

UNIT 8

Education in the Caribbean (with Gender)

Overview

Much of the discussion in this unit builds on your understanding of theoretical perspectives in sociology and your knowledge of current affairs as these relate to the critical review of education. The discussion of education is a consideration relevant to gender in the Caribbean. We will not start with just overviewing the status of education in the Caribbean but, rather, we will jump right into a heavy analytical frame. We want to start talking about education in the Caribbean from the social construction of gender and how this created a perception that facilitated streaming of females and males into certain subject areas. This practice over the years had implications for the levels of contribution women made to certain occupations in the labour market. It also reinforced inequalities between men and women in respect of earnings. For example, women and men could perform the same job functions but women earn less than their male counterparts. An important part of what we are considering here is, also, the informal education that reinforces cultural perceptions of superiority instead of an appreciation for equality and equity.

There have been many changes to the content and structural arrangements in education, as there have been for gender in development in the Caribbean. This was a direct result of the drive for social development in the early 1990s, catapulted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) thrust and measured by the achievement of Goals 2 and 3. The MDGs, which can be regarded as a response to a failed emphasis on economic growth policies, attempted to stimulate the economic development of countries and were replaced in 2015 by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Of specific relevance are SDGs 4 and 5. You can look for information on these online but the point is that there is a global view of formal education which has impacted, and continues to impact, national policy for access to, quality and completion of education by citizens of countries. This global view is influenced by rights based, needs based empowerment and protection perspectives.

As we enter this discussion, we must do so recognizing that education in the Caribbean is a controversial issue. It is contextualised and understood as a key socializing agent for social order and continuity with economic production, even as the Caribbean is faced with challenges related to both areas. Understanding education becomes more complex when we look within our own countries and those across the globe, and examine variables such as gender, age, people living with special needs, ethnicity, geography within country and socio-economic status. These variables impact the citizen's opportunities for social mobility through the education system. In the globalized society in which we live, formal education is also characterized by a level of education in information communication

technologies, as well as, breaking digital divides experienced within and between countries. If we drill down to the policies and provisions offered by Caribbean governments, these are all considerations when exploring education today and require cross-cutting, evidence-driven policies, which will appropriately prioritize and allocate resources.

Based on the variables aforementioned, there is a range of methods that can be used to examine education. In this unit you will be exposed to a few of them.

Learning Objectives

1. By the end of this Unit you will be able to:
2. Develop a social profile on education in a Caribbean country with a view to understanding how gender issues are treated
3. Discuss the contribution of Caribbean thinkers to education in the Caribbean.
4. Critically review the sociological perspectives on education.
5. Evaluate the contemporary situation of education in the Caribbean in respect treatment of gender.

This Unit is divided into two Sessions as follows:

Session 8.1: Sociological Perspectives on Education

Session 8.2: Education and Gender in the Caribbean



Readings & Resources

Required Readings

Mustapha, N. (2013). *Sociology for Caribbean Students* (2nd edition). Module 2, Chapter 7, pp. 180-210. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers. Available via [UWInC](#).

Recommended Readings

Barrow, C., & Reddock, R. (2001). *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*. Section 10, Chapter 44. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers. Available via [UWInC](#).

- Blom, A., & Hobbs, C. (2008). *School and Work in the Eastern Caribbean: Does the Education System Adequately Prepare Youth for the Global Economy?* Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications. Available via [UWIlInC](#).
- Brown, J., & Johnson, S. (2008). Childrearing and child participation in Jamaican families. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 16 (1). Available via [UWIlInC](#) or [here](#).
- Craigwell, R., Bynoe, D., & Lowe, S. (2012). The effectiveness of government expenditure on education and health care in the Caribbean. *International Journal of Development Issues*, 11(1), 4-18. Available via [UWIlInC](#) at <http://search.proquest.com/library.open.uwi.edu/docview/1011597701?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=42537>
- Mohammed, P. (2002). *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press. Part III & IV. Available via [UWIlInC](#) or [Google Books](#).
- OpenStax. (2016). *Introduction to Sociology 2E*. Sections 16.1-16.2. OpenStax CNX. May 18, 2016. Available at <http://cnx.org/contents/AgQDEnLI@6.21:VdqlvHGw@5/Education-around-the-World>
- Prendergast, P., & Hylton, G. (2006). Bringing the Male Voice, Perspective and Issues to the Gender Agenda: The task of male organizations in the Caribbean. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52(2), pp. 14-21,220-221,226-227. Available via [UWIlInC](#) at <http://search.proquest.com/library.open.uwi.edu/docview/221239543>
- Quinlan, R. (2006). Gender and Risk in a Matrifocal Caribbean Community: A View From Behavioral Ecology. *American Anthropologist*, 108(3), 464-479. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3804623>

You are also advised to locate and read: Additional papers relevant to the topics covered.

