

**TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE LEARNING POTENTIAL OF  
STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS:  
Challenges of Inclusion**

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

One key determinant of inclusion regarding children from low-income households is belief in their learning potential. Teacher educators of the in-service post-graduate Diploma in Education programme are charged with helping teacher-participants interrogate and modify negative views they may hold of students from such backgrounds. Some views may constitute an approach inimical to the empowerment of children. While views of teacher-participants on the learning potential of children from low-income households are discussed early in the programme, there is need for systematic analysis of such views. In so doing, insights gained can guide the approach of teacher educators in their quest for sensitizing teacher-participants as to appropriate responses in educating children from low-income households. Using a qualitative case-study approach, the views of nine teacher-participants were obtained through semi-structured focus group interviews that were analysed thematically using the grounded theory approach. Findings revealed that although teacher-participants expressed views acknowledging the challenging life contexts of students from low-income households, they were also keenly aware of the empowering potential of positive relationships in the educational endeavour. Practical asset-based strategies for teachers and administrators were advanced in response to issues confronting students from low-income households. Recommendations suggested ways in which teacher education could be enhanced.

**Background**

Each year the School of Education at the St Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, welcomes a cohort of secondary school teachers of various disciplinary specialties for an initial in-service professional development programme of nine months' duration. This research was carried out with nine teachers of the 2016-2017 cohort of Social Sciences who teach History, Geography, Social Studies and Business Studies. The authors of this research are the teacher educators

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

(lecturers) who facilitate the professional development of the Social Sciences cohort.

To develop teachers in their personal and professional capacities the programme comprises the courses: *Educational Foundations and Issues in Education (Foundations)*, *The Reflective Practitioner*, *Pedagogy as Process and Practicum*. The *Foundations* course fosters discussion on and analysis of various educational issues related to the areas of Language, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, and Health and Family Life Education (HFLE). Secondly, *The Reflective Practitioner* constitutes an action research project geared to foster reflection and improvement on actual practice in the classroom. *Pedagogy as Process* concerns the strategies and issues of the teaching and learning of the Social Sciences and the *Practicum* consists of critical engagement of teachers and teacher educators in the context of actual lessons conducted during the course of the year (The University of the West Indies, Faculty of Humanities and Education, 2016).

### **Rationale for the Research**

In an initial teacher-preparation programme, understanding the views teacher-participants hold, affords teacher educators scope for advancing the professional practice of teacher-participants by engaging directly with existing ideas in order to correct or to build on them. Since in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), teachers encounter in schools many children from low-income households, teacher expectations as to the learning potential of such children are of considerable interest as these may influence student achievement (Wilson & Conyers, 2013).

Teacher-participants' views are thus solicited and discussed early in the programme in order to facilitate a critical engagement of ideas rooted in teacher experience. While teacher-participants provide feedback by way of in-class group presentations, the researchers felt the need to engage in a more deliberate systematic documentation and analysis of teacher-participants' views. Such an investigation, we felt, could sharpen our approach as teacher-educators in the effort to prepare teachers professionally and to sensitize them to the learning needs of children from low-income households.

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' views of children from low-income households as to students' learning potential as expressed by teachers on an initial in-service professional development programme at The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, 2016-2017. This investigation aims, not only to elucidate and interrogate

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

dominant features of teacher constructs, but to discuss the findings in the light of inclusive education.

Expected outcomes include the results of analysis incorporating teachers' views of students from low-income households as to students' learning and teachers' responses to issues confronting these students. Results would guide our approach to teacher education and would add to the literature on inclusive education and on teacher professional development.

### **Literature Review**

Inclusion in education "is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13).

From discourse on the education of special-needs children, namely those "with disabilities, and...who experience difficulties in learning" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 9), concerns were raised as to the practice of separating them from those in mainstream schooling. Eventually the stage of separate or segregated schooling (that often served only a few of those deemed "special") gave way to the praxis of integration or mainstreaming that fell short due to a lack of adjustments to school organisation, curriculum and pedagogy. Consequently, the concept of inclusive education emerged to view student diversity in a positive way rather than a setback to learning, thus "seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning" (p. 9). Education that is inclusive thus entails the "recognition of the need to work towards 'schools for all' - institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs." (UNESCO, 1994, p. iii).

According to UNESCO (2005), in this on-going process, policy and practice emerged from key principles of inclusion. Firstly, that not only is diversity to be seen in an affirmative manner but response to diversity is an ongoing process with differences appropriated as providing opportunities for learning. Secondly, there is the idea that problem solving is also essential, as it involves the removal of barriers to quality learning. Thirdly, inclusive is conceptualized as involving all learners requiring the fostering of creative ways to facilitate their full development for the achievement of curriculum goals and not only with the performance at examinations. Fourthly, while aiming for all round development, inclusive education pays particular attention to those who may be most at risk of "marginalization, exclusion or underachievement" (p. 16). Finally,

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

inclusion is not simply a rearrangement of educational practices but anchored in educational philosophy that espouses the development of the individual as a central aim. The enhancement of a person's potential came to be seen as an entitlement due to every human being. Such a right encompasses more than simply the placement of a child in a school.

