Caribbean Vision, West Indian Practice: Conflicts of Edutocracy and Elitism in Education Reform

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Abstract

This research seeks to understand the outcome of decades of education reform initiatives in the West Indies. Utilising the Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) method, official public documents were collected through web and catalogue searches. Dominant themes were identified through manual and electronic coding using MaxQDA software. These emergent themes were examined through the lens of the edutocracy and elite theories to provide more in-depth analysis of this research problem. The document analysis constructed a narrative of how colonial ideology embedded within the inherited West Indian educational system runs counter to the progressive and more humanist visions and missions envisaged for present-day Caribbean education, culminating in deleterious conflicts between educational theory and practice. This work therefore concludes that there has been little substantive Caribbean education reform owing to the significant gaps between early twenty-first century, and even earlier drafted education visions, and current education practice

Keywords: edutocracy, elite theory, Caribbean education reform, colonialism, ideology

Introduction

There have been several education reform initiatives in the West Indies over the past few decades, which do not appear to have resulted in any substantive change to the system (Tsang et al., 2002; Jules, 2015; Brissett, 2021). The West Indies herein refer to the Anglophone CARICOM states (appendix 1). Research shows that West Indian (WI) governments have taken a piecemeal approach to systemic change, which has not addressed the perpetual challenges in education; namely, poor quality education, high drop-out and repetition rates, high failure rates and outdated curricula (Tsang et al., 2002; Williams, 2012; Hackett, 2004; Fiszbein & Stanton, 2018). Admittedly, these are severe educational problems, but the real issue, I premise, is the racist, classist and hegemonic principles, values, and ideologies built under the system as a stabilizing force and weaved into the fabric of the colonially inherited WI education structure. I use the term West Indian deliberately to show that education in this region still mimics the colonial model, and so I speak of the WI education system monolithically despite the territories being separate sovereign states. This is because it shares several core identical characteristics in policy and practice across these islands. Denny (2020) highlights these similarities; namely, the largely academic monolingual school system operating in primarily bi/multidialectal WI settings, which is predominantly characterized by

high-stakes assessment in English, academism, chalk and talk, text-book-driven curricula, teacher-centered approaches and passive learners (p. 2). For context, most WIs in the Anglophone Caribbean speak a dialect of English, a creolized or decreolized version, but are expected to learn and use solely English in schools based on a mostly implicit language-in-education policy, as this vernacular issue is not treated directly in most official Caribbean education documents (Denny, 2013). Notably, the practice of high-stakes national assessment at the primary level, known as the Common Entrance across the region, sorts students into prestigious high-achieving and low-achieving secondary schools, while regional secondary exams, delivered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), result annually in a meagre 0.01% of WI students attaining national government scholarships to overwhelmingly prestigious overseas universities (Denny, 2021). A major issue this research therefore seeks to address is why after decades of education reforms do these prejudicial practices still exist, so that despite a rhetoric around equity, there appears to be little substantive change in the WI education institutional system. Similar questions of resistant institutional change have been researched regionally around the narrative of economic institutional persistence (Acemoglu et al., 2021; Roland, 2020); yet few researchers have specifically explored the issue of colonial persistence in the education system of the post-colonies (Viegi, 2016). This research therefore aims to fill that gap by contending that substantive educational change will result from educational stakeholders peering *beneath* the system, at its foundation, and comprehensively exploring the genesis of WI education from the level of the plantocratic ideologies shaped by a racist, colonialist Anglo-European minority and inherited unchecked and unquestioned by Afro-WI education managers. Past reform approaches seem to target only the observable symptoms of the educational problems, and so a new approach which explores the *sources* of these symptoms is required for more meaningful understanding of the issues under reform. I therefore propose an examination of the impact of colonial ideology on WI education development, through the lens of the edutocracy and elite theories as a more productive alternative approach to answering the overarching research question.

        This work therefore starts from the premise that present day WI education reform, through its planning, policies and classroom practices, continues the trend of schooling to produce an academic elite. In so doing, the current system is still largely influenced by the colonial education model (Viegi, 2016) which had little intention of creating a mass literate non-White society, but rather of producing an educated elite to continue its work of colonial dominance in the absence of its masters. I therefore posit that reform has failed to bring about substantive change and will not do so if this underlying ideology of education for elite selection is not first addressed. This practice of educative selection is evidenced by the fact that the overwhelming majority of passes in regional exams is at the lowest acceptable level, grade 3. In addition, approximately 40% of WI students fail the English language competency exam yearly (see cxc.org) despite some twelve years of "language learning". In speaking to the level of failure, Glenroy Cumberbatch, a recently retired CXC Registrar admits to a worrying trend of some nearly 20% (over 11, 000 out of 60, 000) failing to acquire a *single* pass in the regional exams, making it difficult, he laments, to produce people in the region who are employable ("Too Many Performing Poorly", 2018). Another former Registrar of CXC, Didacus Jules (2015), insists that the problem with WI education reform is that it ignores history by maintaining a regional exam structure that assumes that the principal function of education is to sort and classify people based on academic intelligence. This study therefore explores WI education reform to understand why decades of reform initiatives seem to meet with resistant systemic change (Jules, 2015; Williams, 2012; Miller, 2014). This issue is especially important at a time when Barbados, an exemplar of WI education, has as recently as April 2021,

created an Education Reform Unit, to "facilitate the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the reform initiatives that will be aimed at transforming the education sector" (Government Information Service, 2021, para. 6). This study is therefore timely, as its findings can contribute to providing research-driven guidance to WI education reformists beyond tackling the observable educational symptoms.