Session 8.1

Sociological Perspectives on Education

Introduction

In any discussion on education, we should not lose focus of the two types of education – formal and informal – within this unit. Both types are important to relations between people in the Caribbean and integration into the economy. Through informal education we learn about the expectation held by others of us. We develop an understanding of meaning behind actions through interactions on the playground, in the classroom and workplace, for example. In the formal sense, our grasp of education is measured by how much we are able to acquire and the certification of our knowledge through rewards such as graduating from an educational institution which should bring us entry into the market place where we would work to earn a living. The idea that we learn through school-going, skills and attitudes needed by the capitalist economy, would find favour with the Marxists. We are, after all, conditioned to appreciate deadlines, accept hierarchy and authority and in the context of an industrial society, education provides a supply of labour that will keep wages down. There is a correspondence between education and the society and the economy. Education is part of a framework, a system contributing to the supposed well-being of the whole which is society.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 8.1

Read pages 180-200 of Mustapha (2013) and then respond to the instructions outlined below. (Your reading should end just before the section entitled, Education and Gender.)

1. In your own words provide a critical review of the sociological perspectives of education he identifies. Your review should compare the main ideas of the functionalist, conflict and interactionist schools. When you are done, share your review with your colleagues in the designated forum. Comment on the review posted by at least one colleague.
2. Reflect on the critical review you have written of the theoretical perspectives. What are the potential gaps in those perspective you would imagine a feminist or someone concerned with gender would notice? Share your thoughts in the designated forum.
3. In your own words provide a definition for meritocracy and provide two criticisms of the concept from scholarly references.

Did you take note of the ways in which education responds to the push and pull factors in the society? Had you ever considered the possibility of a hidden curriculum in the education system? Are your own experiences of streaming and tracking/banding better explained by the theories proffered by the Interactionist Perspective? Hopefully, you are now more aware of the varied cross-cutting issues which are embedded in a system which is designed to maintain social order, however this may be defined.

Session 8.1 Summary

There are few points we can take away from our work in this session.

1. Education is formal and informal.
2. Perspectives on the sociology of education have been largely around the classical perspectives but there has been a growing gendered analysis appreciation of it.
3. The rights based approach to educational provision, in the formal sense gained tremendous traction with the social development thrust of the 1990s which has placed pressure on governments globally, to meet universal standards of educational access and provision.

Session 8.2

Education in the Caribbean

Introduction

The previous session provided a foundation for viewing education with a sociological lens and in the learning activity we did a critical review of the ideas of sociological thinkers. Having consolidated all of these thoughts we should now deepen our reflection and focus our attention on a discussion about the current state of affairs with education in the Caribbean.

Mustapha (2013) puts forward the argument that education in the Caribbean could be examined through three phases: pre-emancipation, post emancipation and the era of political independence. These are important political periods but based on Mustapha's own account of political independence and education, it would perhaps be more practical to break down the last era some more and appreciate a fourth which we can refer to as the Human and Sustainable Development Period. This is a sub- period itself within this era of globalization and is characterized by a collective approach and wider consensus on how development will be realized. This consensus on how development should happen has prompted the revision of national policies and pushed them to be sensitive to social protection systems that enable better and more regular school attendance of children from households living below the poverty line. This is just one example. The swell in support for this broad consensus on education and how development should happen has been evident for the last sixteen years and is mobilized through pressure on national governments and the consequences of an inter dependent world.

Still, education in the Caribbean continues to face obstacles at structural and micro levels. Migration of qualified teachers, financing of infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms are just some. Citizens in different Caribbean countries face discrimination based on area of residence and social class background. The pervasive character of violence has also threatened attendance of children to schools located in communities that are hotbeds for violence. This reality has signaled and witnessed the implementation of safe school policies and programmes implemented by the state.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 8.2

Based on Mustapha's (2013) account of the periods of education in the Caribbean, create brief notes in your own words on the changes that occurred with the advancement into the different periods. What has changed and what has remained the same? Has your country seen any of those changes?

