

Lessons about successful literacy in creole languages from islands such as The ABC Islands, Jamaica and Haiti in the Western Caribbean

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Abstract

This article identifies and analyzes attempts that people of the Western Caribbean (specifically in Jamaica, Haiti and Aruba) have made thus far in addressing serious problems in the Caribbean due to the imposition of European colonial languages as languages of instruction in the education systems of territories where most of the population speak a creole language to envision how the peoples of the Eastern Caribbean (specifically in Statia and St. Croix) might begin to transform a formal educational system whose language policies have reduced their children to failures and victims into a system that equips children to be powerful agents in the learning process. The elements of the informal educational systems which have emerged organically from the feminized, Africanized, Indigenized creole cultures of the Caribbean are presented both as a foundation stone as well as a source of inspiration for the design and implementation of education policy and practice.

Key words: Creole languages, Education, Pluri-linguism, Sociolinguistics, Caribbean

Resumen

Este artículo identifica y analiza los intentos que han hecho hasta ahora las personas del Caribe Occidental (específicamente en Jamaica, Haití y Aruba) para abordar serios problemas en el Caribe debido a la imposición de lenguas coloniales europeas como lenguas de instrucción en los sistemas educativos de los territorios donde la mayoría de la población habla un idioma criollo. El propósito es prever cómo los pueblos del Caribe Oriental (específicamente en Statia y St. Croix) podrían comenzar a transformar un sistema educativo formal cuyas políticas lingüísticas han victimizado y reducido a sus hijos al fracaso hacia un sistema que equipa a los niños para ser poderosos agentes en el proceso de aprendizaje. Los elementos de los sistemas educativos informales que han emergido orgánicamente de las culturas criollas feminizadas, africanas e indígenas del Caribe se presentan como base, así como fuente de inspiración, para el diseño e implementación de políticas y prácticas educativas.

Palabras clave: Lenguas criollas, Educación, Plurilingüismo, Sociolingüística, Caribe

Introduction

The relationship between language spread, imposition and domination and the political and economic dominance imposed

by colonial and neo-colonial powers can be explained by Phillipson's (1992) theory of Linguistic Imperialism. When examining the situation of language spread and language hierarchies and in turn language use and

maintenance in the Caribbean, the significant impact of Westernized and European agendas becomes apparent. Phillipson claims that Linguistic Imperialism is a ‘subset of linguisticism.’ He defines linguisticism as the “practices, ideologies, and structures used to legitimate, enact and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined based on language” (p. 47).

The provision of language teaching and learning in the imperial language is a crucial factor in linguistic imperialism. This of course has repercussions for not only which languages are chosen but also what forms of the language and what cultural values are reflected in the language curriculum. The experiences in integrating creole languages into the curricula on islands such as the ABC Islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, see Pereira 2010; 2011; 2013; Dijkhoff & Pereira, 2010; 2017; Croes, 2006; 2013), Jamaica (see JLU, 2008; Devonish, 1996; 2003; 2007; 2010) and Haiti (see Degraff, 2013) in the Western Caribbean offer opportunities for the development of a praxis on islands such as St. Eustatius (Statia, see Faraclas, Kester & Mijts, 2013; 2016) and St. Croix in the Eastern Caribbean (see Torres, 2009) that may foster a decolonizing approach to teaching and learning. Listed below are ten guiding principles which might facilitate a positive transfer of experience and expertise in effective creole education from the Western to the Eastern Caribbean:

1) *Recognition, inclusion, and valorization of the Creole in education:*

Based on numerous studies of bilingualism, evidence supports that acknowledging and reinforcing a child’s mother tongue early on and specifically developing early literacy skills in a child’s mother tongue better supports later academic outcomes in English and other

imperial languages. Nonetheless, Caribbean teachers have been trapped in a mechanical and authoritarian educational system characterized by regressive tendencies that inhibit the process of acquisition and valorization of native creole languages as a tool for social change.