Literature Review

WI education reform did not truly begin until the 1950s, just prior to the independence era in the 1960s to 1980s (Layne, 1999; Miller, 1999; Coates, 2012) because this was a time of advocating for mass education, and so reforms were catering to this influx. Miller (1999) explains that a rhetoric around nation building saw the newly independent people unifying around education for the Black masses, resulting in a paradigm shift which led to almost universal access at the primary level, extended access at the secondary level and expanded tertiary level education in the region. Despite these early achievements, there is great dissatisfaction with the system currently; as such, Miller (1999), asks why. Scholars like Coates (2012) observes that two hundred years after British colonial rule "the educational systems within CARICOM states continue to reflect the academic traditions of their former colonizer" (p. 347). Essentially, education reform has not caught up with social change because the system continues to mimic British academic institutions which promote highly competitive, selective schooling that is unresponsive to the region's needs (Hunte, 1976). Others argue that the failure of the academized system to promote equality and equity is the real problem, because despite barriers being lowered, they have never truly been removed (Miller, 1999). There has been success in expanding access, but not the kind of access that has resulted in student retention and acquisition of multiple literacies necessary for social mobility (Fiszbein & Stanton, 2018; Hackett, 2004; Miller, 2014). These seminal works suggest that the goals of WI education have not always been strategically directed towards social development. I agree, but also contend that the myopic view of educational goals originating from our inherited colonial education training teaches us as WIs that education is about curriculum, academia, and assessment; namely, systems and processes (Bewaji, 2008) rather than people. This focus has led to recurring attempts at fixing the observable broken education processes and systems like shoring up the number of trained teachers for better examination outcomes, replacing culturally inadequate texts, and revamping foreign-based curricula and assessments. Yet, the indoctrination and the inherent unquestioned ideologies of the *people* behind the systems and processes might well be at the core of addressing the education reform issue. This is what Denny (2021) alluded to in the description of her newly developed theory of edutocracy in the region. I therefore propose in this work to explore the role of this theory in WI education reform.

Edutocracy

Denny (2021) describes edutocracy theoretically as a combination of education and plantocracy. It is a theory of dependency, reliance on Western ideas, knowledge, services, systems, and policies based on ideologies promoting intellectual hegemony, academic power, and legitimacy of imperial knowledge (Bristol, 2010; Best, 1968). It is also a socio-psychological theory grounded in the inner plantation theory (Brathwaite, 1975), illuminating how the impact of the creole education institution on the psyche of the Afro-WI has left many feeling like failures. It is also a theory of plantation pedagogy, mainly a practice of hopelessness and oppression (Bristol,

2010) in the forms of domineering top-down management practices and imposed foreign education policies of international funding agencies (Denny, 2021). Edutocracy is captured as an amalgamation of these three theories in figure 1.
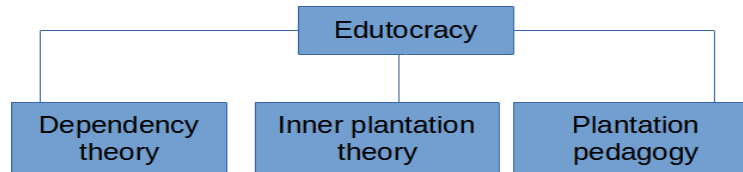
Figure 1: *Concise Model of Edutocracy*

In my experience as a WI educator, teacher trainer and researcher, I can concretize Denny's (2021) theory of edutocracy in terms of education committees devoid of teacher representation, policies of monolingualism in bidialectal pedagogical contexts and high-stakes academic assessments at stipulated ages, regardless of students' levels of competency or readiness. These practices reflect a theory of edutocracy which demonstrates how the practice of WI education creates and preserves an "educated bourgeoisie, [who] would be content to take on the role of business agent for the West, accumulating wealth, supporting ethnic interests, and behaving like the former colonizer, complicit in neo-colonialism" (Enslin, 2017, p. 6), essentially, the new Afro-WI plantocracy. The discourse around edutocracy reads as conflict between colonial education ideology and Caribbean ideal visions for contemporary education. It is also articulated as contradictions between the espousal of democratic principles and anti-democratic education practices (Williams, 2012). This conflict suggests, that while educationists have done laudable work in education reform regarding physical access to schooling, they have failed to progress in addressing issues of (1) access to school language and curricula content for most dialectal speakers, (2) student retention and (3) certification of competency. Instead of simply asking what challenges are we facing in WI education and why (Miller, 1999), we must now ask, "What challenges do we *continue* to face in WI education and why do we *continue* to face them despite decades of 'reforms'"? A theoretical analysis is a more productive start to understanding the problem at its core. The answers appear impossible to be unearthed with concrete initiatives (money and material resources), because they are rooted in intangible complexities (theories and ideologies).

Elite Theory in Education

Elite theory is grounded in the work of Italian scholars Mosca, (1896), Pareto (1916) and Michels (1911/1962) working in the fields of sociology and political science. They each contend that mass rule would descend into uncoordinated chaos, citing the elites' abundance of power, influence, supposed talent and inherent "superior" psychological and sociological attributes as prime assets for governance. Michels differs from his counterparts in his belief that democratic rulership of the masses did not truly exist because only a select few could influence economic development, define social culture, and determine institutional design (DiCaprio, 2012), which he termed an oligarchy. This trio viewed elite rule as a tactical and technical necessity of mass organization (Michels, 1911/1962). In the late 1970s and early 1980s other scholars attempted to expand on these theories, still within a political and economic framework. However, DiCaprio (2012) spotlighted newer themes which explored elite influence on non-elites via institutional control (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), elite group dynamics (circulation and replacement) (Figueroa,

2008), cognitive models of the elite versus non-elites (Pye, 1991) and the most influential on this current work, the ideology of the elite (Kritzer, 1978). Understanding elite ideology is crucial to the WI education reform debate, as elite scholars assert that elites have tremendous influence on a country's development (DiCaprio, 2012); the sphere of education being no exception. An understanding of elite ideology can also elucidate the narrative around the persistence of colonial education institutions in the region, opening a dialogue about strategies for engaging the educated elite on educational development issues within the broader context of national development (Tarp, 2012). Given the narrow focus of the elite theory (politics and economics), this article proposes to broaden the conversation to the sphere of education.

Role of Educrats

In this study, a fresh approach will be taken to exploring WI education reform by examining the research problem through the lenses of edutocracy and elite theory, both of which are integral in understanding the thinking of the people behind the processes and systems that influence deleterious education policies and practices. The elite theoretical approach is significant because elites are crucial to explaining institutional persistence, and a key factor in institutional change will be what happens to the elite (Robinson, 2012). In this work I refer to the educated elite as educrats. Based on Denny's (2021) description of edutocracy, the scholarly literature around the elite, and my own decades' long experience in the field of education in the region, I have defined the WI educrat very specifically. They are a small purposively insular group of highly educated intellectuals from the Caribbean, who share a similarly globalized westernized worldview of self, inner circle and outer circle (Brooks, 2018), with a deep but limited view of WI educational issues owing to their narrow Western tertiary academic training. Despite their small size, they possess inordinate access to resources (Khan, 2016; Bonn, 2017) that can be converted to advantageous commodities. Though celebrated for their academic achievements, primarily owing to their research output, they mostly tend to be "faceless", "people who shape the world without anyone noticing" (The Economist, 2011, p. 1). They are not necessarily wealthy or officially titled (DiCaprio, 2012), but their access reaches politicians and funding opportunities due to networks weaved by sitting on boards and committees (Burris, 2005), acquiring memberships to elite clubs and in many cases having overt/covert political affiliations with political party heads (Abdul-Jalil, 2014). Hence, in understanding reform, we must acknowledge that the strongest force shaping politics "is not blood or money but ideas" (The Economist; 2011, p. 7), and educrats seemingly possess educated and respected ideas, which afford them the listening ear of decision makers to influence and shape education policy and practice primarily for their benefit and that of their inner circle (DiCaprio, 2012).

