

**GROUNDING CARIBBEAN EDUCATORS AND RESEARCH(ERS):
DECOLONIAL REFLECTIONS WITH PROFESSOR JOEL WARRICAN**

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Abstract: *This paper uses a life history approach to reflect on the teaching, research and service work of Professor S. Joel Warrican (S.J.W), a noted Caribbeanist within the Organisation for Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the wider Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Known internationally for his research in literacies, S. J.W deploys his intellectual leverage to call for a Caribbean way of doing and thinking which serves to undermine colonial education inheritances and disrupt education for democracy and social justice. The authors use an in-depth semi-structured interview schedule to interrogate the interplay between biography, career trajectory, intellectualism and service. Through this conversation, we highlight Caribbean literacy, inequality, epistemology and decoloniality as important aspects of his work and contribution. We use these snippets to ground discussions on and directions for Caribbean educators and research(ers). We join with S.J.W in the call for higher education practitioners to advance knowledge systems and capacities that are both relevant to context, and that are converted to address the broader socio-economic and political challenges of the region.*

Keywords: *Caribbean; Decolonial; Research*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, universities within the region have increasingly been guided by global influences that continue to shape the material and cultural aspect of knowledge, curriculum, and assessment (Enslin & Hedge, 2023). The internationalisation of higher education has “amplified the systems and structures of the colonial past” (Ibid, p. 9). In such cases, the competitiveness and implications of global rankings emerge as implicit within the process of coloniality, as a continuation and reconfiguration of colonial structures and power relations through institutional practices. While Caribbean institutions have been implicated within this practice and have used this process to evaluate and market institutional selling points, they have also become steeped within the broader political and economic agendas on which these practices have been founded.

These global institutional realities suggest that decoloniality, as an aspect of transforming higher education contexts and practices, is yet to be firmly grounded and extensively addressed in the Caribbean. This struggle unfolds as a historical feature within Caribbean systems of education. If we locate the decolonial agenda in the early post-independence work of Dr Eric Williams (first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago), then we can trace the many debates on the challenges of colonial education. The legacies of colonialism on the education system of the region have been well documented both historically and within the contemporary period (see Edward, 1971; Bacchus, 1990; Blair, 2013; Bristol, 2012). These studies demonstrate the extent to which the education systems of the region have emerged out of colonial ideology and practice, but also as an exclusionary, hierarchical, acritical, and oppressive practice that denies freedom, identity and contextual relevance. There is no doubt that this history and the continued forms of entanglements within the neoliberal period shape a dysfunctional reality where closed and authoritative systems reduce the possibility for improvements in the relevance of competencies, knowledges and practices within the Caribbean (Hickling-Hudson, 2004).

We can appreciate, therefore, the historical call for inner and intellectual decolonisation as critical aspects of reconstructing and re-centering the histories, lived realities, and futures of the region (Williams, 1946; Bacchus, 2005). Bacchus (1994, 2005), we note, has been critical of educational agendas and results as legitimising colonial configurations and outcomes. In his later work, he cautions, for instance, against educational inheritances with attention to the realities of small states and with some sensitisation that we “are usually ‘takers’ rather than ‘makers’ of the world economic policies” (Bacchus, 2008, p. 141). In assessing the advances of this

decolonial agenda, we also recognise and locate the ways in which these colonial agendas continue within mainstream developmental praxes, educational ideologies, and trajectories (Esnard, 2014). Situating these forms of coloniality requires that we unpack some of the complexities and contradictions within post-colonial education and that we remain critical of the emerging thrusts, discourses, and directions for and around educational developments within the region.

We recognise the many shifts between the reference to educational transformation, reform, post-colonial education and decolonisation as all divergent aspects of this aspirational consciousness and a vision for contextual relevance within the education system. Through these conversations we attend to the potential for decolonising discourse about schooling and educational practice, and the need for educational interrogations that render visible the productive and post-colonial processes within historical and current agendas (Lavia, 2006, 2007). We underscore, therefore, the reality that while there continues to be a call for decolonising educational contexts and practices, there are still few explorations that take forward the approaches through which these are embedded within culturally specific knowledge systems and broader ways of life (Nelson & Parchoma, 2018). Given the broader mandates around education for social transformation and the significance of this post-colonial leaning to effective epistemic decolonisation (de Carvalho & Flórez-Flórez, 2014), this paper centres the experiences and reflections of a Caribbean educator to assess and underscore some of the realities of decolonialising educational systems and scholarship.