Creole speaking students are at a disadvantage at schools because their creole languages are considered ‘broken’, ‘corrupt’, or ‘ungrammatical’ and posing an unsurmountable obstacle for the acquisition of the standard. Both the Creole and the standard language must be used side by side, and given equal status and functions within the classroom. Through research-based approaches administrators and policy makers can help in the implementation of educational programs in creole languages in Statia and St. Croix, similar to the initiatives already undertaken on the ABC Islands with Papiamentu/o, in Haiti with Kreyòl and in Jamaica with Jamaican Creole. These actors have the power to determine whether students feel included or excluded in schools. By bringing students’ languages into the classroom, their culture and history are validated. Using Creoles as the medium of instruction in these territories teachers can foster the development of intellectually and linguistically active students who will be able to challenge a linguistically biased and crippling system, thus becoming future agents of change.

2) *Epecially in cases where the Creole and its lexifier coexist, it is necessary that students and the community in general be cognizant of the significant differences and interface between both varieties*

In the case of St. Croix, Crucian must be used and recognized as a tool to strengthen the students’ proficiency in Standard English. As observed in student and teacher exchanges in St. Croix, sometimes students (and teachers) switch to speaking the creole language in the middle

of a lesson without being aware that they have done so. In order to ensure that students and teachers become consciously aware of the nature, purpose and process of language learning and use, a training program similar to the one implemented in Jamaica can be developed to assist teachers in honing their language proficiency skills and in recognizing both varieties, so they can in turn devise strategies to help students do the same.

The historical and linguistic situation in Aruba preclude Papiamentu from being mistaken for a variety of Dutch; nonetheless, it suffers, similar negative comparisons to European languages as do other Creoles. Of utmost importance is the development of a writing system for the Creole. However, because of the socio-political underpinnings of language planning efforts, and the lack of perceived legitimacy of creole languages, the formulation of a writing system includes two critical goals not usually found in other contexts: (1) choosing a variety of the Creole that would be accessible to the majority of speakers of the language, and (2) establishing the Creole as an autonomous language from its lexifier so that it is perceived as a separate, legitimate language (Siegel, 2005). Statia and St. Croix need to consider the question of putting their Creoles to writing in relation to the two types of orthography at their disposal, namely a phonemic orthography and an etymological orthography. An inherent advantage of a phonemic orthography is that it produces a written form of the Creole discrete from that of the lexifier. On the other hand, the etymological orthography, since it retains spellings closely associated to words in the lexifier language, reinforces the interpretation that the Creole is merely a nonstandard offshoot of the lexifier.

3) *All actors must form part of the decision-making process*

The process whereby *Scol Multilingual* has been established in Aruba

shows the benefit of incorporating as many stakeholders as possible in the processes of research and decision-making for the adoption of language education policies in Statia and St. Croix. Government language policies in the Eastern Caribbean have not only been used to enact colonial domination from the metropole, but they are also a function of economic and social struggles among contending national elites, all seeking to compel compliance among subordinate groups.

In addition to learning useful research skills that enhance the participation of each person, baseline studies and bottom up approaches build on sharing life experiences and developing community narratives and histories in communities. Communities which have been excluded from decision-making in the past, will have the opportunity to learn new methods to analyze their social reality, and to seek new forms of grassroots participation that enable them to organize and collaborate in transforming the quality of education and in turn their quality of life. Although Statia has adopted a bottom up approach to research, they have failed to recognize the mother tongue of most of the population. This yields an incomplete result that still shortchanges their children. St. Croix has also failed to recognize their vernacular and regrettably is imposing educational models from the United States on its children.

4) *Teachers play a vital role*

In the programs being implemented to integrate creole languages into the curriculum in the ABC Islands, Jamaica and Haiti, teachers are receiving on-going and supportive training, since they are the professionals who are directly involved in implementing educational policy hands-on with the students. When teachers are considered crucial participants in the implementation process and encouraged to express their concerns or suggestions, projects have a higher chance of success.

Contributing to the obstacles faced by speakers of these vernacular varieties is the notion that a ‘standard’ is the only acceptable form of language. The unfortunate consequences that flow from that notion are made worse by the fact that many teachers themselves exhibit negative attitudes towards students whose language differs markedly from the standard ‘ideal’ because teachers themselves are products of an educational system that devalues creole languages and cultures. There are still entrenched negative attitudes among teachers and the general public reinforced by the standard language ideology that promotes the superiority of one form of language, and the ideology of monolingualism that downgrades bilingualism and bidialectalism (Siegel, 2007).

Siegel claims that a logical step would be made to overcome the obstacles faced by students if “teachers recognized creoles and minority dialects as legitimate forms of language, if children were allowed to use their own language to express themselves until they learned the standard, and if they learned to read in a more familiar language or dialect” (2007: 67).