Research Question & Data Collection

This research was guided by the following questions:

- What has been the outcome of WI education reform policies?
- If there is little/much substantive change through WI education reform, why is this the case?

Based on these questions, I collected the documents for analysis by conducting keyword searches in scholarly databases. I was either already subscribed to these databases or could access them for free (appendix 2). Based on my research questions I searched for key terms like Caribbean

education, Caribbean education reform and Caribbean education vision/mission. I searched for visions/missions to understand if they were being realized through implemented reforms. I felt such realizations would be concrete determinants as to whether objectives were attained, speaking directly to the issue of reform success. Based on my theoretical assumption that education in this region is a continuation of colonial traditions of elitism, I also searched for elite education and colonial education, which led to exploring the construct of edutocracy. I found official public documents and reports, media articles, academic publications, conference presentations, web blogs and education experts' video interviews which gave a fuller picture of the reform process. The results were unwieldly (appendix 2), so I engaged in purposive sampling aligned with the research questions (Flick, 2018) and related to the *Anglophone* CARICOM territories, the region in which I serve as a teacher-educator and researcher. I felt this region would be a good starting point from which I could then branch out for comparative work. On my second search, I delimited a Google Scholar search to 2010-2022 as most of these current works refer to earlier studies. In the other databases, I went further back to the 1980s to ensure that I was not missing out on key texts which were not captured by the google search. I made sure to sample documents which spoke to education just prior to independence when mass education was being introduced and so too reform around the 1940s and 1950s. I also examined samples from the independence era (many of these territories became independent during the 1960s and 1970s), and post-independence (1980s-present). I searched for documents related specifically to reform policies and papers and implemented initiatives throughout the Anglophone CARICOM region and some other comparable former British colonies (e.g., Africa), for a wider scope of understanding. I searched across fields of education, sociology, economics, psychology, and Caribbean history for a more cross-disciplinary and wholistic understanding of the issues. I capped the sample when I began to see redundancy, whereby, no new insights were emerging from the data (Morgan, 2022). In deciding what to include in the final sample, I followed Flick's (2018) directive of ensuring authenticity, by determining that several different versions did not exist and that they were primary sources (Morgan, 2022). I chose credible documents which were mostly free from errors and sourced from reputable scholarly databases (appendix 2). I also tended towards organization websites (.org or .edu) rather than commercial websites (.com) for statistical credibility. Additionally, I cross-referenced statistical data in research documents with data on the organization's websites for the same period and topic if available. Approximately 80 documents remained after the delimitation process.

Data Analysis

I first coded the data manually to compile relevant themes and then used MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software for further coding and analysis of the data. This software proved useful in justifying/rejecting already existing code choices, in highlighting other pertinent themes and organizing and systematizing the data for easier analysis. I coded, and categorized codes into major and minor themes (appendix 3) until I saw a recurrence of some major themes (conflict/contradiction; elitism; edutocracy, vision/mission, community) which gave rise to the title of this work. I then attempted to connect the themes, at which point things changed. I started by using thematic analysis strategy, whereby themes, patterns and categorizations inductively emerged, because in the past I saw and handled "documents as content" (Miller & Alvarado, 2005). However, I began to see that this content was not merely descriptive, as primarily associated with thematic analysis. It was merging into a narrative of conflict between colonial ideologies and contemporary

education visions, and between educational theory and pedagogical practice, so my view of documents morphed into commentary, an inference of the social reality suggested in the documents (Coffey, 2014). I therefore recoded the data showing this shift from description to exposition and was able to uncover "unexpected meanings rather than summarize the data" (Morgan, 2022, p. 73). I interpreted the research inductively to construct *my* meaning around WI education reform, which meant that I analyzed the sample by examining how *my* views and assumptions influenced my findings, giving more transparency to my thought processes and my interpretations. This is what Morgan (2022) calls the reflexive approach, completely based on qualitative methods. Grounded in the overriding emergent theme of conflict therefore, I teased out several specific educational conflicts from the sample documents by comparing and contrasting the colonial ideology of education with the written present-day Caribbean education vision as cited in Jules & Williams, (2015) (fig. 2). These comparisons and contrasts told a narrative of failing WI education reform. The final constructed meanings, informed by the data analysis, were therefore based on multiple and varied documents, my own professional observations and experience in education for over 25 years, the exploration of the edutocracy and elite theoretical perspectives (Miller & Alvarado, 2005) and the explanations of behaviors and practices (Bouchrika, 2021) (see appendix 4 for my thought process).

Limitations

There were limitations to QDA. Some documents did not contain the information I sought, especially in response to newly emerging questions. Other documents were limited in the information provided; for example, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) website showed the percentage failures, but not percentages of the lowest passing grades which would give a better scope of students' overall exam struggles. In hindsight, interviews might have helped in acquiring this information. Finally, it was possible that the public documents were not always objective; nevertheless, where possible, I relied on the statistics being correct, so that I could interpret the overall data in the context of these statistics and my own professional knowledge and experience of the system.

