

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Student's Name:

Professor's Name:

Assignment # 1: Read Evans' *Inside Jamaican Schools* and write a report that discusses 2 ways that your school matches her descriptions of Jamaican schools and 2 ways that it does not. In your conclusion discuss the significance of this book in today's Jamaican schools.

Date: February 18, 2015

The book written by Hyacinth Evans entitled “Inside Jamaican Schools” puts forward many ideas of things that happen in our Jamaican schools. Some of these are still significant in our schools as well as some are no longer significant. On one hand, a few of the ideas that Evans put forward matches some the things that happen in my school. On the other hand however, a few of her ideas about some of the things that happen inside Jamaican Schools do not match what happens in my school.

I would like to highlight two ways in which her description of Jamaican Schools matches my school. Firstly, in chapter four on page sixty-seven, she stated that “In order to carry out its mission of educating its young, schools develop curricula that reflect some desired end points and that are appropriate for specific age groups. Some countries have centralized curricula wherein a central body, usually the Ministry of Education, determines what should be taught and transmits this information in the form of a curricula and curriculum guides.” This matches exactly what happens in my school as we have to teach the students from a curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education. Each grade has a curriculum specially designed for that grade where teachers are expected to teach the topics outlined for each term and unit respectively. Students are also tested on these topics both in internal and external exams.

Secondly, in chapter five Evans highlighted streaming in her book. On pages 90 and 91 she stated that “Because academic ability is of such central importance in school, streaming by ability structures the students’ school experience in a very fundamental way. The students’ academic ability is identified publicly and the label of high or low achiever is given to a class as well as to the students in that class. The result is that teachers and students in other classes begin to define these students according to their ability. The A’s are bright, the C’s are dunces, are slow to learn and so on.” Later in this chapter also, on pages 94 and 95 she indicated that

schools stream students based on their socioeconomic status. While we do streaming at the school where I am employed, we stream the students based their abilities not their socioeconomic status.

*But you probably notice that there is a correlation between stream and socio-economic status – right? Or are you saying there is no correlation? Has anyone in your school ever looked at whether or not there is a correlation?*

This is done so that we can have students of like abilities together so that the teacher can work at the same pace with all students. We have been doing since the school opened its doors over twelve years ago and it has worked for us. Still on the matter of streaming, Evans also outlined on page 95 that “Teachers of high achievers tended to teach such classes for a number of years and enjoy high status among colleagues and parents.” This also has been proven to be true in my school. Parents and students especially, know the classes that are considered the “bright” or “dunce” classes. Hence, parents would want their children to go to a particular class to be taught by a particular teacher when they move to the next grade as they know which classes are the “bright” or “dunce”.

Just as how there are similarities with Evans Book and my school, there are also differences. One difference that I picked up on is outlined in chapter five on page 91. It states that “Furthermore, it has been shown that more school resources are allocated to the higher streams- the groups with more ability-with the result that those students who need more, are given less.” This is definitely different from what happens in my school as we place more emphasis on the lower streams. Hence, those streams are given most of the resources and are given preferences to use the different technological devices that are available to us.

*Here, again, has anyone ever done a study on the resources that go to different streams? Is it possible that the upper streams actually DO get more resources? Is it possible that your perception does not take into account ALL the ways that resources are put into the upper streams?*

This is done in an effort to get the students in these streams working at the grade level or up to par with the other students in the grade.

Another difference that I have identified in Evans Book is found in chapter seven on page 138. It states that “Colour, class and ability may interact in many ways. For example, students from poorer backgrounds receive mainly negative evaluations and interactions, but their ability may have an influence on the severity of such interactions. Those from privileged backgrounds and those who are brown-skinned received both positive and negative evaluations, with academic ability and attitudes to the teacher being the mediating factors (Keith, 1976).” This of course is different from the school in which I work. Although there are students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and class in my school; we give evaluations and feedback based on students’ academic performance, behavior and overall attitudes. Whether the evaluation is positive or negative it is not based on colour, class or their background; as suggested by the writer. Hence, I would have to disagree with the writer on this point.

*Here is how I am interpreting your description of your school:*

*Nobody intentionally gives dark skinned students from low socio-economic backgrounds low assessments. (And Evans would agree with that.) The point she is making is that there just happens to be correlations among those three things – skin color, socio-economic status, and assessments. The darker the skin and the lower the SES, the lower the assessments.*

*So, I will re-state my question from the earlier section:*

*Do you notice a correlation between dark-skinned, low socio-economic status students and low assessments? Or are you saying there is no correlation? Or are saying you are unaware of any correlation because nobody in your school has ever looked at whether or not there is a correlation?*

Having read the Evans Book, I am led to believe that it is of some significance to our Jamaican schools. However, not much significance as many of the things that are listed in the book no longer exists in our schools. Firstly, in chapter one on page 6, the writer highlighted a number of exams that are longer a part of our education system. These exams include the Common Entrance Examination, the Technical Examination, the Reform of Secondary Education (ROSE) and the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP). The writer also spoke of the cost sharing program in schools that no longer exists. Instead we now have the PATH Program that is extended to students at the primary level; unlike the cost sharing program that was only given to high school students.

Another aspect of her book that is now insignificant is chapter two that is entitled “Theoretical Perspectives: Approaches to Understanding and Studying Schools”. This entire chapter looks at different theories that speak to understanding schools and how they are run. Many might ask why this chapter no longer significant in our Jamaican schools. The answer to that is simple. This chapter speaks to the social science paradigm. This means that the writer believe in these theories because research sees them as “effective”. I strongly disagree with this as we are now living in a different time where children’s attitudes and behaviors have changed. It is no longer like when I was a child growing up. This is a different generation that does not have much regard for not

only teachers but adults as a whole. Teachers therefore have to get creative and imaginative in order to not only teach these children but to also develop morals and values in them. In essence, develop them holistically. This fact has caused me to believe more in the aesthetic paradigm as this is truly the only way to reach these children that we face daily.

In concluding, while I am able to relate to some of the things that Evans speaks to in her book, there are many things that I am unable to relate to as an educator as these things no longer happen in our Jamaican schools.

*Good report. Your grade is 3. You did a good job of looking holistically at this book in your last two paragraphs.*