It should be of no surprise that, given much of the educational baggage that teachers bring into the classroom, the opposite is often the case where the vernacular is seen as an unsurmountable obstacle in acquiring the standard. This calls for extensive training and support of teachers regarding the value of the Creole. During the training, special emphasis must be given to the daily challenges that the teachers will encounter. It is very important for schools to contribute to the healthy and positive development of children and youth. The question on the minds of many administrators, policy makers, practitioners and teachers is how to do this in an effective way.

In Aruba and Jamaica in the Western Caribbean, comprehensive teacher training programs designed to aid teachers to revalorize Creoles and to adopt approaches and devise strategies that will help them improve students’ academic performance, behavior and character are in place. With the recognition in Aruba of Papiamentu as a vehicle of instruction and the decision to implement a multilingual program that recognizes other varieties as well, the *Instituto Pedagógico Arubano* has sought to create educational experiences for teachers involving the valorization of language and culture to foster creative, cognitive, reflective development in children, youth and the community as a whole. The many national and international conferences, the workshops and the courses including the travel-exchange *Perspectiva Mundial De Educacion* contribute to set up teachers for success and to become key agents of change.

In the case of Jamaica, the Bilingual Education Project (BEP) involved redesigning instruction to support bilingualism in Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English. This was done by providing learning and teaching materials in both languages, and by training teachers specialized in Jamaican Creole teaching. Implementation was therefore complemented by an ongoing process of translation of teaching materials and teacher training in bilingual delivery. This overhaul required the full commitment of teachers to aid in the success of the initiative. Wagner (2014) highlights how in the Bilingual Education Project pilot teachers and teachers in training were using the recently translated materials (from Standard Jamaican English to Jamaican Creole).

Siegel (2007) points out that there have also been some developments with regard to awareness programs and that the CAPE syllabus course ‘Communication Studies’ in Jamaican high schools is an

example of a program that includes a ‘Language and Society’ module that focuses on the linguistic situations in Caribbean territories and their historical background. This module also highlights features and characteristics of the grammar of creole vernaculars as compared and contrasted to those of Standard English. This program recognizes and explores cultural and linguistic differences as a rich educational opportunity for both teachers and students.

5) *Moving beyond the dichotomy of the Creole vs. the imperially imposed language*

One of the greatest assets of the *Scol Multilingual* Project in Aruba is the recognition of plurilingual nature of their society. Since most cultures are in themselves multilayered and polyvalent, including, recognizing, and valuing the diverse linguistic and cultural heritages of all students within the classroom is an effective way of both addressing increased cultural and linguistic diversity in schools, as well as improving the educational experiences, and longer-term educational success and achievement of students. The polyvalent nature of creole languages collides with homogeneity.

Croes (2006; 2013) considers the *Scol Multilingual* project to be the first initiative that explicitly supports multilingual education through a holistic approach and regards learning as a process of construction. Given that every language transmits a particular sociocultural perspective, *Scol Multilingual* regards Aruba’s sociolinguistic context not only as a producer of multilingual individuals, but also as a producer of multicultural individuals. It intends, unlike traditional schools, to utilize the students’ multilingualism and multiculturalism as complementary stepping stones in the attainment of knowledge. This project proposes to gradually introduce literacy instruction in four languages during the first years of schooling, in order to produce

students who are literate in all four. The most salient obstacle that this project has encountered is the traditional Dutch-only system itself and the language attitudes that come along with it. In order to address both the pedagogical and social aspects of the Aruban context, the project has designed the curriculum in a way that permits the expansion of the social functions of the languages to academic functions.

The recognition of plural languages, cultures, and identities could be of benefit for the eastern Caribbean. For example, De Jesús (2010) explains that for centuries St. Croix has attracted people from many countries. Processes of immigration still continue today and its peoples speak at least 20 languages. Frequently the same individual will embody a plethora of languages, cultures and identities. Most of the population speaks at least two languages – Virgin Islands Standard English and Crucian English lexifier Creole. In addition, more than 40% of the people speak one or more of Spanish varieties – from Puerto Rico, Vieques, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Central America, etc. Furthermore over 25% of the population speak at least one or more additional languages – a second or third English lexifier Creole, one or more French lexifier Creoles, US Standard English, etc. De Jesús’ fieldwork involved gathering evidence of the multiple languages spoken on the island. Regrettably St. Croix’s rich linguistic environment is not recognized by its educational system. Similar contact situations involving numerous languages and cultures abound and Aruba and *Scol Multilingual* is at the forefront of the efforts for recognition of this fact.