Findings and Discussion

This research explored the outcomes of decades-long WI education reform through the lens of edutocracy and elite theory and the reasons for such outcomes to establish the level of reform success. Using QDA, the major theme of *conflict* emerged from the data, which was subdivided into conflicts of education theory/vision versus education practice. From the data analysis emerged a narrative of a Caribbean education vision grounded in democracy, equity, and community; however, this vision gave way to a reality of the practice of elitism, inequity and singularity, a focus on self-achievement rather than community building (Brooks, 2018). The data reflected an idealised theory of Caribbean education through the espousal of democratic education expressed as universal access; equity reflected as the development of plural literacies, and community expressed as collective Caribbean identity. Simultaneously, it reflected a contradictory practice of an elite education evidenced by linguistic inaccessibility. Additionally, inequity was bound up in an academic literacy bias promoted by schooling, while the concept of singularity, through academic individualism and self-achievement was principally encouraged, resulting in western cultural orientation (fig. 2). In this section I describe and explain these patterns of

conflict through the lens of edutocracy and elite theory, while offering alternative voices on the issues. I then propose the way forward through newly emerging research questions.
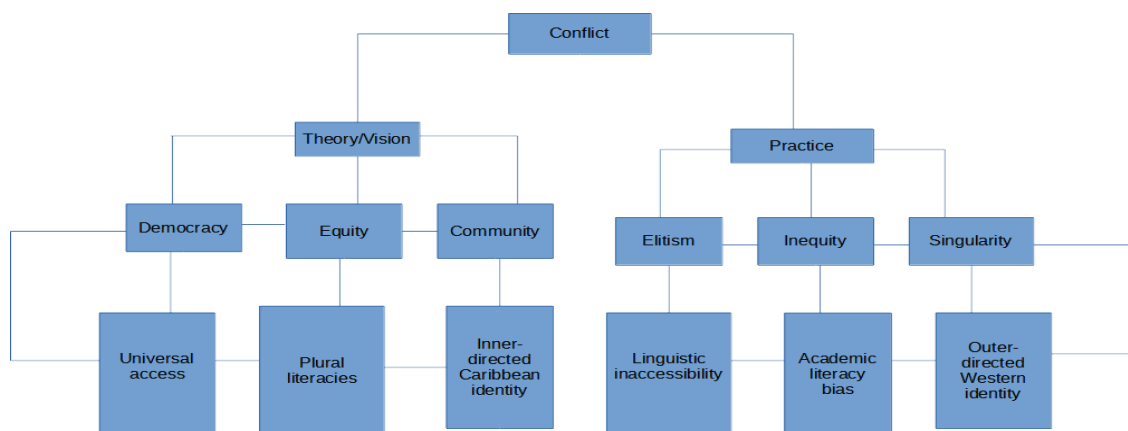

Figure 2: *Conflicts in WI education*

Caribbean Democratic Vision vs. Elitist Practice

Universal Access vs Linguistic Exclusion

A story of conflict between a Caribbean vision of democratic education and a practice of elitism emerged. While democratic education is bandied about by WI governments, it is not explicitly defined. Based on documents used for this research, it is associated with governability, equality, collaboration, participation (Feu et al. 2017). It is portrayed as a practice of social justice, based on human rights, learning environments where teachers and students work together to develop shared meanings (Brissett, 2018), education for increased political participation, increased access and improved livelihoods (Jules & Williams, 2015); essentially, education for equity, access, participation and equality (Tejeda et al., 2003). The first major contradiction observed was that of the democratic vision of universal access and the elitist practice of linguistic exclusion (table 1).

Table 1: *Universal Access vs Linguistic Inaccessibility*

Caribbean Vision	WI Practice
Universal access: "Education for all" (EFA). All Caribbean students regardless of socio-economic status will have access to free primary and secondary education	**Linguistic inaccessibility**: Most vernacular speakers have little/no access to the school's language, English, or its curriculum due to lack of proficiency

As part of the democratic agenda, regional governments worked diligently towards universal entry at the primary and secondary levels (Pilgrim et al., 2018) to the detriment of language access. However, through the elite theory lens, I perceive a struggle between physical and linguistic access. This lens highlights economically privileged children with access, opportunities and

resources affording them quality interaction with the school's language outside of school, enabling increased linguistic proficiency and providing them a better chance of understanding the curriculum content. Conversely, through the edutocracy lens, specifically, plantation pedagogy, linguistic access becomes a pedagogy of oppression for the majority monolingual dialectal speakers with little opportunity outside of school to engage with English, but this is the language "enthroned in the school and in the classroom…at the expense of the vernacular used in the home" (London, 2002, p. 105). Meanwhile, linguistic bridges are not created, like using the child's vernacular in a systematic and deliberate way to facilitate language acquisition (Siegel, 2007; Migge et al., 2010). The result of this pedagogy of oppression is high failure rates in regional exams and consistent commentary in regional reports of students' poor language expression (cxc.org). Still the problem is never interpreted as one of linguistic inaccessibility, but of other kinds, such as teacher quality (Campbell, 2018), examination structures (Hamilton, 2012) and poor reading habits, which are then targeted through teacher training, examination overhauls and remedial reading programs (list of initiatives in Jules & Williams, 2015).

Through the inner plantation lens, linguistic democratization, that is, use of the vernacular to aid second language acquisition, becomes further problematized. It becomes an issue of the WI perception of self, through the vernacular, as lesser, owing to a linguistic ideological indoctrination about the vernacular, in the WI voice, as a bastardization of English, a non-language, lazy speech (Nero, 2006) to be rejected as a pedagogical tool, and beneath the dignity of the formal teaching and learning space (Denny, 2002). Disallowing the systematic use of students' language as a learning resource works against a collaborative effort of shared meaning between teacher and student (Brissett, 2018), the foundation of democratic education. It also negates the espousal of student retention within the universal access plan, as students' incompetency in English leads to school withdrawal through truancy (Jules & Williams, 2015; Bourne & McLymont, 2020; Government of Grenada, 2006) and other means. European monolingual education practice in a predominantly WI bi/multidialectal space has been and continues to be colonial elitism. Under such undemocratic linguistic restrictions, devoiced underachieving students are unlikely to care to access or inhabit this hopeless space, even free of cost. At this stage, the inner plantation ideology rhetoric of deservedness is weaved into the narrative.

Through the inner plantation theory viewfinder, a clear shot of deficiency comes into focus. Denny (2021) poignantly argues that unlike any other creole institution, "education has infected the Afro-WI with a deficiency syndrome. They have inherited a discourse of denigration, humiliation, deficiency, subjugation, and disenfranchisement from the education system" (p. 7). The result, she claims, is a lack of self-esteem, low motivation and anxieties which block language and learning inputs and perpetuate a psychological downward spiral associated with the feeling of undeservedness as part of this pedagogy of oppression. Undoubtedly, students are deficient in the school language. This fact is less worrisome than the inflexible, denigrating language attitudes of educrats, who refuse to be educated about flawed creole linguistic ideologies and prohibit creative means to help students acquire the target language which would give them "access to the code for unlocking the curricula's content on which they are assessed" (Denny, 2021, p. 8). Educrats' refusal to expand linguistic access and tolerance through the incorporation of multidialectalism in schools, therefore, more so than students' language incompetency, becomes the true educational barrier to student success.

