were evident in the system of tracking and sorting some students into poorly resourced secondary schools. Some educators also described racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society describing struggles of some groups for recognition and representation. Indeed the hierarchies of race and class inherited from the

colonial era continue to persist even today in many of the Caribbean territories (Hintzen, 2004; Kamugisha, 2007). Educators viewed schools as microcosms of wider society and therefore suggested that these occurrences in wider society were being reflected within schools.

This discussion of schools as microcosms of wider society brought into focus the concept of the democratic school and classroom. Accordingly, the majority of these educators regarded a democratic school and classroom as mirroring the principles of a democratic society. Four of the ten educators underscored that democratic principles must operate at both the school level and the classroom level and stressed the importance of strong leadership in schools as a means of fostering a democratic environment. Listed below are some of the main features of a democratic classroom highlighted by these educators:

- students have voice and are afforded space for expression by the teacher and by each other
- activities are centered around students and accommodate a variety of learning styles and intelligences
- the democratic school or classroom is characterized by fairness, justice and equity
- students have a say in what they learn and how they learn it
- students take responsibility for their learning and the resulting outcomes
- students are treated with respect by the teacher and by each other
- students are protected psychologically and made to know that it is ok to make mistakes since this is part of learning
- assessment of student gains is undertaken and used to improve teaching and learning

Educators acknowledged that within the context of teacher-centered classrooms⁴ in the region, most teachers fall short of consistently practicing democratic principles. Some of the factors cited to account for this occurrence included, teachers never having experienced a democratic classroom, persons employed as teachers without requisite educational certification, insufficient emphasis on these principles in teacher preparation programs, lack of consistent support to help teachers integrate these principles into their teaching practice.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

This focus on schools as sites for promoting democratic citizenship emphasizes the role of the teacher in the process of democratic citizenship education. There have been longstanding debates about teacher professionalism and teacher professionalization as teachers struggle to raise the status of their work. In the current climate of increasing focus on accountability and calls by policymakers and the public for greater and better outcomes of students, the importance of clearly defining the starting point

⁴ One of the broad approaches to teaching that emerge in the literature is **teacher centered or content focused approaches** and **student centered or learning focused approaches**. **The teacher centered approach focus on the teacher as the expert who transmits the knowledge to be learned to the student, while** in the **student centered approach**, the focus shifts to the students and what they do to learn.

and understanding the process through which these outcomes are achieved is frequently overlooked. Parker (2008: 65) alludes to the importance of this latter focus when he suggests that a key question to ask about citizenship education programs is “What kind of citizens do we want schools to cultivate, and how might these organizations go about that work?” The salience of this question is underscored when one considers the role of citizenship education in preparing students to participate as active adults in wider society and the function of the classroom in this regard as a microcosm of society. It therefore becomes both necessary and essential to address first things first by focusing on the role of the educators who oversee these “microcosms of society” and who are tasked with delivering citizenship education curricula.

Giroux (2004) proposes the concept of the teacher as “transformative intellectual” in response to a series of educational reforms that effectively sidelined teachers casting them in the role of high-level technicians who lacked the ability to provide moral and intellectual leadership for the nation’s youth. The term “transformative intellectual” was essentially a call to rethink the nature of teachers’ work and to underscore the role of the teacher in “producing and legitimating various political, economic and social interests through the pedagogies they endorse and utilize” (p.209). In this manner, Giroux focused attention on the role of the teacher in shaping democratic society through “educating a class of intellectuals vital to the development of a free society” (p.210). In urging attention to the social function teachers perform, Giroux called for schools to be understood as “contested spheres that embody and express a struggle” (p. 210) over what gets taught and how it gets taught, including types of knowledge, forms of authority and versions of past and future. This view of schools is consistent with the underlying philosophy of critical educational theory that promotes a view of schools as sites for the creation of “politicized citizenry capable of fighting for various forms of public life and informed by a concern for equality and social justice” rather than “passive, risk-free citizenry” (McLaren, 1994: 166). To achieve these outcomes, teachers would engage in practice aimed at preparing learners to be active and critical citizens who can “appraise their systems of governance, understand the implications of international and global change, address patterns of injustice, hold politicians accountable and experiment with problem-solving, both nationally and in alliance with global civic movements” (Hickling-Hudson, 2004:299).