6) *Incorporating models that reflect the organizing principles of traditional subaltern Caribbean societies de cohabitation into planning, decision making, and community*

Societés de cohabitation (González-López, 2011; Faraclas, 2012) articulate an

alternative positive self-identity that negates the sub-humanity attributed to Caribbean peoples as slave descendants by dominant others. Their fluidity of linguistic and cultural identification offers a historically informed framework that allows them to present all languages and cultures as being of the same value as those of the imperial powers. The acknowledgement of vernacular languages gives all a voice to talk about and thus realize their imagined community and offer greater social democratization. The Eastern Caribbean islands of Statia and St. Croix must connect their pedagogical practice with theories of language and power, and should engage in dialogue with other territories involved in similar initiatives.

Educational programs inspired by various aspects of the *sociétés de cohabitation* which have played such an important role in Caribbean history as well as in shaping Caribbean society, can have a positive impact on learners' motivation to learn multiple languages. In *sociétés de cohabitation*, language contact has never been seen as a problem to eventually be resolved by the adoption of one dominant language. In *sociétés de cohabitation* the imperial or standard variety loses its exclusivity in favor of a role alongside other languages in projecting multiple voices and a pluricultural identities which incorporate a pluri-lingualism. By incorporating this less exclusive and less monocultural approach, our schools could become part of the solution to the inter-communal conflicts that are among the most poisonous legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean, by equipping young people to embrace the true multilingual nature of Caribbean societies.

Cummins explains that in “an era of globalization, a society that has access to multilingual and multicultural resources is advantaged in its ability to play an important social and economic role on the world

stage” (2001). *Sociétés de cohabitation* have always seriously challenged and still challenge the colonial order. *Sociétés de cohabitation* can help transcend the legacy of colonialism in order to acknowledge and valorize the variety and complexity of Caribbean languages and cultures and move them out of the fringes of declining colonial Empires. All the centrifugal elements of *sociétés de cohabitation* create a plurivalent and heteroglossic space in resistance to homogenizing standardization.

Another of the characteristics that has facilitated the success of the *Proyecto Scol Multilingual* in Aruba and that can be useful to other Caribbean communities is that, as a modern reflection of *sociétés de cohabitation* it engages the community, moving away from the idea of a culturally homogeneous national identity by celebrating ethnic and cultural diversity. It also re-valorizes pluriculturalism in Aruba, which can help overcome long-standing prejudices, racism, and ethnic tensions on the island.

7) *Production of contextualized local materials*

Eastern Caribbean educational systems tend not to provide materials in the local creole language since they do not recognize Creole's place in education. In the Western Caribbean, we have examples of locally produced didactic material in the ABC Islands, Jamaica and Haiti. Having such materials available positively affects attitudes towards creole languages and cultures among students who seem more motivated to learn through creolized modes of instruction, and this in turn can positively impact teachers, principals, and parents. The production of materials in creole languages in the Western Caribbean is not restricted to formally didactic genres, but there are also examples of other materials that make use of the vernacular (newspapers, short stories, media, phonebooks, etc.).

As mentioned before, critical to the production of print materials is the progress made in orthography development in the ABC Islands, Jamaica and Haiti. In Aruba, there is a prolific tradition of production of materials. Many of the resources prepared as source materials to help and encourage local literacy projects in Papiamentu in Aruba and Papiamentu in Curaçao, recognizing orthographic differences within the ABC Islands, are produced by *Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma* (FPI). In Aruba, educational and cultural institutions and organizations (Departamento di Enseñansa, Drumi Dushi, Fundacion Lanta Papiamentu, etc.) aid in the production of literacy materials. The availability of dictionaries, grammar books, literature (both translations into Papiamentu and original works in Papiamentu), textbooks and workbooks for every single subject and all of significant quality (in terms of appearance/presentation and content) elevate the status of the vernacular.