The outcome of WI education reform has been laudable universal access, but there are other insidious outcomes like perennial student withdrawals and continually high percentages of inadequate target language (TL) proficiency (cxc.org). The views through edutocracy and elite

theory suggest that the continued gap between the democratic education vision and the elitist teaching practice of Anglophone monolingualism in a bi/multidialectal context is a substantive reason why WI education reform has not yet met its primary objective of true universal access.

Equitable Vision vs Inequitable Practice

Plural Literacy Vision vs. Mono-Literacy Practice

The disparity between an equitable vision of plural literacy development and the inequitable practice of the overemphasis of academic mono-literacy emerges as another major theme (Table 2).

Table 2: *Plural Literacy Vision vs. Mono-Literacy Practice*

Caribbean Vision	WI Practice
Plural literacies and competencies: A vision of an education system based on the teaching, assessment and certification of plural literacies and competencies	**Mono-literacy:** An emphasis on developing academic literacy by way of teaching, learning, assessment, and certification

According to the National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS), equity refers to fairness. In education, equity means that every student gets the kinds of opportunities and resources required depending on their specific learning situations and needs (NSHSS, 2021). This is different from equality, which is synonymous with sameness, so that every student gets the same resources and opportunities, like school funding, quality and abundant materials and facilities, and quality instruction (NSHSS, 2021). Equity and equality in the WI context, would look like that espoused in 1997 when the CARICOM Council of Human and Social Development approved the regional Vision of the Ideal Caribbean Person strategy. CARICOM heads proposed that through Caribbean education, the ideal Caribbean person should demonstrate multiple literacies, independent and critical thinking, question beliefs and practices of past and present and bring this all to bear on problem solving (Jules & Williams, 2015). This vision is at odds with the reality of an entrenched bias towards academic literacy (Layne, 1999; Coates, 2012; Brissett, 2021), while educators and assessment bodies continue to complain that students do not think critically (Jules, 2010). For example, Brissett (2021) speaks to the teach-to-test approach employed in Barbados which limits development of analytical and critical thinking skills (p. 20). Tsang et al (2002) contend that four CARICOM territories under their review "need to promote the acquisition of problem-solving and critical thinking skills" (p. 29). Correspondingly, Watson & Watson (2014) lament that the system is content, and discipline focused, emphasizing letter grades to compare students rather than identifying their individual capabilities. WI students therefore need to develop other kinds of literacies besides those promulgated in schools through an academized curriculum.

The over-emphasis of academic pedagogy aligns squarely with ideologies of elitism. In the Caribbean, inequity persists because inequality persists due to elite persistence, and elite education perpetuates inequality (Khan, 2016). For instance, WI educrats, in practice, support the view that the intellectual is best qualified to lead, and by extension, academic grades are the best indicator of intellectualism, so it is unsurprising that an academic school system is organized to facilitate an academic elite selection process. Simultaneously, educrats argue that WI education is a meritocratic system which gives all a fair chance of selection because school success is an indicator of

personal deservedness, rewarding individual ability and efforts, not wealth or privilege (Wiederkehr et al., 2015). Educrats cleverly contend that if the playing field is levelled through educational access, but students are still failing despite having the same content, instruction, and assessment, then the problem rests with the students' inabilities. The argument seems plausible until one unpacks its complexity through a sharper focus of the plantation pedagogy lens, which illuminates a conflict of a foreign Europeanized, mono-cultural, mono-linguistic, one-size-fits all education system (Jules, 2015; Tsang et al., 2002) within a multicultural, non-White, bi/multidialectal space. Furthermore, an elongated view through the elite theory illuminates the blind spots which expose powerful external forces impacting learning outside of school walls. These include academically high performing schools with better resources due to their wealthier demographic, which privilege students to richer and more diverse learning environments and experiences that expand their linguistic and intellectual repertoire. Additionally, having more access to financial resources means these students receive extra tutoring from the best certified teachers in the field to prepare them for national and regional exams. Yet, the ability of the elite to have the masses "buy in" to the concept that education is the way out of poverty and that everyone receives a fair education means that as a society "[o]ur continued delusion that we live in a meritocracy masks any dissenting view" (Cosslett, 2019, para 5). Meritocracy is just another elite ideology to assuage the fears of the majority, so they feel less oppressed by an educational system packaged as freedom from their woeful economic circumstances. Document analysis viewed through elite theory shows that meritocratic espousal is a tool used by educrats for maintaining the status quo at a time when colonial ideology of control, through education, has shifted from undignified complete subjugation to a more palatable elite co-optation (Viegi, 2016). Education reform in the hands of educrats will not consider that equity (fairness) cannot allow for sameness of language, curricular content, teaching methodology and assessment in effectively addressing issues of culturally and socially diverse learners with varying competencies and intelligences, varying access to school language and learning opportunities. A focus on *sameness* (equality) in WI education reform, has yet to result in a *fair* (equitable) outcome for the disadvantaged masses.

The narrative of meritocracy illustrates that two things can be true at once. Educrats can advance meritocracy, equality and social responsibility while simultaneously supporting privilege, disenfranchisement, and self-interest. To illustrate, educrats who head publicly funded educational institutions can justify educating their children in private institutions, believing that the institutions they themselves manage are too poorly equipped to offer their children educational advantages. Educrats are therefore unmotivated to improve the poorly functioning public education system because they are privileged to withdraw from it at will. Still, grass-roots communities (the most adversely affected) will not easily oust educrats, so it behooves these communities to find where educrats' self-interests align with national interests (DiCaprio, 2012), and engage them for the majority benefit (Tarp, 2012).

Document analysis of the issue of educational equity creates a narrative around an outcome of blurred idealistic Caribbean visions regarding plural literacies. It reads as a tragedy of reforms which reinforce an ideology of schooling as academic literacy, a mere vestige of racial, and I might add, classist discrimination, which reiterate questions around the role of education for the non-academically inclined/interested majority (Tejeda et al., 2003). It is reasonable to conclude, based on a reading of the documents through the edutocracy and elite theories, that if these instituted education reforms *principally* advocate for plural literacies, but the system consistently and contrastively over-emphasis academic literacy practices, then the reforms fail to meet their objectives and must be deemed unsuccessful.