Inclusive education holds as a core feature that education is a human right to be afforded to all children. Education as a right achieved worldwide priority in recent decades and has also been expressed in many important documents at the level of the United Nations. The following are key documents pertaining to inclusive education: *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989); *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994); *Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All* (UNESCO, 2000); *Education for All: Is the World on Track?* (UNESCO, 2000); and *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 2006).

While targets for inclusion focus on gender, ethnicity and those challenged physically and mentally, concern also includes people from low-income households. In general, attention to the poor and marginalized has become a hallmark of modern democratic societies. Given sharpened awareness of the need to develop and sustain a knowledge-based society, the UK and the USA have attempted to ameliorate the conditions of those from low-income households through policy measures in health, social welfare, housing and educational opportunity (Douglas, 1964; Halsey, Floud & Anderson, 1961; Lupton, 2005; UK Department for Education, 2015; US Department of Education, 2002; US Department of Education, 2009).

In the Caribbean, the colonial heritage has left us a unique paradigm of inequality with patterns of social and economic stratification based on ethnicity and wealth. After achieving independence, great hopes were placed on education as the means of empowering citizens of T&T to leave behind the constraining, elitist and oppressive legacy inherited from the colonial past (Deosaran, 2016). Governments of T&T invested heavily in the development of its people by way of facilitating greater access to educational opportunities by a wider clientele than were previously afforded. Measures adopted included expanding school places and supporting children from poor backgrounds through the provision of free school books, free transport and free school meals.

With the goal of developing the learning potential of students through schooling, official T&T government policy has held firm to the position "that every child has an inherent right to an education which will enhance the development of the maximum capability regardless of gender, ethnicity, economic, social or religious background" (Trinidad and

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

Tobago, National Task Force on Education, 1993, pp. xvii). Today, the issue of inequality of educational opportunity for low income households is still a concern the world over (UNDP, 2011), regionally (UNESCO, 2015) and in Trinidad and Tobago.

According to the T&T Central Statistical Office (CSO), the designation of households with low income refers to those whose combined yearly income falls within the “US\$4468 - 5000” bracket, with increasing gradation bands to that of high income designated as within “US\$ 7001 - 7500” (Trinidad & Tobago, CSO, 2012, p. 9). Reports on two surveys carried out by Kairi Consultants (Johnson, 2016) indicate that the percentage of those in the population living in poverty has risen from around 16 percent in 2005 to 24.5 percent in 2014 and that 300,000 persons were living in poverty. With this growth in the incidence of poverty in a stratified society, the challenge to promote a key element of inclusion - equity of educational opportunity- increases with implications for non-discrimination and justice in society (UNESCO, 2009).

Within T&T, the education system is also stratified as part of our colonial legacy (Campbell, 1992; De Lisle, 2012). Historically, there have been two main categories of schools, namely the traditional denominational (government- assisted) and government; the former took on the character of “highly valued” prestigious schools and the latter consequently less valued and in some cases “demonized” (De Lisle, Keller, Jules & Smith, 2009, p. 147). A general characteristic of this system is that the denominational secondary schools have in attendance the better academically performing students who mainly come from middle and high-income households, while many from low-income households attend the government schools and are, by and large, academically outperformed by the former (Deosaran, 2016; Jules, 1994; Ryan, Rampersad, Bernard, Mohammed & Thorpe, 2013). Between 2008 and 2012 when considering the number of students gaining five or more passes at the CSEC level, the denominational schools surpassed the government schools by “41% in 2008, 40% in 2009, 44% in 2010, 44% in 2011 and 45% in 2012” (Deosaran, 2016, p. 211).

An official report commissioned by the Government of T&T on Youth and Crime in 2013 (also referred to as The Ryan report) suggested that “those who do not succeed in gaining admission to those ‘prestige’ schools generally have to cope with the psychological trauma of a deep sense of failure, which some never overcome” (Ryan et al., 2013, p. 56). The narrowing of chances toward obtaining a quality education can leave students in unfortunate circumstances. The Ryan report makes connections between the conditions of poverty, crime and educational opportunity indicating that “broken and dysfunctional families, juvenile

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

delinquency, peer rejection, failure or disruptive behaviour at school, gang membership and incarceration” (pp. 10-11) seem to thrive in the same environment.

Another study albeit in a different context elucidates the link between poverty and habitual school truancy and its relevance to students’ learning potential. In this respect Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) indicate that:

Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students, and it is low-income students who benefit the most from being in school every day... the available data indicate that while chronic absenteeism is deeply detrimental to educational success, just missing more than a week of school can have consequences. (pp. 6-7)

Given the plurality of terms in the literature that are used for classifying schools in T&T, the authors of this study follow De Lisle, Keller, Jules and Smith (2009, p. 147) in their use of the term “highly valued” for those schools generally perceived by stakeholders as those more desirable for children to attend. This designation is in keeping with the aim of the research that investigates teachers’ views of students and thus is more fitting as it incorporates the aspect of the affective.