How do Educators View the Role of the Teacher

In a previous section of this report, teacher educators outlined the attributes of democratic schools and classrooms. These attributes implied certain characteristics of the teachers who would promote these ideals. Characteristics such as, being fair, just and equitable and fostering a deliberative outlook among their students so that they might contribute to the development of a more democratic society. Indeed these attributes are embodied in the descriptions of teachers as transformative intellectuals proposed by Giroux above. In addition to the role of the teacher in promoting the democratic ideal outlined in an earlier section, another theme that was strongly underscored and consistently raised by all educators is the changed role and profile of the teacher over time and the implications of these changes for the educational process and educational outcomes. Educators observed that contemporary teachers seldom view their role as more than delivering content and often do not see their function as including shaping the development of the “whole student.” Without exception, these educators contrasted this view of contemporary teachers with the role of the

teacher in society in times past. They underscored the extent to which 'the teacher' (the office as well as the holder of that office) was respected and revered in society.

Several factors were advanced by these educators to explain the decline in the prestige of the teaching profession over time. These included teaching no longer being viewed as an attractive career and instead being regarded as a transitional career, in part due to the low wages and salaries paid to teachers. As a result of this reduced attractiveness of teaching as a career, these educators proposed that the number of applicants has significantly contracted over time and the quality of persons seeking to enter the profession has declined. Related to this decline in prestige is the fact that the profile of the teacher has changed over time. Teachers are younger and tend to view teaching as a job rather than a vocation. **Accordingly, educators argued that teachers need to return to a place where they see themselves as builders of society and can internalize their role, place and function in society. These educators called for teachers to see themselves (and by extension to be regarded in wider society) as agents of social development and role models for students not just within the school or classroom but also in wider society. Educators also called for teachers to have deep understanding of the role and purpose of school in building a democratic society.**

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND PRACTICES THROUGH EDUCATION IN THE SUB-REGION

Educators cited several challenges to education in the region including the relatively large proportion of untrained teachers, lack of sensitivity to gender issues, increasing impact of social issues on the life of the school, and changing societal values that have negatively impacted education. These changing societal values were linked to the changing role of the teacher over time as educators cited new demands and concerns teachers must contend with in their schools and classrooms as they educate students. The other main findings related to lack of support for teachers in their efforts to change their teaching practice to incorporate democratic values and practices, the failure of school systems and curricula to meet the new and different student outcomes, and the continued challenge of integrating technology into teaching. Each of these findings is described in greater detail below.

Finding #1: There is a significant proportion of untrained or inadequately trained teachers

More than half of the educators interviewed listed lack of trained teachers as a major challenge for the region. The high proportion of untrained teachers (over 50% at the primary level in Belize and 50 % in Antigua and Barbuda) was ascribed to *brain drain, traditional systems of teacher certification that did not require specialized training in pedagogical techniques as well as rapid expansion of educational access at rates that outstripped the numbers of teachers available.* Educators noted that **the proportion of untrained teachers was higher in the less developed countries of the region** e.g. Belize and Antigua and Barbuda. Five of the ten educators proposed that the current training offered to teachers is inadequate and/or poorly structured with teachers failing to spend sufficient time engaged in clinical practice. Additionally, educators expressed the view that student teachers' engagement with clinical practice is often not structured in a way that allows for connections to be drawn between theory and practice. This lack of training or inadequate training was linked to low quality

teaching which manifested in a number of ways, including: (i) *inability to implement varied approaches and pedagogical styles*; (ii) *poor lesson planning and lack of preparation to execute lessons in accordance with curricula demands*; (iii) *inability to distinguish between curriculum objectives e.g. teaching content versus teaching skills*; and (iv) *lack of understanding of and reflection on their role as teachers*. This challenge of lack of training or inadequate training results in teachers struggling with basic classroom management and lesson delivery, and experiencing great difficulty implementing democratic values and practices.