Biography, Research and Community

Opportunities for collegial reflection afford us the occasion to reflect on values in our academic efforts and the impact of these systems and related practices within social and professional spaces. As a starting point, therefore, we recognise the ways in which performative assessments and neoliberal agendas within higher education frame and impact academic work(ers) and institutional research/scholarship (Esnard, 2023). We appreciate that while research occurs on the individual level, these neoliberal agendas are continuously being framed within competitive spaces where academic metrics such as journal impact factor and citations are used to determine the scope and reach of a scholar's work (Ravenscroft et al., 2017). Like Ramani,

Aguinis and Coyle-Shapiro (2022), we remain cautious of using the journal impact factor and the number of citations as central measures of assessing and valuing individual scholarship. We note here that while these are significant indicators of impact, they are also (in)directly shaped by broader politics of citation, knowledge

hierarchies and tribalism that do not provide just measures of the contributions being made through local scholarship.

Through this work, we advance perspectives, insights and achievements of researching and impacting educational spaces, but through the biography of a long standing academic, Caribbeanist, and educator. In doing this work, we explore the biographical outline of Professor S. Joel Warrican (S.J.W), an educator and researcher who has spent years within the area of higher education, doing some of the education policy work that moves the higher education sector forward. Appreciating this intention and the politics of the field, the reflection on the interview is not to measure the impact of his research but to reflect upon the ways in which his biography has, in the first instance, influenced the nature of the work that he has sought to engage in and, in the second, his reflections on grounding Caribbean systems of education and research. In this section, we examine the interconnectivity between biography (career trajectory), identity, practicality, and decoloniality.

S.J.W has been in the field of education for over 30 years, with teaching experience that ranges from kindergarten to tertiary levels. He holds a B.Ed. in Language and Literacy education from The University of the West Indies (UWI), an MPhil in Research Methods and a PhD in Language and Literacy Education, both from the University of Cambridge. In 2016, he was raised to the rank of Professor, with the title Professor of Education (Language, Literacy and Cross-Linguistic Studies). In January 2018, he returned to the School of Education at the Cave Hill campus in the post of Professor of Education. Prof. S. J. W brings a wealth of experience holding different positions of responsibility throughout his career to date, with over 100 scholarly works (books, journal articles, book chapters, technical reports) that reflect his expertise and diverse interests in the field of education. He has also worked on many projects in education at the request of regional governments and has served on the CARICOM Task Force for Teaching and Teacher Education.

The paper centres his life, experiences and insights within the context of transformative practice and systems within the Caribbean region. This life history approach offers a way to capture slices of this journey and to locate the meanings and impacts of critical events and experiences along that trajectory. Oftentimes, this slice of life approach and the type of interviewing solicited through reflection of collective memory, provide intricate details on the relationships, power structures, and experiences that have contextualised the lives and perspectives of individuals. The use of biography here is important to provide insights into the conditions, contexts,

motivations, and influences that have shaped both the person, the positionality, and the career.

In doing this work, however, we recognise oral history is dialogic (Summerfield, 2016). We consequently use a dialogic life history semi-structured interview to allow for a more discursive and collaborative mode of engagement (Barge, 2002) within the communication of his experiences and thinking. This type of interview is used to capture key aspects of one's life as consistent with the slice of life approach within oral history, with attention to major moments in one's professional trajectory. This type of interviewing makes possible the social production and reflection of personal narratives (Tanggaard, 2009). The goal was to draw on specific events and positionalities, which are connected, through the conversation, to wider social and contextual repertoires of discourses that shape the individual and professional life story. Within the broader framework of oral history, the hope was also for the possibility of what Wiesner (2021) describes as a relational dialogic process where deep responsive listening allows for the creation of safe, open, authentic spaces for sharing and reflecting.

For this paper, we capture aspects of this expression below. We reproduce snippets of the conversation between Talia Esnard as the interviewer and SJW as the interviewee, followed by thematic representation of the conversation that was framed by the reflective notes of Laurette Bristol, who served as a critical listener within the process, and supported the dual coding of the interview. The reflective notes, while not used as a part of the data here, supported the articulation of the thematic analysis and critical moments learning for the wider field. We ensured as part of this process, the use of member checking to confirm or adjust, where needed the representation and interpretation of the interview.