The existence of “highly valued” schools and thus those “less valued”, serves to institutionalise the issue of inequality. While the challenge of attending to the learning needs of students from low-income families confronts all schools, since the former schools attract the better-off financially, issues concerning children of the poor are more intense in the schools deemed of lesser value; significantly, the lesser-valued schools have the bigger task in this respect.

Links between social inequality and educational inequality can be explored in three main strands of the sociology of education and clarify important perspectives by which students from lower-income households are viewed. Firstly, functionalists explain the causes of inequality as being due to the malfunctioning of the agencies of socialization such as the home, community group or school (Douglas, 1964). In an approach called *deficit thinking* children from poor communities and the communities from which they come were viewed as deficient (Sugarman, 1970). The Coleman studies (Coleman et al., 1966) suggested that home factors contributed to the underperformance of working class children. In addition, Bernstein (1961) suggested a linguistic deprivation of working class children since their use of a restricted code compared to the elaborate code of the middle classes, limited their capacity for abstract thought. Interventions therefore had to correct deficits in the home, the community as well as in the children as they entered the school system.

*Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

In critique of this deficit view, Valencia (2010) claims that “many behavioural and social scientists hold the deficit thinking model in disrepute – arguing that it ignores the role of systemic factors in creating school failure” (p. 6). Keefer (2012) also critiques the deficit approach. Citing the work of Gorski (2008) and Ladson-Billings (2006), Keefer identifies elements of the “pathology” (p. 38) with which working-class children are accused and renders such an approach as overly biased, negative and unfair. This pathology suggests that the poor are lazy, do not care about the education of their children, are linguistically different and are abusers of drugs and alcohol.

The second strand of theory is Marxist in orientation and represents a conflict perspective to the genesis of social inequality (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). Fundamental to this theory is the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) who advance a deterministic outlook regarding the hidden curriculum of the school as operating to shape different social classes differently. The hidden curriculum promotes acceptance of hierarchy, a subservient workforce, fragmented views of the world and motivation by external rewards. They propose that social status is the product of the social structure of the society and schools simply promote the social inequalities that exist in the wider society as the class structure reproduces itself by preparing the different classes for their respective roles in the economy. Students are viewed as cogs in a wheel and have little choice but to “toe the line”. The solution to the problem of inequality in this paradigm requires radical social transformation.

In contrast to the crude determinism of Bowles and Gintis (1976), other scholars (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977) leave more room for agency. The latter see schools as sites of contestation where teachers and students exercise agency and where there is room to resist the hegemony of class structure. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) additionally offer a cultural-capital theory whereby the dominant groups in the society impose their culture through schools constituting a challenge to working class children, thus “aiding and abetting the reproduction of social inequality and social exclusion” (Tzanakis, 2011, p. 76). Teachers are seen as complicit in this process of cultural reproduction.

While Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) recognize and affirm the cultural capital of lower-income families, Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) find both the cultural capital and material circumstances as important. While the language, education and values of the family are important, the ability to access books, health or extra supports is also critical and so both material and cultural factors work together to shape educational opportunity. Freire (1971; 2004) also recognizes the role of agency in this second strand and insists that the hegemony of class can be resisted by

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

pedagogy designed to help people win their freedom through a critical-thinking process called *conscientization*.

The third strand, in postmodernist paradigm, includes symbolic interactionism (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012) and differs from the functionalist and conflict perspectives as it moves further away from determinism and advances even a greater degree of agency to teachers and students in the context of schools than that proposed even by the second strand. Interactionist authors take account of the subjective states of individuals and the meanings they attach to the unfolding events in their lives (Becker, 1977; Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1971; Rist, 1970).

The exploration of teachers' views as a significant research endeavour connects with the interactionists who give primacy to subjective meanings whereby, in short, "people behave based on what they believe" (Crossman, 2017, para. 2). A working assumption is that teachers actualize their agency related to the perceptions of reality that they deem meaningful. For schools to be effective instruments of empowerment, teachers' views matter: "beliefs, practices and attitudes...are closely linked to teachers' strategies for coping with challenges in their daily professional life... shape students' learning environment and influence student motivation and achievement" (OECD, 2009, p. 89).

A useful concept in this regard is that of self-efficacy which is defined as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p.3). In particular, teacher efficacy can be understood as "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p.628). The concept of teacher efficacy therefore includes the belief not only that the teacher is capable of empowering but also that the potential of the learner can be enhanced. Wilson and Conyers (2013) assert that among the key elements that "enable students... to achieve their potential" (p.53), the positive expectation of adults (parents, teachers and other caring people) as to a child's learning potential is critical. Teacher efficacy is not enough, however, but achieving learning goals also requires an openness on the part of the student to engage in the learning process (Bradshaw, 2010).

A study exploring the connection between teachers' expectations and their sense of responsibility for the learning of students from poor backgrounds proved instructive (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004). Findings indicated that teachers had lower levels of expectations and consequently less acceptance of responsibility. The low level of expectations generated by impressions conveyed by the wider society became embedded in the organizational habitus of the school.