Share your findings about the changes and the things which have remained stable in your country in the designated forum. Comment on the postings of at least two of your peers the forum.

Gender Issues in Education in the Caribbean

Of course, a major issue that has had held the attention of Caribbean people over the last two decades has been the extent to which males are perceived to be missing in action in the education system especially at the secondary and tertiary levels.

This focus has been sharpened in the context of a recognition of the ways in which gender ideologies have worked in various ways against women and girls and efforts at the international, regional and national levels to provide remedies. The provision of some of these remedies has also forced attention on the status of men in the education system and within the labour market. It is not uncommon to hear people in the region speak of matter of the marginalisation of the black man who is seen as being "in crisis", "at risk" and marginal. The vulnerability of males, and black males in particular, is currently at the centre of a discourse prevalent within popular culture and enjoying a growing appeal among social scientists (Parry, 2004). The discussions and the focus are representative of the concern, both internationally and regionally, that males are increasingly becoming 'vulnerable, marginalised and at risk'. One reason proffered for the state of the black male is the breakdown in family, the nuclear family in particular. Families within which males are not permanent residents and relationships seem, on the face of it, at least, to revolve around adult women are characterized as mother-centred or matrifocal. The absence of a father is the explanation offered for the (perceived) poorly socialized boy child who is, therefore, at a disadvantage in the society. The model of perfect family is one with identifiably differential gender roles. In such a model, social gender duality would be headed by a two adults. There would be the modest and obedient female and an aggressive and virile male. In a context in which female values were consistent with respectability and male values were consistent with reputation, the mother-centred family could not properly socialize the young boy into his full gender role.

Men were, hence, perceived as being marginal to the family, accounts for the understanding we now have of the 'problems' that we see with the Caribbean family. Even worse, men are currently being seen as victims of women since educational successes of women and the educational failures of men are being seen as two sides of the same coin. In other words, males fail because females do well. In fact, in some Caribbean territories the education policy attempts to "fix" the imbalance by discriminating against males in order to compensate for the poor performance of males (Parry, 2004).



LEARNING ACTIVITY 8.3

Read Mustapha (2013) Education and Gender pp. 200-202 for a useful synopsis of the various elements of this discussion. Then respond to the instructions outlined below.

In the human development period, some countries have made more strides in improving formal education. In this learning activity **select a CARNCOM or OECS country other than your own** and provide information for a three-year period on each of the following descriptions listed below. You may utilize sources such as World Bank data bases, data from National Statistics Offices, official reports from government agencies to name a few. Be sure to indicate the source of your information and other relevant referencing information.

- % of males versus females enrolled in primary educational institutions
- % of males versus females enrolled in secondary/high school institutions
- % of males versus females enrolled in tertiary level institutions (university, vocational)
- % males versus females completing primary school
- % of males versus females completing secondary/high school.

What conclusions have you drawn about the educational attainment and achievement of men and women in the Caribbean country selected? What are the sociological implications that you are able to identify from this review.

Share your findings and notes with your colleagues in the designated forum. Comment on the posting from at least one colleague who reviewed a country other than the one you selected.

Session 6.2 Summary

An understanding of education in the Caribbean with attention to gender requires a reflection on the Caribbean society before emancipation, when the education offering was limited and then, post emancipation and post-independence, when there was some improvement in access. Since pre-independence, and certainly in the last decade, Caribbean countries have made significant strides in educational provision. But there are equality and equity issues that need to be identified and weeded out to lessen the inequality between groups. The consequences of the inequities are transferred from educational experiences and filter into the labour market.

UNIT SUMMARY

In this unit we have recognized the continued importance of formal and informal education and also that English-speaking Caribbean societies have a shared history of colonialism that influenced educational systems and for some time restricted Caribbean citizens as education was largely seen as a function of reinforcing the status quo. There has been a change in educational attainment and provision by different groups in Caribbean societies since their independence but with that has come new demands. In this unit we also examined the theoretical perspectives and accepted that these have been useful but cultural differences urge a Caribbean perspective on education.

In the next unit we will focus our attention on religion in the Caribbean.

References

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