Vision of Caribbean Community vs Practice of Education for Singularity

Inner-Directed Caribbean Identity vs Outer-Directed Westernized Identity

Reform documents speak to a developmental mission to grow Caribbean community through an education to create the ideal Caribbean person, but the reality could not be more divergent. WI schools inculcate singularity and self-achievement through "murderous academic competition" (Layne, 1999), resulting in an education which orient students towards western capitalist values (Bewaji, 2008; Brissett, 2018). A cohesive reading of the data conveys that WI reform initiatives fail to meet the objective of creating the ideal Caribbean person because they have been reduced to obscure written rhetoric, tucked away in official reports, educational plans, strategies, white papers, green papers, and policies (Jules & Williams, 2015). The aforementioned 1997 CARICOM regional educational development strategy entitled "Vision of the Ideal Caribbean Person" is such an example. Three years on (2000), rather than speaking to outcomes, the Inter-American Development Bank report reiterates Caribbean governments' *hopes* of implementing this strategy through an education training system to promote social cohesion, historical and cultural heritage, strong sense of [Caribbean identity] and self-esteem (Tsang et al., 2002, p. 44). Twenty-two years later (2022), the reality is that the vision of this ideal Caribbean person has been blurred by schooling that creates Westernized, outward looking citizens (Bewaji, 2008; Hackett, 2004), focused on migrating to the Western metropoles for economic 'salvation' (table 3).

Table 3: *"Caribbeanization" vs. Westernization*

Caribbean Vision	WI Practice
Culturally Inner-directed: Vision of education which provides a strong basis for understanding and celebrating Caribbean cultural identity as part of a Caribbean community	**Culturally outer-directed**: Education which orients students towards western education, western employment, culture, goods and services considered superior in comparison to African/Caribbean counterparts

Though the link between education and the labor market is important in the Caribbean (Beckles & Richards-Kennedy, 2021; Brissett, 2021) and global context, it supports a fundamentally flawed view of WI education as merely preparation for the job market. Learning therefore becomes decentred, replaced by chasing credentials (Lakes & Carter, 2011) to acquire employment. Such views work at cross-purposes with the notion of a Caribbean education that promotes and celebrates plural literacies, beyond economic gains (Tsang et al., 2002), an education that foregrounds socio-psychological well-being rooted in cultural identity to encourage self-worth and self-esteem. If the annual regional education reports are to be instructive, then Caribbean examination results erode students' self-esteem. According to the IADB (2017), in 2015, 48% in the region failed Math, 39% English and 26% the sciences. Notably, these figures do not capture those who obtained the lowest passing grade, which has deeper implications. In concrete individual terms, only 6.1% of Barbadian students managed to get 4 passes in a single sitting; typically, students sit for 7 or 8 subjects. These results meant that 67% of school leavers in 2015 were unqualified for work in various sectors and for tertiary level education level (IADB, 2017). This is *not* a confidence booster for these examinees. Such figures outline a vision of empty rhetoric. In reality,

some twenty years later, the idealized vision of the Caribbean person, *through education*, appears more akin to examination failure and lack of self-esteem.

Through the microscope of edutocracy, a picture emerges of WI schooling to create a "westernized global citizen", quite contrary to the vision of the ideal Caribbean person. The modern picture of the education system resembles a clone of colonialism whereby the strategy for addressing current educational problems is (1) looking at how a similar problem has been addressed in the mother country, or those of its Western counterparts, (2) adopting that solution and (3) adapting it for local circumstances (Miller, 1984) without implicatory analysis of the objectivity of Western knowledge (Bewaji, 2008; McQuaid, 2009). In fairness, WI governments walk a tight rope as they attempt to balance education visions alongside targets set by global western agencies funding their reforms (Jules, 2015; Miller, 2014; Tsang et al., 2002), but "the continued dependence on donor aid has created a development dependency upon donors to fund projects" (Jules & Williams, 2015, p. 288). This means that there is a vicious cycle in which WI governments typically depend on culturally divergent western ideas and financing to combat Caribbean education issues. They justify tapping into the West's riches as a means of preparing globalized citizens, while paradoxically heralding a need for an education to create authentic Caribbean citizens. A paradox of aiming for globalization without ever mastering the previous stage of regionalization, which ironically will better position the Caribbean for survival in the globalization process (Jules, 2010), surfaces through the lens of dependency. WI education, through this lens, reads as a system working against its own vision by circumventing, and hence invalidating issues of Caribbean identity as part of the globalization narrative.

There is a more insidious dependency than the economic, (Best, 1968; Levitt, 2005), though still related. The economic theory of dependency constructs an account of the producer providing raw materials for the manufacturer who resells to the producer, now as consumer. The producer is entrapped between getting the raw material sold for revenue, but also satisfying a need to acquire the finished product (Bristol, 2010). The processes of WI education can be similarly understood. The raw material is analogous to WI students' unfiltered, pure, creative talents on first entering school. Throughout schooling they become manufactured, 'refined', changed by the westernized educative system that distorts and confuses their thinking about things indigenous, which the scholarly discourse describes as anti-traditionalism, intellectual hegemony, and education of whiteness (Viegi, 2016; Bewaji, 2008; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). The consequence, I argue, is that through westernized education WI students buy back into the buy-in of Western superiority of ideas, cultures, and services. For the academically proficient, the result is regional brain drain (Jules, 2015; Williams, 2012; George, 2016) as academics pursue Western tertiary education, and lured by its lucrative job prospects, opt to reside outside the region. For those who cannot enter the western space through academic prowess, they may devise a plan, legally or otherwise, to migrate for a more economically secure future. In this way, WI education teaches students to become dependent on the West as an economic savior.

When the inner plantation and plantation pedagogy lenses are applied to this identity issue within the education context, the picture becomes more unsettling. There are scenes depicting a poor sense of the African indigenous self, a disdain for things African (Bewaji, 2008; Thiong'o, 1981) and a view that everything local is inferior to the colonizer's way of life (Viegi, 2016). This amounts to a pedagogy of oppression and hopelessness, an "educational practice [that] is essentially a 'black' practice of whiteness… implemented within the local educational arena" (Bristol, 2012, p. 72). In essence, this is the replica of a colonial education which aimed to establish a worldview and a view of self and community *for* people of African descent through a subversive

curriculum based on the "objectivity" of European knowledge (London, 2002). I imagine that this is perhaps what Thiong'o (1981) referred to as "psychological violence of the classroom" (p. 9), perpetrated by European values and visions in the curriculum. When I gaze through the inner plantation lens, I also see a picture of psychological *self-inflicted violence*, an outright cultural identity battle, which did not begin until the point at which the African body and mind intersected with the ideologies of the creolized school. The result is a confusion of ideology; for example, the use of the home versus school language in the school setting becomes an internal badge which labels students as either articulate speakers or dunces, as those speaking properly versus those speaking badly. Labels previously unused as part of the home community narrative, but which now psychologically confuse, degrade, and scar many initially curious, active, precocious children who within the school context become silent, disinterested, compliant and sometimes passively aggressive. Reforms do not earnestly address this issue of cultural (mis)identity, which is necessary in breaking the cycle of negative self-fulfilling prophecy inherited by many slave descendants in this region.