### *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

Low expectations of the possibilities for student learning confirmed the self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992) which teachers operationalised in their classrooms. Positively, the study also revealed that where school leaders facilitated teacher reflection on practice, progress was made in tackling negative approaches by teachers toward students from low-income households.

While not discounting the importance of positive influence of teacher expectations for student achievement nor the occurrence of the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992), Chang (2011) asserts “it is not always the case that ‘you get what you expect’” (p. 200). Chang indicates that other factors are also needed for promoting student learning. Citing findings of a case study, he points out that misplaced beliefs about students (such as those pertaining to student autonomy) and inappropriate approaches to student learning and assessment can have deleterious effects on student outcomes.

The enhancement of learning potential not only entails belief in a child’s ability to learn but requires also the embodiment of appropriate teaching practices. Together with belief in their students’ capability, teachers “must act on that belief by creating a classroom environment that fosters potential that helps each student grow” (Wilson & Conyers, 2013, pp. 55-56).

In an educational setting, enhancing opportunities for learning also involve an enabling learning context. Wilson and Conyers (2013) thus define student potential as “the capacity for acquiring the knowledge and skills to achieve to a higher level of performance in any domain given the proper conditions for success [that] include effective instruction and support in a positive learning environment” (p. 53).

For achieving a positive learning environment, the affective element in teacher-student engagement seems critical. In a study carried out on teachers who themselves emerged from low-income households, the ability to connect (to empathise) with their students from similar backgrounds made a positive difference (Liggins, 2014). Teachers in that study believed that their backgrounds made them better equipped to teach students from low-income families “because they had personally been ‘in the same shoes’ as their students and had been successful themselves” (p. 100).

In addition, given the role that culture plays in students’ success at school (Bourdieu, 1973) and because they identified closely with the challenges that a culture of poverty (Payne, 2009) may pose for students, teachers in that study (Liggins, 2014) felt that they were sensitized to their students’ world and equipped to assist in overcoming obstacles and

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

gaining student trust in their efforts to promote the learning potential of their students.

Findings from research linking social class and teacher understandings of students' potential for achievement conducted in South Florida (Keefer, 2012), highlighted emotional support as the critical factor for students' personal success. In practice, this entailed the provision of an emotionally safe learning environment, life skills and recognition of the positive elements of students' backgrounds. The creation of such conducive learning settings cannot but engage and draw upon a teacher's emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). There is a place here for the employment of differentiated learning strategies where students feel respected in their particular learning styles and where learning activities are crafted to connect with the actual needs of individual students (Tomlinson, 2014).

Educational administrators also play an important role in raising the performance of children from low-income families in less-valued schools. In a survey of several studies, Crawford-Patterson (2008) identifies seven common characteristics of successful leadership, namely, a good principal is "a strong educational leader" with "a focus on clear standards for improvement of results", encourages "teamwork", ensures that "teachers are... committed to help all students achieve", sets "high expectations... for all students", encourages "collaboration... among faculty and staff" and engages families to "reinforce classroom learning at home" (p. 11).

Attention to beliefs and actions to facilitate conducive learning contexts can enhance the learning potential of students toward the attainment of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.71). Flow refers to a state of learning fulfilment and joy characteristic of optimal learning experiences. For the attainment of flow, parents need to believe in a student's potential and provide challenging opportunities toward growth. Csikszentmihalyi states that "almost all kids who are in flow frequently, their parents have very high expectations of them and they trust that they can do that. And they give them the opportunities" (edutopia, 2011).

The Funds of Knowledge (FOK) approach advances a corrective to the deficit view of students indicating that "missing from such a framework is the understanding that students, families, and communities are comprised not only of struggles, but also of strengths" (Sugarman, 2010, p. 97). The FOK paradigm, which has anthropological roots, adopts an "asset-based" understanding of marginalized groups (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Kinney, 2015) wherein the cultural knowledge of these groups become incorporated into culturally relevant curricula with implications for pedagogy (Rodriguez, 2013).

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) and Messing (2005) confirmed from their studies, that pre-service students who were engaged in

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

ethnographic research in poor communities in which they had to conduct their teaching, experienced shifts in their assumptions about the children, their parents and the communities in which they lived. The outlook of the teachers was transformed from deficit model thinking to an asset-based one that could generate communication and a positive exchange of ideas, talents and assets between the home and school environment.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

The ability to challenge popular pathologies, deficit theorizing and dominant discourses about low income and marginalized groups is required within a paradigm of teacher education which promotes reflection and the development of teacher identity. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) recognize that the evolution of identity rests on the concept of self, the sets of roles and functions the teacher is called upon to execute and the set of images and expectations of what a teacher should be that is imposed by the wider society.

The research on FOK by Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, (2005) and Messing (2005) represents a new hopeful departure in the way teacher education programmes can be transformed wherein action research is employed to allow teachers to reflect on their beliefs, practices and their very identity, as they learn about the real lives of poor and marginalized students. Paulo Freire's (1970) contribution on reflection and conscientization is congruent in this respect with the FOK approach.