The Dialogic Interview

Talia Esnard: We will start by asking you to share a little bit about yourself and to speak somewhat of your history and involvement in education over the years.

Joel Warrican: All right, thanks a lot. I'll start by saying that I've been in education since I was 18 years old ... [when] I taught at a primary school for a year before going to college to become a trained teacher. Since then, I have taught at all levels from early childhood to graduate education. I would like to add that as a child, I was like, an avid reader ... I mean I was raised in a family [with] lots of cousins...there were the readers and the non-readers ... one of my cousins, a boy, got a broken leg and spent a few weeks in the hospital ... [and] there was no television, nothing to do ... you could see he was

bored, and he looked forward to my visit. And the thought that I had at that time [was] ... if I were here ... I would be reading like crazy I think that interest in reading at that age is one of the things that ... led me to do my degree in language and literacy And then I continued that through my graduate work, interrupted by a master's in research methodology. But even as I did that, I grounded the research in literacy ... but later ... when I taught at university level, it came to my realisation that there were some very important things that needed to also be tackled, besides my focus on literacy. And so, I started to consider the bothersome issue of colonialism in its modern form, and how it influences education. So, I was thinking about things like those issues of diversity, equity, and teacher education. So, I've broadened my research to include issues such as race and class in education, especially in the context of colonality and how it affects our education.

Talia Esnard: Thanks for sharing that. What influenced your motivation to read?

Joel Warrican: My father read everything, encouraged me [and] read with me, and questioned me about what I read. I do not think that he believed much in ... censorship. So, the materials were often above my level at the time. He just placed them in a place that would catch my attention, then questioned me about them later. It was also the time of the Black Power movement ... I remember, there was a shop in the village that sold material coming out of Cuba ... he ensured that I just read those materials, and then we would discuss them. I remembered him bringing home left-leaning newspapers that had views that were different from the mainstream. Much of what I read then has become clearer to me now as an adult, but they have clearly shaped my thinking and outlook on life. But along with that, as I told you before, I grew up in a house with lots of cousins. And pretty much we were divided equally: half were boys, and half were girls. And I found that all the girls were reading, but most of the boys, except me, were not. So, my female cousins influenced me significantly ... to the point where I never made a distinction in the type of material that I read ... I just read everything. And that also has helped to shape how I think as a literacy professional. If I go into a classroom, I try not to make a distinction in any way about the suitability of any reading material for either gender group. I know, educators ... say one of the reasons why boys would not read is because the female teachers [are] pushing materials to them that are female orientated. I don't subscribe to that I'm aware it can have an influence, but you must widen children's interests. So back to the question, I would say my father was the primary motivator for me as a reader, and then my cousins ... my female cousins.

Talia Esnard: How many years have you been actively engaging in educational research?

Joel Warrican: So, I started as an undergraduate student in 1996. And I must say from the time I stepped foot in the classroom, as an undergraduate student, my eyes just opened. I had a hunger for learning and for research, so I started showing an interest in research And I think that is what led me to move on later to do a master's in research methods. I was fascinated with research articles and as a result I read journal articles about education ... science, history, economics, and so forth. And I think all that has helped to shape who I am, as an educator ... [and my] interests in research in general. After I completed my PhD, my first job was at a college in 2002, in the British Virgin Islands, and I spent two years at that college before moving to work at The University of the West Indies.... While at the college, I realised that I must be in a space where research is the normal way of being ... that is what makes me tick ... that's the thing that I'm interested in ... I believe in this small Caribbean space ... we must ground ourselves in research data, we are making too many decisions that are not necessarily research based or data driven.... It is quite disastrous.

Talia Esnard: But what would you consider to be the most important piece of work that you've published over the years?