Finding #2: Schools have become overwhelmed by social issues

Growing violence in wider society (including domestic violence) and issues of sex and sexuality were among the major issues cited by these educators as growing concerns for schools. These social challenges in broader society ‘spill over’ and make their way into the schools demanding different approaches by educators who were not faced with these issues in the past and have not been trained to deal with them. Some respondents noted that encroachment of these larger social issues into the life of the schools casts many teachers in the role of crisis managers with the problem becoming particularly acute in instances where school leadership lacks a clear plan or vision for the direction of the school. **Educators observed that teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the growing incidence of violence in schools, particularly since teacher preparation programs do not focus on these issues.**

Finding #3: Changing societal values are negatively impacting education

More than half of educators interviewed cited a change in societal values over time as negatively impacting education in the region. This view was expressed in a number of ways. Some respondents described growing individualistic tendencies in society and movement away from collective and communal values of the past. Others described the change in terms of the adoption of North American popular culture and values by Caribbean youth causing them to ascribe to different values from elders in society. In the view of some of the respondents, one of the manifestations of these changed values is a cultural dissonance between the expectations of the elders and the outlook of today’s youth. One respondent noted that this influence of North American culture on students has been perceived by some adults in society as resulting in increased indiscipline among students and a failure by students to be educationally engaged.

Finding #4: There continues to be a lack of sensitivity to gender issues

Four of the ten educators interviewed raised the issue of gender parity as an important concern for education in the region calling for greater sensibility on gender issues in relation to both male and female students. They observed that issues of gender bias were pervasive in wider society and that the failure to address this issue within schools merely reflected a broader societal trend. While gender issues in the classroom were described in terms of boys lagging in performance behind girls, these educators also emphasized the manifestation of gender issues in the differential treatment by teachers

of male and female students. Educators observed that teachers often held out different standards of behavior, treatment, and levels of academic expectations for boys and girls. Accordingly, boys and girls tend to experience the process of schooling differently. For instance, harsher treatment might be meted out to boys. Alternatively, girls might be steered away from engaging in certain tasks or enrolling in certain subjects regarded as more suited to boys.

Finding #5: Teachers lack support in their efforts to change their teaching practice

Almost all of the educators interviewed for this report stressed the need for teachers to be properly supported in the process of changing their teaching practice or enacting newly acquired practices. This support was viewed as particularly important for ensuring consistent practice of democratic values and principles. Educators underscored the importance of support both from within schools (from teachers' peers and from school leadership) as well as support from outside school (from Ministry of Education officers). Some respondents reported instances of teachers becoming demotivated when they receive no support in their quest to implement new initiatives acquired through teacher training or professional development. A few educators stressed the importance of teachers learning from and supporting each other through the establishment of professional communities of practice. Such practices can help promote schools as places where teachers learn from each other. In addition to support at the national level from Ministries of Education and at the school level from other teachers and school leadership, some respondents called for greater support from training colleges arguing that the supports offered through these institutions can be extended beyond the period of preparing teachers to offer supports to teachers early on in their professional careers after being placed in schools full time.