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach for this study is that of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) in which the views of teachers in an in-service professional development programme were collated and examined using grounded theory analysis in coding and the generation of themes (Charmaz, 2006). While the entire cohort of 56 teacher-participants were invited to participate, only a total of nine eventually participated in two focus groups in which semi-structured interviews were used. Of the nine teachers, three (Kathy, Adele and Parvati) teach at highly-valued schools, with Kathy, Adele and Gail having grown up in middle-income households while the others were from low-income households. Table 1 displays bio data pertaining to the respondents in this study.

**Table 1. Respondents' Bio Data**

<b>Respondents</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>School Type Teaching</b>	<b>Form Level Teaching</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Background (Socio-economic)</b>
Radha	Less valued	Upper	9	33	Low
Carol	Less valued	Lower	5	29	Low
Parvati	Highly valued	Upper & Lower	12	33	Low
Shazaad	Less valued	Upper & Lower	13	35	Low
Gail	Less valued	Upper	7	35	Middle
Adele	Highly valued	Upper & Lower	6	37	Middle
Geeta	Less valued	Upper & Lower	8	33	Low
Tessa	Less valued	Upper & Lower	13	36	Low
Kathy	Highly valued	Upper & Lower	7	29	Middle

During interviews, teacher-participants were asked explicitly to focus on students from low-income households and issues pertaining to these students' learning. For example, one question from the interview protocol consisted of the question: "Can you describe any general features that you have come to associate with students of low-income households as to their learning ability?"

Findings were reprised and discussed in the light of ideas and previous research contained in the literature review.

Research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are teacher-participants' views of students from low-income households as to their learning potential?

RQ 2: How have teacher-participants responded to issues confronting students from low-income households as to their learning potential?

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

Rigour was established by way of continuous peer review, including feedback from a conference presentation, and subsequent refinement as an integral part of the research process. Data were reduced in collaborative fashion with the authors critiquing one another in the process of ascribing codes and themes. Discussion of findings in the light of the literature was carried out in the same manner.

In keeping with ethical principles, permission was gained from the nine teachers who participated, with measures to preserve anonymity, to use their verbal contributions for purposes of this research.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Teacher-participants' Views as to Students' Learning Potential (RQ1)**

Teacher-participants expressed various views relating to the learning potential of students from low-income household as relating to student school attendance, home environment, literacy and the expectations of educators.

##### ***Student school attendance***

Absenteeism is viewed by the teacher-participants as a characteristic associated with students from low-income households that negatively affects their learning potential (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Absence from classes (including unpunctuality) is due to issues relating to meals, transportation, domestic responsibilities and financial need. School attrition (those who drop out of school prematurely) is also a matter of concern that teachers pointed out.

Gail, who teaches in a catchment area with many low-income households, shared that, "*If there is no 'box lunch' [free lunch], they don't come.*" Additionally, Adele refers to students whose:

*academic performance tend [sic] to dwindle away because they cannot leave home in the dark so they have to leave home when it's early but at that time the traffic is at the maximum level so they reach to school after 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning.*

Due to the demands of domestic responsibilities, Parvati gave an account of one of her students, who is frequently absent, and comes from a single parent family: "*He has two younger siblings to babysit while his mum takes up another job and he is losing instruction.*"

Another case of absenteeism centred on financial need as Gail recounts: "*When he [student] came into form one, the father did not want to come and register him because he was working in Tobago. So, he spent a whole week or a month not being in school.*"

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

Some students even drop out of school entirely. Shazaad shared that *“they would come to school for the first few days of the term [then] you would see them working in some store.”*

***Home environment***

In the teacher-participants’ views, student learning potential is affected by home conditions. Emotional support from parents, a culture of crime, a lack of respect for parents and teachers, value placed on education and a tendency to depend on others for financial support are some of the factors that teacher-participants view as influencing student learning potential.

In teacher-participants’ views, parental support was highlighted. Respondents opined that some parents did not render sufficient emotional support with regard to their children’s learning. Geeta who teaches in a school located in a district with many low-income households said that in households headed by *“single parents, [or] grandparents, it was hard to get that parental support.”* Elaborating on this point, Kathy claimed that *“those [students] from wealthy backgrounds know their parents will come versus those from lower classes their parents will not even come to Parents’ Day. You see that link to parental support and their ability to do well in school.”* The absence of parental support has been noted in the literature as to significantly contribute to the underperformance of working class children in schools (Coleman et al., 1966; Hanushek, 2016).

While Geeta and Kathy associate a lack of parental support with students of low-income households, Radha opines that such a perspective is not entirely consistent. Radha, who has experience of teaching in two separate and distinct catchment areas with many low-income households, lauded the positive parental support in her current situation: *“when you have Parents’ Day all the parents show up as opposed to”* her previous school. Radha’s current situation characterized by parental support provides a more conducive environment for the enhancement of Csikszentmihalyi’s optimisation of learning (edutopia, 2011).