Regarding the instruction materials in Jamaica, Wagner (2014) explains that even though after an initial evaluation of the BEP, evaluators were concerned by the lack of sufficient funds to reproduce high quality materials for each student, they recognized and highly praised the creative efforts put into contextualizing the materials and making sure every student received a copy. The evaluators recognized as a strength of the BEP that the materials being created by Jamaicans were extremely useful in the process of contextualizing learning for primary education. At the level of secondary education, Jamaican Creole is used as part of the CAPE syllabus course ‘Communication Studies.’ Increasing the availability of contextualized learning material and re-tooling educators to participate meaningfully in the process of developing them for their own use is vital for the success of any program that integrates creole languages into instruction.

8) *Support of a critical mass of organizations in the recognition and promotion of the Creole*

Aruba has been especially effective in enlisting the support and collaboration of diverse organizations in the promotion of Papiamentu for literacy, national pride and as a marker of identity. We have already highlighted the important contributions of *Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma* but there are many other promoters of Papiamentu. For example, the Foundation *Bon Nochi Drumi Dushi* established in 2007 as a reading promotion group, initially enlisted a group of teachers to read to children. They later recruited volunteers of all kinds (parents, grandparents, community leaders) to read to children at different venues around the island. They routinely organize motivational campaigns to recruit more volunteers, and make their presence felt at various public and cultural events. They have also created a website that includes general information about the foundation, as well as reading materials divided into a section that also includes puzzles and games customized for children, and a section for parents and other family members who wish to partake in reading to children in Papiamentu.

Another organization is *Fundacion Lanta Papiamentu* (FLP) which has as its main objective to spread awareness regarding the importance of Papiamentu as the official and national language of Aruba and the mother tongue of the majority of the population. FLP organizes a variety of educational and cultural activities to highlight the importance of Papiamentu locally and internationally, alongside many other groups and organizations, including *Grupo di Corector di Papiamentu*, *Biblioteca Nacional Aruba*, *Departamento di Cultura Aruba*, etc. Besides PSML, there are other educational institutions that collaborate in the promotion of Papiamentu as part of their academic mission, including:

Instituto Pedagógico Arubano, Departamento di Enseñansa, and Universidad di Aruba. If and when Statia and St. Croix decide to embrace, promote and support their Creole languages in their educational systems, they must understand that if they want to replicate the levels of success in the Western Caribbean, they must replicate the continuous, ongoing promotion of the creole language as well as the collaboration of a range of actors and stakeholders beyond those in the school.

9) *Use of the creole language for scientific inquiry in all subject areas and the integration of technology*

A lesson to be learned from the MIT Initiative in Haiti is the application of the Creole especially to those fields of study and scientific inquiry with which many who are still biased against Creoles would not associate the vernacular (Degraff, 2013). The Initiative's use of digital technology and open educational resources online, all in Kreyòl, to improve science, technology, engineering, and math education, as well as leadership and management, is a step in the right direction for elevating the status of the language and broadening its linguistic register and vocabulary repertoire.

That said, the application of Creole to scientific inquiry must not merely be an effort, similar to those which typify linguistics as well as other fields of study, to seek to gain authority and popularity by appealing to a 'scientific pedigree'. According to Harding (1986), the underlying premise is that we are a scientific culture, since scientific rationality has permeated the modes of thinking and acting of our public institutions (1986: 9). In modern societies "neither God nor tradition is privileged with the same credibility as scientific rationality" (Harding: 16). Thus, more and more theories and hypotheses are validated under a veil of scientific rigor and scientific data and objectivity. Supposedly unbiased and pure

scientific research provides a distorted view of the reality of scientific data. Scientific information and scientific theories are economic commodities that other scientists and academics consume.

As Harding points out, regardless of the deep-seated Western cultural belief in science's inherent progressiveness, "...science today serves primarily regressive social tendencies; and that the social structure of science, many of its applications...its ways of constructing and conferring meanings are not only sexist but also racist, classist, and culturally coercive" (p. 9). Harding adds that during the last century the role of science is no longer that of an "occasional assistant" but that of the direct manufacturer of economic, political, and social accumulation. Harding acknowledges that the question should not be: "how to preserve it, as if carved in stone or else to completely reject the European [scientific and epistemological] legacy, but rather how to update it so that it, like many other 'local knowledge systems,' can be perceived to provide valuable resources for a world in important respects different from the one for which it was designed" (p. 125).