Joel Warrican: Well, I don't think I can look at a single piece of work as the most important work.... In recent times, a few years ago, I published a conceptual paper in *Teachers College Record*, a journal out of Columbia University. That paper is pretty much on moral licensing ... that really comes out of many years of my doing research and thinking why black students [have] been disadvantaged.... I know that there are people who would ask the question, I'm living in a predominantly black region ... my answer to that is that I do not look at blackness just from the Caribbean. I have grounded myself in diasporic education, education about black children anywhere, because we all originate from the same continental source, Africa.... So, this paper on moral licensing is related to black immigrants to the US ... I take the view that, let's say for black immigrants going into the US, moral licensing is applied by a white majority ... what do I mean by moral licensing? It is the whole notion that doing a single good, gives you the license then to do as much bad as you so desire ... so for immigrant children going into the US, the argument seems to be, "You have to be the American way ... and that we have done good ... we have allowed you into our space [so] you should be willing to learn in English ... drop all the things that you have brought from the Caribbean or from Africa ... because we have done you the eternal good.... In fact, once upon a time, you would have ... been a slave in our society. We have changed ... we have free education. If you become a citizen, you can vote, you can participate. So

do it our way.” And I think we see the same thing here in the Caribbean: you hear how politicians brag about the things they have done in education. So, we have built two new schools, introduced a new curriculum, and raised teacher salaries, all of which are good. But then they forget that they still have something called a common entrance exam, which marginalises many children, most of the children ... they forget that 70% of our children are graduating or leaving secondary school without getting five CXCs.... So, by doing whatever they perceive to be good (and quite often what they think is good is not quite good, it does more harm than good), they can then ignore or justify all the bad that is happening.... And they appeal to people who are steeped in colonialism, who have been influenced by colonialism, and the modern-day form of it. Coloniality has been taking over their lives and makes them see things through a Eurocentric lens.

Talia Esnard: What is your vision for the education system in Barbados, and perhaps the wider Caribbean?

Joel Warrican: I would say the establishment of a Caribbean way of seeing the world.... It will be an education that is not solely about individual countries ... but an education that is Caribbean centric. I would like to see the entire Caribbean thinking about where we want our education to go, not each country focusing on themselves ... It is unfortunate that at this stage in our existence, we still seem to be governed by the principle of divide and rule. People do not realise that that the insularity that we have in our region is very much linked to a deliberate colonial policy of how to rule and we find that everybody wants to do things their way.... We always seem to want to walk alone ... even as they go to a meeting, and they talk about walking together, you then hear people putting forward the argument of losing their sovereignty. We must learn to work together to plan an education, to have a Caribbean vision that would then impact Caribbean civilisation ... how we see ourselves as Caribbean people, where we want to be placed in this shrinking global space, what contributions we want to make to the world ... to help to shape that vision and to help to take our young people into that future that we have.... I want to see a region that moves away from acting on whims and fancies, because that is what we do quite often as we make major decisions.

I want to see a region where education sheds itself from coloniality and the influence of colonialism. But how do we do that? Again, it means that we must bring people together ... we must bring the ministries of education together, developmental partners ... even though I'm always careful ... because many of the development partners still have a vision of coloniality that they try to impose on us. But the point is, we need to work together to help shed that cloak of colonialism and coloniality so that we can shape our own vision, so that we can have a Caribbean way of thinking. We can

have young people who are emerging with a Caribbean way ... there is a unified way in which you look at it. When we talk about the Caribbean we will embrace the individual, the community, the region and of course ... not discount everything that is happening outside.... So, we are influenced by what happens in the region, through our own research and our ways of thinking. But of course, we know that we are operating in a global space, and just like all we can share to the world, the world can share with us, just that we do not embrace without good thinking.... So, a region that comes together through education, to build that Caribbean civilisation, to help us to think like Caribbean people who are willing to contribute to the world. So, we are in a global space, without Caribbean particularity, but an outward look, as we want to contribute within the workspace.

Talia Esnard: I can imagine there are many challenges in putting that vision into action.....Based on your experience within the sector ... what are you taking away with you?

Joel Warrican: The truth is, there are days when I become quite disillusioned about where we are going, but I am an eternal optimist. So, I often deliberately shed such thoughts. I have seen some positive things. So, I see, for example, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), through the OECS commission, has a single curriculum and not to say it is flawless ... [but] ... you see where all the countries are working together ... in training of teacher leaders, literacy training, and so forth.... I think these are good signs that unification is happening ... but we still need to do it in a much more systematic way. I do have a concern ... many of our leaders are afraid of research ... I do understand it, because we're living in small, politically volatile states.... We are a very stable region, but we know that little things can help to change a government, that's part of the reality of being a small state ... [but] ... 70% of the children on any of these islands are generally failing ... in the education system; that can be disastrous for a government. So, I believe there are often deliberate policies to try to prevent that data from getting into the hands of people who write about it or air their views about it. And to show that I don't think we have a lot of respect for research in the region, we might be one of the very few places where you have such a major university, The University of the West Indies is a global university of repute, where there is no facility, no funding facility for research ... no governmental space that you can go to at any time that's dedicated to research funding.... If governments can't see the need for research and support, it financially and otherwise then it suggests a level of ignorance that can only help to slow down progress ... I am aware that politics and research don't always sit well together, but we must interrupt the work of politics ... [and become] strategic in how we spend our money.... Governments need to encourage and support research, especially research that can help shape policy and practice.