According to Tessa, students of low-income households are sometimes involved in a culture of crime (Ryan et al., 2013) which contributes to an unstable learning environment with regular distractions:

*We have boys from gangs, that’s a big thing in our school. If two boys get in a fight “ah go bring mih father’s gun for you” and it has happened. We have a police station nearby and they’re always in our school.*

Shazaad expressed a similar view to Tessa’s but in addition, mentioned the presence of drug trafficking: *“marijuana is a huge business and there are rival gangs who sell out [sic] each other...and this happens in our school on a weekly basis.”* Both Tessa and Shazaad attest to situations

*Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

whereby involvement in the culture of crime contributes to regular disruptions to the learning environment. The occurrence of regular distractions can only augur negatively as to the development of the learning potential of students from low-income households and to building a culture of learning especially in the schools perceived of as less valued.

Some respondents were of the view that students of low-income households showed disrespect for parents and teachers. According to Shazaad, who teaches in a school less valued:

*You would be surprised that 12 and 13 years olds, boys especially, the parents have no control...the child is talking over the parent, talking louder, making excuses for their behaviour and the parent will be like "you see how he does talk to me?"*

Interestingly though, Parvati who teaches in a highly valued school did describe anti-social behaviours toward authority among some of the students from low-income households: *"My school is in a different class altogether [sic] but there are some boys who give teachers real attitude and they don't want to hear them and they [are] very disrespectful."* Disrespect toward parents and teachers as key agents of socialisation, interferes with the enhancement of a student's learning potential as the very process of acquiring new learnings requires openness and humility toward those in authority capable of facilitating growth (Bradshaw, 2010).

Teacher-participants held views about the value that parents and students placed on education. Some students from low-income households were perceived as possessing a negative attitude towards education. Evidencing this view is Gail who shared that her students who were provided with Ministry of Education (MoE) school books came to class without them: *"I don't expect them to have text books. I ordered 20 and we now have three."*

On the other hand, another teacher-participant pointed out that some parents and students from low-income households did place high value on education, while others did not. Kathy said that:

*There are kids from the same background and they apply themselves. They have their battles at home and go on to win scholarships. I am not sure what is the difference between the kids that apply and the kids that sit back in a daze. I think it is the value placed on education.*

While Kathy was unable to make sense of the difference in application, it may be that the students, having succeeded at the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA— a selection exam into secondary school) continued in their schooling with a heightened self-esteem. Those who did not gain

entry in the highly-valued schools may experience quite the opposite as stated by Ryan et al. (2013) who underscores the “psychological trauma of a deep sense of failure” (p. 56) at the exam that has lasting effects on students.

There is also the opinion that some students expected the school to supply all their needs thus portraying a troubling culture of dependency (Deosaran, 2016). Radha stated that “*as far as they [the students] are concerned, they are supposed to be provided with.*” Shazaad shared that, in order to access the state’s social welfare grants, children must attend school and therefore “*would come to school in the first two or three weeks, present the social welfare form and you won’t see them again for maybe the next year.*” These cases seem to concur with findings from Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) who identify material and cultural capital deprivation as relevant factors impacting negatively on educational opportunity and thus the actualisation of student learning potential.

#### ***Literacy***

Another view among teachers somewhat resonates with the view of Van Vechten (2013) who explores linguistic deprivation among people of low-income households. One teacher’s view is that students from low-income households do have literacy challenges such as being unable to use Standard English in writing and reading as with many other students but yet they are able to demonstrate a measure of communicative competence. That teacher named Carol mentioned that from her experience, students “*are good at expressing themselves orally, not on paper, and, even though not in Standard English, they are good at getting [their] points across.*” In this case Carol is not in denial about her students’ shortcomings with regard to their command of Standard English but focusses not on their lack, but on their strength. In this way she avoids a deficit perspective by acknowledging and affirming students’ ability to nevertheless get their points across in the way that they know best.

#### ***Expectations of students by educators***

Geeta stated that her administration’s views on the learning potential of students displayed negative profiling in that “*the administration did not actually encourage you to expect anything [from the students]*”. Gail also recounted that one of her colleagues at her school tended to label students negatively “*Miss, dem [sic] children can’t do IT [Information Technology] for CXC [Caribbean Examination Council] they don’t have the ability.*” The problem with such manner of administration and teacher labelling is that it leads to less acceptance of teacher responsibility for student learning (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004).

Geeta, having gone through a period of exposure to the Diploma in Education (Dip. Ed.), on reflection, admitted that her teaching style may

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

have negatively impacted on her perception of students' learning potential: "Looking back now, I really did not believe that they [the students] were capable. I have revised that since I realised that it's all about me and the techniques I used." Geeta's new understanding born of her reflection on her teaching practice was key to her professional growth (Messing, 2005).

In summarizing the data relevant to research question one (1) a variety of views were apparent. Some views of the teacher-participants tended to acknowledge the challenges of students' life issues, whether in terms of material (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) or cultural deprivation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Other views relating to students' learning potential were more consistent with the symbolic interactionist (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012) and asset-based perspectives (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) in their focus on students' capabilities.