She claims that reflecting on an appropriate model of rationality in our culture is a project with immense potential consequences because it could produce a politics of knowledge-seeking that would show us the necessary conditions to transfer control from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots' (p. 20).

The concern to define and maintain a series of rigid dichotomies in science and epistemology... is inextricably connected with specifically masculine -and perhaps uniquely Western and bourgeois- needs and desires. Objectivity vs. subjectivity, the scientist as knowing subject vs.

the objects of his inquiry, reason vs. the emotions, mind vs. body – in each case the former has been associated with masculinity and the latter with femininity. In each case, it has been claimed that human progress requires the former to achieve domination of the latter” (p. 23).

Part of Harding’s critique of the natural sciences is understanding the extent to which science is also gendered. If the nature, uses, and valuations of knowledge-seeking are to become humanly inclusive ones then we must be aware of the economic, political, and psychological mechanisms that keep science sexist. Concurring with Harding, these mechanisms must be eliminated from any project that seeks to bring creole languages and cultures to the forefront by embracing scientific inquiry and research. Violence and competition have been the key methods by which Western science has established domination over nature and colonized persons.

The adoption of creole languages and cultures into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields under a *société de cohabitation* approach could help move science to those more inclusive valuations of knowledge instead of those dominant paradigms of science that seek to justify the domination of non-European descended peoples by European descended peoples.

Science can develop from and be part of a critical, moral and democratic discourse that fosters co-operation as part of its core values. These co-operation-based models of science have been commonplace in most human cultures and for most of human history. Co-operation based science is naturally entrenched in the efforts of communities to manufacture their own knowledges and resources in their own image and in their own interests, while the

dominant archetype of science is practiced by an elite group of isolated specialists who fashion realities in the interest of a dominant class (Faraclas et al., 2008).

Faraclas et al (2008) contend that paradigms of science are perpetuated through language in the form of metaphors. Much of Western science is based on metaphors of competition. *Sociétés de cohabitation* have always offered peoples in the Caribbean spaces for cooperation and validation of their own powers to create knowledge, and *sociétés de cohabitation* could be used as a model for new approaches to science and education and all realms of society. The use of technologies in the quest to transform the world, must not result in yet another vehicle for Westernization. The role of technologies in promoting creole languages and cultures in education must make world-wide communication possible and be critical and self-relexive, to see if in fact technologies can be used to better the human condition as the Western and non-Western worlds collide.

In Haiti we see how Kreyòl-based classroom tools and methods have the potential to shift educational outcomes toward both distributive and political equity. The MIT-Haiti Initiative serves as a model where close collaboration between humanists, educators, scientists, mathematicians, and engineers provides a space of possibility for all stakeholders. Linguistics is critical, alongside education and STEM, for facing global challenges, especially in promoting participatory readiness and distributive justice in disenfranchised communities that speak disenfranchised local languages – in Haiti and beyond.

10) Learners aid teachers in the teaching/learning process

We offer two vignettes as examples of teacher-learner interactions we have witnessed. The first comes from a school in St. Croix:

Ms. Rivera* corrects Joseph* when he responds in Crucian to the question: “Where did you go?” /Mi bin a stour/, says Joseph*. “I went to the store,” corrects the teacher without acknowledging whether the response correctly answers the question or not. Joseph* does not participate again in class that day.

(* = names have been changed)

In many cases in the Eastern Caribbean, when the vernacular is not the official language and teachers are seen as the only authoritative fluent speakers of the standard variety (whether this is true or not), we see students who feel unsure about their language and in turn feel unsure about themselves and their potential as learners. We gather from some teacher-learner interactions and exchanges in Eastern Caribbean school settings that engaging in classroom interaction with teachers of the standard variety is a struggle, primarily because the pupils may be positioned as dehumanized non-adults who do not know the target language and bring nothing to the teaching-learning process, or are only seen to be contributing corrupted, worthless forms. In her 2009 dissertation: “Attitudes of Crucian Students and Educators toward Crucian Creole as a Language of Learning” Geissa Torres concludes that:

The general feeling in St. Croix is that S[tandard]E[nglish] is the language to be spoken because of its worldwide prestige. It is the language of upward mobility that will ensure a respected place in the business world while Crucian is viewed as an obstacle to achieving higher educational and professional goals and as the dialect of the illiterate. Therefore, speaking in Crucian is reserved for informal domains (interactions among friends

and relatives), whereas English is mainly used in formal domains (school and work). Crucian Creole does not enjoy the prestige that SE does due to the constant negative rhetoric against it from the hegemonic SE education that started with the ... colonial regime. By enforcing SE, educators are doing what they think is best for the students. Educators believe that Crucian retards the development of English; therefore, since teachers feel responsible for preparing students to become respected professionals, they emphasize SE as the linguistic medium through which that goal must be achieved. Parents also support an English-only methodology for the same reasons teachers do. Many students testified that parents had scolded them for using the “jargon” or “broken English” at home. As a result, the students made an immense effort to restrain themselves from using Crucian at home and at school.” (p.155)

A second vignette is an exchange witnessed in one of the schools in the pilot project of *Scol Multilingual* in Aruba:

Ms. Williams* (whose first language is Papiamentu) is teaching Spanish at the elementary level. While teaching a song about the family, a student William*, asks how to say “grandfather” in Spanish. Ernesto*, a student who has recently come to Aruba from Venezuela and whose first language is Spanish, explains to his classmates that “*abuelo*” is “grandfather” and “*abuela*” is “grandmother.” Ernesto* seamlessly takes on a role of teacher for the rest of this class teaching Spanish

vocabulary and modeling Spanish pronunciation.

(* = names have been changed)

To resist the marginalizing practices encountered elsewhere, students in *Scol Multilingual* who master any of the languages that other classmates do not, choose to reframe their relationship with the teacher as aids in the teaching-learning process, and from the identity position ‘teacher’, rather than ‘student’, claim the right to speak and teach classmates. The success of these types of interaction can be explained in part by social learning theory, as outlined by Bandura (1963), who describes the process of observational learning in which a learner's behavior changes because of the observation of the behavior of others and its consequences. The theory identifies several factors that determine whether observing a model will affect behavioral or cognitive change. When students perceive similarity of the model to themselves, this increases their self-efficacy, leading to more effective learning of modeled behavior.

Discussion

Hancock posits that exposing learners to various languages and cultures at an early age offers them experiential advantages in perception and concept development (1977). Parents, students, cultural leaders, educators and governments, should come together in order to make teaching and learning more relevant in a changing Caribbean and in a changing world. They must constantly update their understanding of their target audience and their understanding of the material reality of those who participate in the process. The language of the metropole can no longer be the determining factor for the selection of the language(s) used as media of instruction. Now, in a progressive Caribbean, the

plurilingual, pluri-cultural and pluri-identified nature of the peoples must be recognized, cultivated and celebrated.

Since preparation is the key that will unlock the door of opportunity for the twenty-first century, students at all levels should be given the opportunity to study and use various languages. Studies on foreign language teaching and learning have shown that the earlier a student begins the study of a foreign language the better she or he is able to perform not only in that foreign language but in other subject areas. But what if, rather than considering these languages to be “foreign”, we considered these languages instead were recognized to be a part of the cultural makeup of Caribbean peoples? Certainly, the benefits and rewards will have an impact not only on the educational life of the learner but also on her/his overall quality of life as well. A monolithic monolingual model of instruction which is the prevailing paradigm in most Atlantic colonial societies “treat Caribbean culture and languages as determined and constrained by historical events such as slavery and reproduce a narrative of impossible oppositional struggle against colonial and postcolonial/neocolonial domination” (Burton, 1997).

The right to education is fundamental. It shapes the life of the individual, and opens new opportunities of understanding, knowledge and self-assurance. For those who speak a creole language, education in the mother tongue establishes a communicating bridge with the traditions, history and language of the community to which they belong. We must recognize that the multiple varieties spoken in each territory of the Caribbean constitute a wealth of voices that should find spaces as valuable resources in the educational landscape. Recognition of creole languages and cultures similarly recognizes:

the decentered, heteroglossic sense of personal authority over language

and of personal power through language into the Creole Space brought by African and Afro-Caribbean peoples. Language and power are not the exclusive dominion of elites and Euro-centric peoples, and when Africans and Afro-Caribbean peoples through heteroglossia embrace their traditional sense of personal and community control over their languages, cultures and existence, they can subvert and transform systemic forces that seek to impose a unitary truth (Faraclas, Walicek, Alleyne, Geigel, and Ortiz, 2007: 22).