Finding #6: There is continued reliance on outdated education systems and curricula

Education systems and their curricula are failing to meet the demands for greater and different educational outcomes. Several educators cited the failure of education systems within the region to change over time as a major source of the challenges faced within the educational sector. They noted that the educational systems in place within almost all countries in the region were devised in a post-emancipation era and primarily aimed at teaching lower order skills and knowledge. These systems have not been sufficiently adapted, reformed or transformed over time to achieve the outcomes desired of students in this contemporary age, including outcomes reflective of democratic values and practices. Educators therefore described the education systems of the region as *“archaic” and “not fit for purpose” since they remain largely functional; aimed at getting persons to be numerate and literate rather than serving the purpose of understanding the world in which they live, perceiving and envisioning their own place in it, and readying themselves to participate in it.* **This challenge of preparing students for different outcomes is exacerbated by curricula that continue to be largely content-based rather than skills-based.**

One of the features of these education systems frequently cited by respondents is the practice of tracking and sorting students at the secondary level through a system of examinations. Though the

format of the examinations used to promote students to the secondary level differs⁵, they are essentially high stakes tests that operate to rank and sort students according to school type with the highest scoring students assigned to traditional grammar schools. In many contexts, this practice results in a concentration of the lowest scoring students in the most poorly resourced schools with the resulting stigma attached to these assignments. Teacher educators interviewed for this report argued that this failure of the education system to be structured equitably violates fundamental democratic principles and therefore belies the authenticity of initiatives aimed at promoting democratic values and practices within the school.

Finding #7: The integration of technology remains a major challenge for education systems in the region

Almost all the educators interviewed expressed as a challenge to education in the region, the need to integrate technology into teaching more effectively. Educators observed that while several initiatives had been funded by regional and international organizations to increase or enhance the use of technology in the classroom, these efforts had largely failed to take root. Accordingly, while in theory education systems might be regarded as technologically equipped, in practice this was not the case.

Several factors were cited by educators to account for this disconnect between rhetoric and reality, including teachers' relative lack of familiarity with and infrequent use of technology (as compared with their students). Educators therefore called for initiatives that would bridge the gap between students (of the digital age) and teachers (of the analog age). Importantly however, educators underscored that this trend toward integrating technology must be mindful of the unevenness of access to this technology by students and their families.

Finding #8: Students are often not placed at the center of the educational process

The majority of the educators interviewed for this report lamented the failure of some teachers to place students at the center of the educational process and regard their successful outcomes as the *raison d'être* of the process. This observation was made particularly in relation to the most vulnerable students who are sometimes "ignored," "stigmatized," and "not valued" by their teachers. Educators cited failure of some teachers to attend to the needs of students as grounded in wider societal stereotypes about these students, their communities and their ability to achieve successful educational outcomes. They noted that these discriminatory practices strike at the heart of issues of democratic values and practices within schools. Educators called for these sometimes unconscious assumptions to be unpacked and interrogated and stressed the importance of teachers' deep understanding of the psychology of the students they teach. **Educators also spoke about the need**

⁵ Some countries utilize the Grade Six Achievement Test that aims at ongoing assessment at the grade six level culminating in two days of testing while others utilize the Common Entrance Examination with its heavy emphasis on a single final examination at the end of the primary level. The Grade Six Achievement Test replaced the Common Entrance Examination in some Caribbean countries

for teachers to care for the “whole” student and to approach the task of teaching as aimed at educating the whole child rather than delivering content in a subject area.

Finding #9: More attention needs to be paid to Early Childhood and Special Needs Education

Educators interviewed for this report acknowledged and welcomed the current national initiatives that focus increased attention on early childhood and special needs education. However, they called for more to be done, particularly in regard to early childhood education. Two of the educators interviewed for this report touched on this issue, noting that at present in some countries in the region early childhood education is unregulated and a significant number of the persons working in this field have minimal levels of education and lack formal training. **They further noted that early childhood education addresses the most formative years of a child’s development and that accordingly the persons who are entrusted with the responsibility to educating these students should undergo rigorous training and certification.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings set out in the previous section essentially identify challenges to education in the region broadly while asserting that these challenges hold implications for the ability of schools and teachers to promote the democratic ideal through education.