Through research, we as a region would be in a better position to make decisions that positively impact the lives of young people. We are often quite paternalistic in our decision-making process in education ... for example, we do very little consultation among young people, even though the decisions we make are about their future. I think the time has come that, as we think about education, as we try to move education forward, we bring youth leaders into the space to have that kind of discussion about their future.... Get them to be part of the discussion, part of the think tanks, and so forth.... We pay lip service to youth, only lip service. We talk about how important our youth are, and so forth, but if they're so important, why don't we want to make them a part of the decision making and discussion process?

Talia Esnard: You talk a lot about Caribbean centred research and having that direction to guide us as a people. How do you see CERJ [Caribbean Education Research Journal] as a Caribbean journal advanced in this kind of work?

Joel Warrican: Well, journals like CERJ are very important to get the work done ... but one of the things we've got to be very careful about is that we do not produce journals that people see as [meeting] less than international standards.... What CERJ has done in recent years is to set up a review committee made up of international scholars, ... in the review committee ... there is much more assurance in the global space that a journal of this nature is part of the international scholarly community.... There's always that misinterpretation, that quality means that there's only a 5% acceptance rate or a 10% acceptance rate and so forth. No, you can have a 70% acceptance rate and have a high-quality journal, it is more about the purpose of the journal.... So, CERJ has operated under the philosophy that we help scholars, especially young scholars ... so we take that scaffolding approach, rather than just a rejection, we say this is how we can improve. We can even assign, in some cases, an experienced writer to guide the young scholar to help bring the paper to the standard that we want. In fact, we have a space for young scholars, which we call "Emergent Scholars," so that they can write with an assurance of support. And while we are doing that, we are accepting [that even though we want] to see research in the Caribbean, we are accepting papers from international scholars. So, we are now getting papers [from] international scholars from all over the world ... and although they might be writing about something in their community rather than something that is Caribbean oriented, we can still find it useful.... So, it may not be Caribbean research[ers]. It is still likely that we can learn from them and, for example, apply that same methodology in our setting. What I really like is that we are helping to share the work that we're doing in the Caribbean with the world. We have this space, where if a person is thinking about, you know, what does the Caribbean say about a particular topic, there's a high chance

that you can go to a Caribbean journal and get that answer. So, CERJ is advancing Caribbean research and helping to disseminate.

Talia Esnard: Early on you spoke on the issue of coloniality. However, do you see the quest to maintain an international standard [as] problematic?

Joel Warrican: Right, that's an excellent question. We must know what is international versus what is local or regional means. And the whole issue of coloniality would always be there. But I also like to say, in a practical sense, we live in an international space and the Caribbean is part of that international space. I strongly believe we can have international standards, and still have what I call a Caribbean particularity. So, having a peer review system, with many international peer reviewers, is important. [But] I think that is also important to have Caribbean scholars such as yourselves (Talia Esnard and Laurette Bristol) working in [this] editorial position [for CERJ as an example] to balance this off. And that's why I talk about not being bound to concepts such as acceptance rates. [This also extends to] Caribbean editors [who] should read what the reviewers say to ensure their decisions are not affected by a lack of understanding of our region. It is our duty to be alert to issues of coloniality that may creep into reviewers' responses and decisions and intervene where necessary. That support system for writers that I spoke of earlier is critical in cases such as these to ensure that the Caribbean voice is not lost, to ensure that the work is grounded in the Caribbean but has a global reach. Our job is to ensure that we present a Caribbean way of being and doing and do not allow actions rooted in coloniality to control what we publish. We can take what they have said and ensure that our scholars improve the paper up to a certain standard [but] to maintain what we call the Caribbean-ness about it. So, I think that we are the ones who keep it in balance to make sure that the review, for example, is not done just through ... lenses of coloniality. I think it is very important that we recognise that by having an international panel, if we're not careful, you can have rejections based on certain idiosyncrasies that are linked to coloniality.