Educators, policy makers, government officials and Caribbean peoples in general must recognize the value of creole languages as evidence of the flexibility, resistance and creativity of Afro-Caribbean peoples (Glissant, 1997; 1999); in perpetual bilingualism/multilingualism (Bernabé, 1990) who are not only pluri-lingual, but also pluri-cultural, and pluri-identified (Faraclas et al., 2008).

Concurring with Barcant (2013), the examination of the educational policies regarding language in the Caribbean can greatly benefit from feminist postcolonial and de-colonial approaches. Presenting brief glimpses of the linguistic situation in some territories of the Western and Eastern Caribbean we have examined how language is integral in the production and maintenance of culture and reflects the dynamics of power relations (Freire, 2000) and how the language of the colonizer became the tool for imposition and oppression of the minds of the colonized (Smith, 2007).

The colonial agenda has hegemonically imposed a single language in its attempts to exert political domination

over land and people. Said (2012) enlightens this discussion by clarifying how the concept of ‘othering’ cannot be separated from the imposed colonial language. Nonetheless, the existence, survival, prominence, and recognition of creole languages that are now rising from the shadows where imperial narratives had been trying to push them, serve to challenge the colonial discourse of domination through acts of identity and resistance. These acts, sometimes overtly and forcefully, but many times as Bhabha (2012) observed, “not through political opposition but through ambivalence within the recognition of dominating discourses, stand against erasure and as testament to peoples’ agency”. Creoles gather, as part of their hybrid nature, a rich legacy of contributions of European, Indigenous and African descended peoples and their recognition in education will ensure that the cultural and linguistic repertoire of the Caribbean landscape is diversely enriched.

The response to the repressive social order in the Caribbean cannot be mere opposition to dominant discourse and institutions. Instead, pro-active community work, research and dissemination are necessary to create a new set of realities on the ground. The recovery and recognition of peoples’ plural identities, plural cultures, and plural languages is necessary for providing spaces where Caribbean people to thrive. In Fanon’s (2007) terms the colonial agenda of language imposition has been a prolonged system of epistemic violence, but the complex colonial (patriarchal) structure can also reproduce blindspots for equal representation and resistance.

In this article, I have attempted to identify elements of the informal educational systems which have emerged organically over the past five centuries from the feminized, Africanized, Indigenized creole cultures of the Caribbean as both a

foundation stone as well as a source of inspiration for the design and implementation of education policy and practice that serves our interests and reflects who we are as Caribbean peoples.

This entails that Caribbean peoples (as demonstrated in many of the language policies observed in the Western Caribbean) routinely defy (as Pollard, 1994 suggests) society by defying its imposed language. Subverting and appropriating features from the cultural and linguistic repertoires at their disposal have been the ways in which Caribbean peoples have created their fluid identities as a way to not only resist or survive in the face forces that seek to homogenize, marginalize and erase, but also to thrive amidst those nullifying forces.

Conclusion

Our future depends not only on widespread awareness of the positive transformations that occur as a result of the pluri-identified, pluri-cultural and pluri-lingual negotiation process emerging from intense contact in the on-going evolution of the Caribbean landscape. Our future also depends on positive action taken towards more inclusive teaching and transmitting of the language, history, heritage and culture of all peoples in Caribbean societies, including the implementation of pluri-identified, pluri-cultural and pluri-lingual models throughout the whole educational process, creating a major role for creole languages and building upon students' knowledge of other languages in a realistic, challenging and meaningful way throughout the education system and society in general.

The models from the Western Caribbean are foundation stones through which the Eastern Caribbean and the world can embrace new ways to instill pride and self-esteem in students, provide paths for learning about their languages and heritages, for revalorizing their worldview, for

relearning and retaining their linguistic and cultural awareness, and for determining where they fit in a fast-evolving world around them. To achieve these goals, Caribbean peoples do not have to follow a blueprint established by the formal systems of the metropolises that usually become monstrosities that perpetuate colonial imposition through inapt and imported 'fixes' on the peoples of the region. Instead they just need to look around to see what their neighbors are doing to create organic informal educational systems designed to embrace the feminized, Africanized, and Indigenized creole cultures of the Caribbean to find solutions that ensure that their languages, cultures, heritages and native customs are not lost, but preserved for generations to come.

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