The educators interviewed for this report acknowledge that while broader systemic change is imperative, this deep systemic change would be a longer term objective and that additional interim solutions are required. **These educators offered a number of recommendations for initiatives and programs to improve quality teaching and the democratic practices in schools and classrooms.** The recommendations offered by these educators flow directly from the challenges highlighted in the previous section of this report and are set out below. The majority of these recommendations relates to training and support for teachers as well as re-conceptualizing the role of the teacher. Other recommendations related to transformation of the school curriculum, strengthening school leadership, and valuing of students. These categories are utilized below for organizational clarity:

Re-imagined school curriculum:

- ***A new and re-conceptualized curriculum must be created for schools. This curriculum must include a focus beyond the basic functional aims of creating literate and numerate citizens.*** This new curriculum must: a) recognize the demands of the 21st century and be structured in a way that facilitates teachers in their role of preparing students for the knowledge economy as well as providing opportunities for students to reflect and create ;b) allow for students to understand the world and the ways in which they might meaningfully participate in broader

society; and c) facilitate the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching⁶ and have built-in consistent support for teachers to assist them in delivering this re-conceptualized curriculum.

Strengthened School Leadership:

- **There needs to be greater focus on strengthening school leadership. School leaders need to be trained to enable them to support teachers.** Their guidance also needs to be premised on an overarching vision for the school in the short, medium and longer terms. This is a skill that is sorely lacking among school leaders. Many school leaders currently spend a great deal of time in the role of operations managers and crisis managers at their schools and their role as instructional and transformational leaders is often neglected or ignored.

Students should be valued:

- **One initiative that might be undertaken is a campaign promoting the importance of ‘valuing the child.’** This can prove very useful in helping teachers place students and their needs at the center of the educational process. This initiative can have a two-fold effect. The first would be to help teachers reflect on the issues in students’ wider environments that impact their learning and engagement in the educational process. The other effect might be to create space for teachers to reflect on the role they must play in educating **all** children regardless of their life circumstances.

Strengthened and re-imagined teacher training and professional development:

All teacher educators interviewed for this report called for a more deliberate and concerted focus on training and professional development of teachers with appropriate levels of resources dedicated by governments and Ministries of Education for these purposes. Educators’ recommendations included both approaches to improving current teacher systems as well as calls for re-conceptualizing current approaches:

⁶ *“Student-Centred Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking”.* Attard, Angele et al. (2010). *Student-Centered Learning: A Toolkit for Students, Staff, and Higher Education Institutions:* A publication of Education International and The European Student’s Union. The publication is available by [clicking here](#)

- **A different approach to initial teacher formation (teacher training) and teacher professional development is required i.e. more than ‘training’ in the traditional sense is required.** This new approach must move beyond the current focus of dispensing information (for certification and passing examinations) toward helping teachers reflect on and interrogate their role as educators preparing students to participate as active adults in wider society.
- **One example of a possible alternative urged the adoption of a reflexive and/or psychological approach to teacher formation and teacher professional development** that might explore issues/topics such as:
 - Teaching as a profession and the teacher as a professional
 - The importance of valuing the child and placing performance of **all** students as a central concern
 - Engagement of teachers in their professional life i.e. identifying ways of giving teachers voice so that they might shape decisions relating to their professional lives.
 - New or contemporary challenges for education and how teachers might be best equipped to deal with these challenges
- **Teachers must receive specialized training to deal with life skills issues e.g. sexual health and violence.** For instance, they should be trained in conflict management so that they might address acts of violence before they escalate and should be trained to understand and/or manage issues of sex and sexuality. These issues must be taken up by the curricula of teachers’ training colleges and form part of contemporary teacher professional development programs.
- **Teachers should receive mandatory training in gender sensitivity to address the persistent gender biases deeply ingrained in schools and society.** This training should be extended not only to classroom teachers but also to teacher educators, administrators, teacher education officers at MOEs and policy makers. CARICOM has commenced efforts in this area with the development of a gender module for teacher education and this might be a useful starting point in developing such an initiative⁷.
- **The current structure of teacher formation programs needs to be revisited.** Teachers encounter concepts in fragmented ways as they progress through their formation programs and are often pushed through these programs with such speed that they do not have time to internalize the concepts or understand their connectedness to the realities they encounter in