Talia Esnard: You have been part of CERJ for quite some time. What would you say would be your lessons learned...and the directions that are needed?

Joel Warrican: The lesson learned is that it is difficult to run a journal on volunteerism. And it's not that people do not want to do it; it's that we are all so busy ... [but] we must find dedicated staff. I also think because of this whole notion of 'publish or perish' some of our Caribbean scholars try to get in more than one article in an issue or submit articles to consecutive issues. I do not think this is good for the image of the scholar or the journal itself. And as a lesson, I've learned that there are

some people who you have to save from themselves, you've got to find a way to discourage them without making them feel as if it is not a space for them to publish. Many of them are young scholars [now making a] way through academia. So you have to be very careful that what you say to them does not take them to the point that they get deflated.... If you're going to be a scholar of any repute, you have to publish both in the Caribbean and internationally, outside of the Caribbean.... I'm practical, I accept that even though we recognise the whole issue of coloniality, and so forth, that in this academic arena, there's some things that must be done, I would like to see us ... take the journal to the point where it gets SCOPUS recognition. I would like to see our journal reach the point that it is given a ranking like a SCOPUS ranking. And one thing I would like to see happen is an advancement in the number of issues and discussion around a particular theme in each issue. So, every year, starting this year, we can have an op ed ... write an opinion piece ... an informed opinion, like a concept paper, out of which we can have discussions ... it could be setting up a blog that is linked to the journal.

An Exploration of Views

This dialogic interview allowed for us to openly explore critical issues that have influenced the positionality and professional trajectories of Prof. S.J.W. Through this section, we focus on key aspects of the conversation, including the importance of literacy, inequality and Caribbean scholarship. These will be addressed in the subsections that follow.

Shaping the Literacy Field

Prof. S.J.W has a keen interest in reading and literacy, which was influenced by his early childhood experiences and family engagements. This early interest is seen as a conditioning force throughout his academic life with “over 30 years teaching experience from kindergarten to tertiary” (S.J. W’s Narrative Bio). Through his leadership, we see him taking on the role of Principal Teacher Educator for the Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT), a regional literacy initiative in the Caribbean with a high reputation and sustained contribution within the sector. His vision for a Caribbean way of thinking and the value of literacy skills is reflected through collaborative publications such as *Education for the Future: Shaking off the Shackles of Colonial Times* (Thompson, Warrican, & Leacock, 2011), which considers the need for educators to interrogate educational paradigms which may be framed within a colonial spectre. In the article S.J.W and his collaborators call for “letting go of nostalgia to do what is best for future generations” (*Ibid*, p. 83). We see this call

reflected through his contributions to the St. Vincent Community College as a Principal, guiding the college through governance, infrastructural and curriculum reform and increasing the visibility of the college through the development of regional and international partnerships (S.J. W's Narrative Bio).

A recognition of the need to build bridges and partnerships across spaces is also reflected in the publication *Fostering True Literacy in the Commonwealth Caribbean: Bridging the Cultures of Home and School* (Warrican, 2015). We see the continuing interest in literacy but note that in navigating the challenges of what is best for future generations, S.J.W gives life to a Caribbean way of thinking about literacy relationships and practices as a means of social and political empowerment, promoting youth engagement in society. Encouraging empowerment and participation among the youth is also reflected in the publication *Language-based Differences in the Literacy Performance of Bidialectal Youth* (Smith et al., 2018), where the authors challenge assumptions of hegemony that are embedded within a dominant turn towards standard English. Importantly, through this project, S.J.W and his colleagues flag the need for literacy research as a practice of advocacy, challenging dominant assumptions and proposing ways in which the cultural biases implicit in standards of performance success can be transformed.

We see this aspiration to build Caribbean cultural competency further reflected in S.J. W's participation in regional associations such as the CARICOM Task Force for Teaching and Teacher Education, fostering capacity in policy development through his participation as an advocate for the democratisation of education and education for sustainable development (S.J. W's Narrative Bio). Again, this value system of the Caribbean as a site of assets is reflected through more recent publications such as Smith et al. (2018), where the navigation of the inner and outer circles among English speakers serve as sources of sustenance for immigrant multilingual educators, and Warrican et al. (2019), where the construction of peer effects is deployed to optimise students' educational results, using social relationships to accelerate the learning outcomes for students who may be experiencing socio-economic deficits. Smith and Warrican (2020) therefore argue for critical multilingual and racial awareness among literacy teachers and educators as a way to enhance the cultural and linguistic responsiveness within the region.