The proposed outcome of Caribbean education reform aimed at creating a Caribbean identity has not adequately met its objective. Instead, the narrative shows that rather than creating the ideal Caribbean person, WI education constructs an ideologically confused and culturally conflicted people (Hackett, 2004). One group scoffs at "their traditional heritage as a consequence of their ignorance of this heritage and the intellectual and cultural captivity engendered by the insidious indoctrinative brainwashing occasioned by the new educational exposure", while the other becomes "an ingratiating Africana intelligentsia, who are forever grateful to the Western (mis)educationists and…are now dedicated to the task of forever deriding and disrespecting their own cultural heritage" (Bewaji, 2008, pp. 12-13). The marginalized group however is more adversely affected. They are unable to finance alternatives to this compulsory education which offers little non-academic content to acquire meaningful skills for employment or entrepreneurship to increase their chances of upward social mobility (Soling, 2017). Additionally, the socio-psychological consequence of interacting with this creolized system disadvantages both groups. By promoting a westernized education of self-achievement and individualization, *all* are cheated of an opportunity to learn about their "civic consciousness, a sense that we live life embedded in community and nation and that the essence of the admirable life is community before self" (Brooks, 2018, para. 14), aligning with true integrationist and globalist education visions and practices as outlined by the Caribbean vision.

Conclusion

It is not within the scope of this research to provide solutions, but rather to outline the outcomes of Caribbean education reform from its inception in the 1950s to present, and through the lenses of edutocracy and elite theory, to provide possible reasons for these outcomes. I do not claim to provide an exhaustive list of outcomes or rationales, but I do contend that utilizing the edutocracy and elite theories provides a clearer understanding of the debate, which depicts conceptualizations of Caribbean visions and colonial practices on a collision course in the education reform drama (fig. 3). To answer research question one, the outcomes of education reform are as follows: 1. Document analyses reveal that Caribbean governments espouse an education that targets all Caribbean people (mass education), essentially, an investment in the human potential of Caribbean people, but they practice financing higher education through scholarships *only* for the academically gifted (*selective education*). This can be read as a capital investment in the schooling

of the scholarly (fig. 3), which begs the question as to the role of education for the non-academic. 2. Reformists also promote a vision of increased access to education, but students are denied access to the school's curriculum because they lack proficiency in the school's language, and until now, there has been no real effort to create programs which use the vernacular as a bridge over to English, so *students fail to acquire English proficiently and they fail to grasp the curriculum delivered through that language*. 3. Reform documents speak to a vision of an education of equity and equality, such as growing students' potential through the development of multiple competencies/literacies; yet *there is an over-emphasis on academic literacy* in the teaching, learning, assessment, and certification of content. 4. There has been reform aimed at "Caribbeanization," but instead *students have become oriented to western values*.

   To answer research question two, *there has been little substantive change created by WI education reform initiatives* over the decades. Firstly, this is because the reform objectives embodied in education vision and mission statements are disengaged from the practices they hope to affect. Secondly, reform strategies address the concrete systems and processes of education while overlooking the abstract ideologies of the people behind them which may be an inhibitive force to successful implementation. Thirdly, reforms do not directly address the conflict between the visions of democracy, equity and community that they espouse, and the educational realities of elitism, inequity and indoctrination of singularity. Fourthly, reforms appear as vague meaningless rhetoric which cannot be easily concretized or implemented. Finally, reform measures attempt to address the inequitable educational outcomes with little consideration for the inequitable forces (exogenous and endogenous) that create them, such as the guise of equity and equality through an elite manipulation of meritocracy. In short, the colonial ideologies currently embedded in education, conflict with the Caribbean vision which is struggling to emerge beyond the WI practices, processes and people in the education sector as detailed in figure 3. The questions for future research therefore become: How can these current findings directly address the gaps in WI education reform, and what strategies can be used to engage the educrat in a meaningful education reform process?
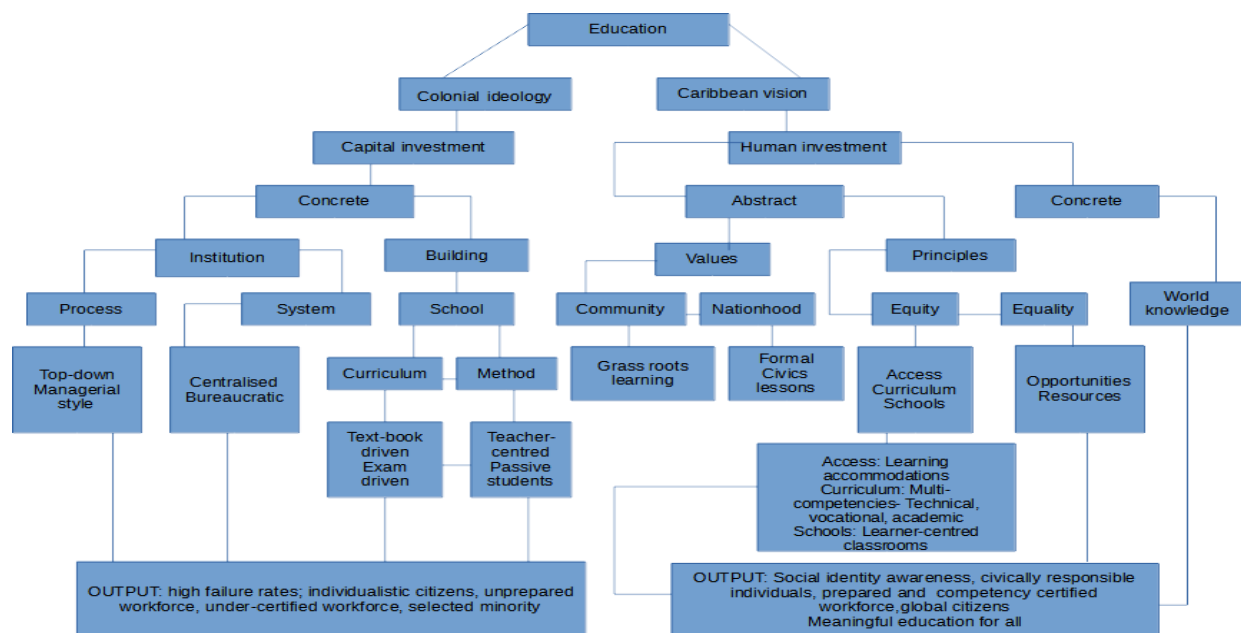
Figure 3: *Colonial and Caribbean Conceptualizations of Education*