### **Teacher-participants' responses to issues confronting students as to their learning potential (RQ2)**

Intervention initiatives, by both the administration and individual teachers, exist in schools to provide a more inclusive education for students from low-income households. Teacher-participants support administrative initiatives that include streaming with increased time for subjects, a more inclusive curriculum and pastoral care. Teacher-participants themselves outline a range of approaches to assist students of low-income households. These include establishing emotional bonds with students, improving self-esteem, offering voluntary remedial classes and implementing student-centred teaching strategies.

#### **Administrative initiatives**

##### ***Streaming with increased time for particular subjects***

Streaming was also introduced as Geeta reported "*they shuffled the classes, pulled out those who had the ability, [and] placed them into one class.*" In addition, her administration not only offered fewer subjects to students in the 0 – 30 % test score range but also allocated more teaching time for those subjects: "*We have seven periods of Maths, seven periods of English, one for conversational Spanish, while five are allocated for Social Studies*". The practice of streaming has been criticized by UNESCO (2009) who advocates for a more inclusive approach to education in that it ultimately promotes in society a greater degree of justice and wider citizen participation.

##### ***A more inclusive curriculum***

The incorporation of disciplines in the schools such as the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA), Technical Vocational (Tech. Voc.), Physical

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

Education and other vocational possibilities not contained in the traditional grammar-school curriculum in teacher views was to be acknowledged and affirmed.

Tessa illustrated appropriately with her comment that at her school (less-valued): “*We have an active VAPA department, young men interested in visual arts, we have dance... Sir wants to introduce Drama. We are the only school in the country that does PE for Form 6.*” Similarly, in her less valued school at a remote seaside location, Gail lauds her principal who “*sent a [group] of children to [pursue] their seaman’s certificate. They did very well. Miss [the Principal] want to get it in the curriculum.*” Gail also shared that another initiative that is being developed at her school is “*called Open School which is a joint [venture] with Caribbean Fisheries doing fish preservation [and] small boat repairs.*” The provision of a wider curricular scope in both Tessa’s and Gail’s schools is congruent with the FOK approach that builds on the talents and resources of students in their setting (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

Though the positive approach at Tessa’s school is acknowledged, the sustained implementation of the wider curriculum proved problematic. She lamented that due to lack of replacement of Tech. Voc. teachers who retired “*there is no more AC [Air Condition] repairs, mechanical repairs. A lot of the footballers were into that and they were doing really well.*”

#### ***Pastoral care***

Teacher-participants explore pastoral strategies for assisting students from low-income households in the interest of achieving greater equity and for further enabling schooling to become an agent “for providing pathways out of poverty” (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p.7).

In some schools both staff and students donate cash and kind to assist students from low-income households. Parvati shared the following:

*We have a very active welfare committee and donations are done every day and our boys are pretty generous. We have community support, the principal, the administration, teachers who go out of their way and take out of their pocket.*

Respondents also noted that apart from material assistance, the pastoral care of students is also carried out by promoting a humanistic approach (Keefer, 2012). Gail notes that “*the Principal emphasised love, to be safe... to know what kindness was*”.

Shazaad observed that at his school: “*There are two pastoral deans per year group, who liaise with the home to provide any assistance necessary*”. He added:

*The majority [of students] are of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers have programmes in place in the*

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

*classroom and if it is a case where we have to get student services involved or the social worker, they would do whatever is necessary.*

Smaller class size can be advantageous for achieving better classroom management. With less students per class a teacher is afforded the opportunity to focus his/her energies more effectively. Carol, comparing her current teaching experience with that in her former school, shared that she was able to cope much better at the previous school where class sizes *“were manageable because they were so much smaller.”*

The above instances involving financial assistance, emotional support and a more manageable class size as vehicles of pastoral care were all seen as elements in the upbuilding of an inclusive learning context for the enhancement of student learning potential.

### **Teacher-participant initiatives**

In continuation of the humanistic approach but now from the initiative of teachers themselves, there was acknowledgement that teaching approaches in the classroom needed improving. Kathy disclosed that *“we have narrow cognitive goals. It is very certificate driven; teaching to the syllabus.”* Keefer (2012), in his research, supports going beyond the cognitive domain by establishing emotional bonds especially when it comes to students from low-income households as indicative of the following cases.

With intent to encourage students facing challenges to persevere, Parvati was very open with her students: *“I come from a lower socioeconomic background and a single-income household...I went through some tough times and [I] came out.”* Here Parvati expresses sentiments in accord with the Liggins' (2014) study whereby teachers themselves who emerged from low-income households felt that their experience better positioned them to assist students in the actualization of their learning potential.

Just as Paravati was able to empathise with the struggles of students from similar low-income households and harness this empathy in a helping relationship, Gail was able to identify with the struggle of students in the less valued school to the students' benefit. Having herself attended a less-valued secondary school, Gail had high expectations for her students and encouraged them to remain steadfast because as she put it: *“I was average, and I felt as if I got that push, so I pushed them to complete the syllabus as much as they can.”*

Carol builds students' self-esteem by recognising the pursuits they value such as their sporting performance. She says: *“they looking for*

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

*reinforcement when they are coming to class. When they feel Miss recognize [that] ‘I am a cricketer and not just an environmental science student [they become] more to Miss’.*”

Voluntary remedial classes are conducted. According to Adele “we devote half of our lunch time. They [students] get their lunch early and are there waiting so it's just a matter of us [sic] being there and they respond to it generally well.”