⁷ The following document is an example of these efforts commenced by CARICOM. Barbara Evelyn Bailey, Yasmeeen Yusuf-Khalil, Monica Brown, Caribbean Community (2000). Secretariat, Centre for Gender and Development Studies (Mona, Jamaica). “Gender issues in Caribbean education: a module for teacher education”. Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat.

the classrooms during their field studies (practicum). Such restructuring of teacher formation programs should focus on helping student teachers:

- Understand the connectedness between their field experience and the concepts they encounter in their foundational studies.
- Focus more closely on the practice of teaching rather than the short term gain of passing exams and achieving certification.
- Gain more opportunities to experience “good teaching.” Many teachers have a very poor understanding of teaching and learning because they have never experienced good and effective teaching and learning.
- Better understand curriculum so that they might be able to distinguish between curriculum objectives e.g. teaching content –vs.- teaching skills
- Recognize their role as broader than delivering content.

Support for teachers in their practice:

- **Greater and more consistent support is required for student teachers and in-service teachers to assist them in changing their teaching practice and achieving quality teaching.** Such support can help promote the consistent practice of democratic principles in schools, particularly in light of the difficulty in changing teaching practice. **Support for teachers may come from the following sources:**
 - **Ministries of Education (MOEs):** Greater numbers of MOE officers are needed to support teachers in the field since the current ratios (teacher: MOE officer) are too high and the frequency of visits too low to enable any meaningful impact or to facilitate quality teaching. Officers should engage in critique as well as praise of teachers’ practice and should be equipped to recommend resources to help teachers improve their teaching practice.
 - **School Leadership: There needs to be buy-in from school administration if reforms are to take root within the school.** Teachers therefore require support of school leadership, particularly when they are newly returned from professional development initiatives or have just completed their initial teacher preparation program.
 - **Teachers’ Peers: The role of peer coaching and mentoring for teachers is greatly under-valued and under-utilized.** Whilst teachers find value in leaning from master teachers they are less trusting of dialogue between and among peers as a source of learning and professional development. Teachers frequently work in isolation and are afraid of critical evaluation or do not feel psychologically safe working with their peers. Further, teachers continue to emphasize the need for autonomy over their own classrooms and feel that this autonomy would be threatened by closer peer interaction and critique.

- **Ministries of Education, teachers training colleges and schools should promote opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue with other teachers about their practice and support them through initiatives aimed at improving their practice.** Such initiatives might serve as the start of a process aimed at reshaping the culture of teaching and teachers’ understanding about the role and function of schools and teachers in society. An example of such a change process model offered by one of the educators interviewed for this report included the following components and strategies:
 - Begin by looking at the vision and mission of the school
 - Identify resources within the school i.e. determine the specific strengths of particular teachers
 - Leverage resources within the school by pairing and grouping teachers to work together
 - Establish indicators to assess student performance (both cognitive and affective)
 - Analyze student performance – not just scores but performance – and link this analysis back to teaching (i.e. assessment **for** teaching). This analysis might explore questions e.g. ‘What factors account for these student scores?’ or ‘What were the problems with this content area?’
 - Use the outcomes of these dialogic processes to inform curriculum and teaching practice and to open up a discussion about the role of the teacher in improving student performance (as it relates to the whole child).

- **More frequent and structured in-service professional development opportunities for teachers are needed.** At the moment, most countries in the region do not mandate or assess teacher professional development and initiatives relating to development of in-service teachers are undertaken on an ad hoc basis.

- **Coaching and mentoring must be provided for student teachers as well as in-service teachers to help them consistently and effectively integrate technology into their teaching.**

Teacher Professionalism:

- **Promote spaces for dialog among teachers so that they might reflect on ways to elevate their profession. The role of the “teacher as professional” must be established as a means of valuing teachers’ work, giving them greater voice in their professional lives and emphasizing their function in shaping citizens to participate in wider society.** Ministries of Education and teachers colleges might engage in the following actions as a way of promoting teachers as professionals:
 - Give teachers voice in decisions and educational reforms that affect them and seek their buy-in for these decisions and reforms.