Locating Educational Inequalities

Educational inequalities within the Caribbean are a focus within the interview and conversation. Of note are challenges related to gender and racial inequalities. In this case, the discussion takes us to a well-documented and long-established body of

literature that underscores the many imbalances within the educational experiences and outcomes for students based on social constructions of gender. S.J.W, for example, uses his own childhood experiences to centre the gender disparities within literary socialisation and engagements of children. This focus is also consistent with the work of other researchers who stress on gender differentials within higher learning achievements and outcomes (Bailey, 2000; Bailey & Charles, 2010; Morris, 2004), but, with still dominant participation and representations in traditional science and technical areas within the region. While these realities are conditioned by the geographic and socio-economic dynamics of school systems, they underscore the significance of gender as a stratifying principle and practice that still textures the experiences and outcomes of Caribbean citizens. The general understanding therefore has been for a persistence within perceptions and practices related to the gendered observations of schooling and of the differential ways in which this impacts educational outcomes (Younger & Cobbett, 2012).

Yet, the issue of racial inequalities also unfolds as a critical aspect of this conversation. In his deliberation, S.J.W touched on his own work and position on this issue, with attention to racial disparities and outcomes as a crisis within the education system (See Warrican 2020a, 2021). In speaking to this, S.J.W underscores the challenges for Black children within the region, United Kingdom and United States diaspora who face to face many stereotypes, barriers and institutionalised forms of discrimination. His attention to educational systems and research on these racialised experiences also makes visible the silences around these structures, which are often nuanced with the significance of other social strata and continue to impact educational outcomes in and beyond the region. His positioning of ‘moral licensing’ and on the challenges of ‘*Combating Raciolinguistic Ideologies*’ (Warrican 2020a), situates some of the legacies of colonial education and the expressions of this reality that continue to disadvantage already marginalised groups. This conversation speaks to a growing body of literature that examines the underrepresentation and underperformance of Black Caribbean children within the diaspora (see, for example, Demie, 2019; Tomlin, Wright, & Mocombe, 2014). The questions of the legitimisation of colonial agendas that serve or favour students from specific socio-economic and cultural and racial backgrounds emerge, however, as an area of research that is still lagging for the region. This conversation raises the need for more nuanced engagement and research on the structural intersections such as class, race, and gender (Ramsaran, 2001), which continue to impact our educational systems and that are still absent within the research and policy agendas for the region.

While these discussions touch on the challenges of quality education with attention to the reduction of gender parities (Bailey, 2003), inclusive education (Amstrong et al., 2005; Edwards-Kerr & Spencer-Ernandez, 2017), basic literacy (Miller, 2000) and more recently that of sustainable development goals (United Nations, 2000, 2006), there is also an acknowledgement of the many gaps that remain within the educational experiences and achievements of Caribbean citizens. The closure of these gender gaps, of the hidden curricula that perpetuate other forms of inequality, and the lack of acknowledgement and mechanisms to reduce these educational gaps, are also of critical importance. More importantly, these discussions touch on the issues of curricula developments (London, 2002) and the implications for teacher education and classroom engagement within the region (Jennings, 2017). These debates and calls to action also centre the still troubling realities that require continued intervention and engagement by key stakeholders within the region. Given the legacies of the colonial experiences that are implicit within these realities, other scholars remind us of the need to go beyond global goals and development agendas to address educational strategies and policies that advance educational priorities and outcomes (Crossley et al., 2019; De Lisle, 2016; Thomas, 2014).

Advancing Caribbean-centric Scholarship

In the final thematic area of this paper, we touch on the still contentious issue of advancing Caribbean-centric scholarship. We ask the question of what does this mean for the region? What are the explicit assumptions that underlie these discussions and expectations? How are these visions being translated into scholarly practice? And what challenges unfold that are a part of this process? In S.J. W's discussion, he speaks of the need to locate and advance the knowledge and insights from the region, within the larger body of knowledge systems and interventions that exist for educational advancements. Yet, in his deliberation, he calls for scholars to recognise the need to participate within global debates, but to balance this engagement of global knowledge debates with that of locating the relevance and contribution of Caribbean scholarship (see Warrican, 2020b, *Conducting Research in the Caribbean: Peering Through the Lenses of Western Frames*). In the dialogic interview, therefore, is the recognition of the still visible imbalances within knowledge generation and dissemination, but with attention to the contradictions that scholars face with locating their scholarship and practice.