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Appendix A: *CARICOM Nations*

Member States	*Associated Members
Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago	Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands

*Not yet independent from Britain; hence, cannot access full member status

Appendix B: *Databases and Research Results*

KEY WORDS	Scopus	WOS	ERIC	SD	DO AJ	JSTOR	GS 2010- 2022	RG	WC
Elite education	16, 745	52, 361	1819	37,829	61	32,354	1,740, 000	NG*	64, 364
Caribbean edu- cation	6458	51, 949	916	22, 771	30	107, 830	610, 000	NG	46, 390
C'bb education reform	6852	57,974	61	3800	9	36,534	76,300	NG	3624
C'bb education vision/mission	7730	53, 406	11	3539	8	37,825	94, 400	NG	2647
Colonial educa- tion	6647	53,136	2048	23,912	670	363,12 6	915,00 0	NG	80, 350
edutocracy	0	1	2	0	2	0	4	2	7

*NG= search results not given, but several publications appear

WOS: Web of Science
ERIC: Education Resources Information Center
SD: Science Direct
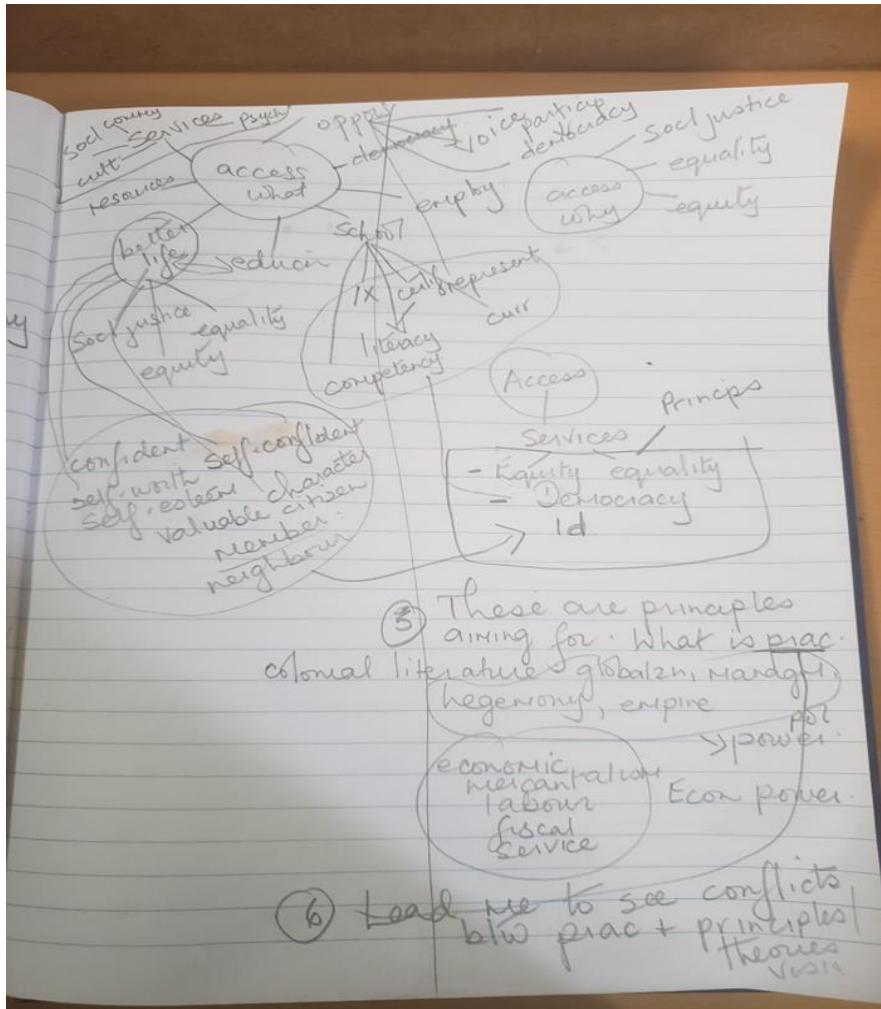DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals
JSTOR: Journal Storage
GS: Google Scholar
RG: ResearchGate: under each category
WC: WorldCat

Appendix C: *Portion of my Thematic Scribbles*

Appendix D: *Notes of my Thought Process to Explain Thematic Scribbles*

1. I start by asking reform WHAT? Looked at the time-period pre-independence to independence, so reform elite education to mass education. This was about access.

2. Why reform: most documents indicated to create a Caribbean person, move away from colonialism. Was elite education achieving this: No. People moving up social ladder and forgetting those at bottom. What was elite education creating: anti-traditionists (tension between indigenous and modernization); individualism (self-achievement vs community belonging), classism: the academic vs the vocational. Tensions/conflicts building

3. What was colonial/Caribbean vision for education based on documents: Colonial= words like selection, sorting, classifying, control. Caribbean: community, identity, life-long learning, skills, competencies. Showing that visions were different. Yet same outcomes: poor-quality education, inequity, inequality; poor exam results, lack of retention, poor certification rates etc. I look back at the reason for reform=ACCESS. Construct thematic tree (seen in photo). Looked at access to what, and its expected results: words like education, schooling, resources, services, opportunities, competency, certification, better-life, equality, equity, confidence, self-worth, good neighbours, good citizens; sense of belonging featured as sub-themes from readings, and my own thinking. Look at what connected some of these sub-themes. I see 3 major themes like equity/social justice; democracy; sense of community. These are principles the Caribbean vision aims for, so what are the educational practices? Notice from my readings, classroom observations and recollecting my own experiences, that practices (over-emphasis on curriculum, texts, assessment, rote learning etc.) are very colonial/traditional in nature. Immediately can see issue of conflict between contemporary educational principles/visions and colonial/traditional practice as the overarching theme.