- Become more selective about the profile of persons allowed to enter the profession. Some teacher training institutions have already taken steps in this direction by raising minimum standards of qualification for entry into B.Ed. programs. Consideration might be given to the use of psychometric evaluations as a tool for screening applicants to the profession.
- Hold teachers to higher and more consistent standards of teaching practice and professional conduct, and ensure that persons entering the profession following the teacher formation process meet these standards.
- **Provide more opportunities for teachers to engage in and/or benefit from research relating to teaching practice. More qualitative research, including action research, is needed to investigate what happens within classrooms.** This research can assist teachers in becoming more reflexive practitioners as they become more conscious of their actions in the classroom and their approaches to educating their students. One respondent suggested that *changing teaching practice will remain a very difficult task until teachers achieve this level of consciousness/awareness regarding their practice.*

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ANNEX A – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Information

Age, gender, race, employment, connection to issues in education, years' experience in the field of education

Identifying Challenges and Issues

- What are some of the greatest challenges to education in your country/the region (now and in the near future)?
- What are the most pressing issues you perceive for education in your country/the region now and in the near future?
- Why are these issues and challenges important/significant? What makes them significant? What factors do you feel account for these challenges or issues being significant?
- Are these new issues and challenges or have they existed before and/or taken on new meaning in the contemporary times? Explain.

The Impact of Challenges and Issues on Teacher Education

- How do these issues and challenges impact what teachers need to **know**? How is this knowledge different from what was needed or emphasized before?
- How do these issues and challenges impact what teachers need to **do**? Are these required actions different from what was needed or emphasized in the past?
- What different roles do these challenges and issues require teachers to fill/take on compared with the past?
- How do these issues/challenges impact what students need to **know**? How is this knowledge different from what was needed or emphasized before?
- How do these issues/challenges impact what students need to **do**? Are these required actions different from what was needed or emphasized in the past?
- What different roles are teachers required to take on in light of what students need to know and do now and in the near future?
- What is the relevance of these new teacher-roles for a democratic society?

- Do teacher preparation programs address these roles teachers must take on? Have they done so in the past? Should they? Why/Why not? What else can teacher preparation programs do (specifically) to address these roles teachers must take on?
- What kind of teacher professional development programs might address these concerns? Describe.

Conceptualizing Democratic Society and Democratic Education

- What is a democratic society?
- What does it mean to live in a democratic society? What does it mean to be a citizen of a democracy?
- Do you believe you live in a democratic society? Why/Why not?
- We talked earlier about challenges and issues for education in your country. What are implications of those challenges and issues for your country as a democracy?
- Do you see schools and classrooms as microcosms of wider society? Why/Why not? Should they be microcosms of wider society?
- What does it mean for classroom to be conceived of as a democratic space? Do you think it should be so conceived?
- What factors work against the classroom functioning as a democratic space?
- What do teaching and pedagogy aimed at promoting the classroom as a democratic space look like? Describe in detail.
- What does curriculum aimed at promoting the classroom as a democratic space look like? Describe in detail.
- How do current teaching, pedagogy and curriculum in your country/the region differ from what you just described?
- You stated that you do not believe you live in a democratic society, do you think change is needed and how can that be achieved? Explain.
- What is the teacher's role in preparing students as citizens who can bring about such change in society?
- How can teachers prepare students to live in a democratic society?/What is the teacher's role in preparing students to participate in wider democratic society?

Closing Questions

- What factors work against the teacher's ability to prepare students to participate in wider democratic society?
- What do you think is required to address these detrimental factors/effects?
- More specifically, what can teacher preparation and teacher professional development programs do to address these detrimental effects? Describe in detail any programs or approaches that you think are warranted. Do any of these approaches exist currently?