The debate remains a longstanding, still relevant and timely one. We note the historical call for the grounding of Caribbean scholarship and for social and political action that emerge out of this (see Bogues, 2011; Rodney, 1969; Lamming, 2017; Best, 1997). These early conversations emerged out of a recognition of the Eurocentric

framing of knowledge, the traditional agendas that were implicit within this process, and the lack of visibility for the advances and contributions within the Caribbean. The push for Caribbean theorisations and for specific methodologies at a broad level (Wilson et al., 2019), for reducing or removing monocultural perspectives and knowledge hierarchies (Shahjahan et al., 2022), for decolonising qualitative methodologies (Stewart, 2020) and for using more culturally affirming methods (Nakhid et al., 2022) emerge as more recent extensions of this conversation.

Yet, these conversations also call for broadening the engagements to conceptualise notions of the Caribbean, of identity, of culture, and to acknowledge within these debates the complex systems and webs of power that problematise how these are located and applied within our contexts. At best, these discussions call for ongoing deliberations that deepen these insights and that advance the anti-imperialist agendas within Caribbean systems to make visible our contributions within the broader educational landscape. In doing this kind of work, other scholars emphasise the importance of capturing the diverse socio-cultural and political realities across Latin American and Caribbean countries (see Butcher-Lashley, 2016) and of tackling some of the critical aspects of educational systems including aspects of pedagogy and criticality (Boiselle, 2016; Bristol, 2012; Poitier, 2022). Nava et al. (2023) extended this conversation to advocate for decolonising science communication with attention to the research, funding, and infrastructural developments, specifically for small island developing states. We recognise that many of these directions, while critical, remain yet to be substantially addressed.

Understanding the Call

Our use of the abbreviation of Professor S. Joel Warrican's name to S.J.W throughout the narrative was deliberate. This turn is intended to reflect Prof. Warrican's implicit call for the erosion of elitist siloes within education that serve to marginalise and reduce the access of many to ways of doing and thinking, particularly within the university. The use of the acronym S.J.W is also reflective of Prof. Warrican's academic and professional personality, oriented towards collegiality and inclusivity as opposed to the university's traditional peerage.

S. J. W's aspirations for Caribbean intellectual activity and the ways in which this is reflected in his collaborative scholarship have been concretised through the interaction between his career trajectory and his scholarship and a deliberate design to contribute to the social and human capital of the region. This reflects how his lived

experiences prefigure how he continues to show up as a scholar, leader, researcher and teacher (Alvine, 2001). Through this engagement, we recognise the subjectivity of individual biography (Bialy, Piasek, & Pieniżek, 2024), its connection to the formation of intellectual identities, and the ways in which these can then influence the cultural work of academics. We propose more nuanced explorations of this kind of relationship or engagement to access constructions of intellectual impact where academics are not only in a race to a high h-index or a journal impact factor, but where academics are called to live education as a practical experience in service to community.

To do the kind of work that S.J.W calls for, we recognise the need for building knowledge, practice and community. While these are not prescriptive recommendations, they offer critical starting points that build on already established foundations and scholarship within the region. We take forward the work of De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez (2014), who call for a ‘meeting of knowledge’, both as an epistemic and collective stance, with dialogic engagements that advance the tools, curricula and knowledge production within these agendas. Even there, we acknowledge that institutional dependency and hierarchies are reinforced by ranking systems and can emerge as major obstacles within that prospect. We note therefore, the tendency for continued relevance of external knowledge systems and consultants as knowledge and practice shapers with deep implications for methodological exploration, innovation and implementation (Lewis & Simmons, 2010). We recognise also the challenge of transforming and sustaining higher education within the region. The realities of (1) reduced public funding, (2) the dependency and politics related to state funding, and (3) the limitations or drawbacks for Caribbean researchers, unfold as clear challenges with which we must contend. Where these bear negative outcomes for research cultures, evidence and practice-based dynamics, and private-public partnerships within the region, the call therefore is for grounding Caribbean educators and researchers. Building knowledge systems and capacities that are both relevant to context, and that are converted to address broader socio-economic and political challenges of the region, remain central to this process.

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