Teachers shared that they utilise student-centred teaching strategies. Tessa stated that: “We try group work so the ones who are brighter could help them [the others].” At Kathy’s school “they encourage us to use technology in the classroom...looking at the different types of learners,” while Shazaad stated that he tries to “to incorporate alternative assessment.” Geeta also values a more inclusive approach due to her experience over her professional development as she lauds “the Dip. Ed. learning about different learning styles, different teaching methods.” Gail also recommended the approach of differentiated teaching (Tomlinson, 2014), stating that “we have to figure out what to tap into when teaching”.

In summarizing the data relevant to research question two (2), a variety of responses to issues confronting students from low-income households came to the fore towards greater inclusive practices geared to enhancing student learning potential. Administrative initiatives aligned to a more inclusive curriculum with focus on FOK (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and humanistic approaches (Keefer, 2012) were prominent. Teacher initiatives were overwhelming with a humanistic and pastoral focus (Liggins, 2014) and student-centred pedagogical strategies (Tomlinson, 2014).

### **Recommendations**

Replacing any low expectations that spring from the pathologies about the poor and marginalized in the society is an ongoing duty. Teacher-participants’ views indicated awareness of “deficits” with which children of low-income households had to contend but did show remarkable sensitivity to the assets or strengths which students brought with them especially in the area of psychomotor and kinaesthetic abilities. It is recommended therefore that this awareness be strengthened in the Dip. Ed., *Educational Foundations and Issues in Education (Foundations)* course by developing in teachers, a way of engaging all students with an expectation of identifying their strengths and building on students’ positives in crafting learning experiences. The requirement to focus on each individual student can also be enhanced by the development of teacher expertise in differentiated classroom strategies so that they can

*Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

cater for individual learning needs. Apart from the academic subjects, viable options for alternatives should always be available.

Becoming reflective about their practice and conscious of the need for pedagogies which allow children from poor and low-income families to access learning opportunities in school is the mark of the conscientious educator. In this vein, there was an instance of real progress by Geeta in her change of attitude to students that came as a result of reflection on her work during the initial weeks of the Dip.Ed. programme. In this case teachers should be encouraged to habitually engage in reflection on their work so that improvements would be more likely to happen on a regular basis.

Some students from low-income households were perceived (as evidenced by Gail's comments) as possessing a negative attitude towards education. However, it must be noted that students showed that with extra effort by teachers, change is possible. In Adele's case, they indeed valued the education being offered to them in their reaction to teachers who took the responsibility of extending themselves in the light of the challenging social environment of their students. Therefore, there is potential to change a deficit view of parents and students as not valuing the education offered. Here the symbolic interactionists seem to have the edge that in focussing efforts on enabling relationships in the school context there is potential to effect change for the better. It is thus recommended that administrators promote an ethos of service among school staff in the interest of accommodating students' learning that takes into account the peculiarities of the social context in which the schools operate.

In addition, Carol's student appreciated her for recognising that student's sporting ability and herein is an important cue. There is value in acknowledging the co-curricular activities where students shine as the student is validated in an arena apart from the classroom space. Teachers can thus pay attention to validating students by recognising and building upon student strengths to win them over to other pursuits in the interest of students' holistic development.

If teachers and administrators are to be more than inadvertent perpetrators of social inequality in the classroom then consciousness of the workings of class bias in the school system is critical especially in a context of a stratified school system as in T&T. As teachers' views tended not to incorporate much by way of analysis in the social reproduction strand, it is recommended that further consciousness be raised in this area in teacher education programmes. In the Dip. Ed. programme in particular, this is an area that can be exploited in the *Educational Foundations and Issues in Education (Foundations)* course.

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

## **Conclusion**

While teachers did acknowledge the challenging situations experienced by students from low-income households, they, however, never profiled the students as inherently lazy or lacking ability to learn due to the students being from low-income households. In fact, many did refer to their own early backgrounds of hardship and offered their own experiences as motivation for their students.

Teacher-participants' responses to the challenges associated with students from low-income households resonate with interactionist and asset-based views. The latter are more affirmative of students and identify a greater space for the agency of teachers as well as students in their power to determine access to schooling. They emphasise the agency and strengths of administrators and students by underscoring the potential of positive relationships in the school and incorporating talents possessed by students.

In the Dip. Ed. Programme, teachers do already possess sufficient openness to the "funds of knowledge" and "assets" possessed by students and their families. Granted this positive finding, such an affirmative disposition further developed would augur well for the success of teachers in their course of professional development.

## **References**

- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *The importance of being in school: A report of absenteeism in the nation's public schools*. Retrieved from [http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport\\_May16.pdf](http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf)
- Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2012). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis (7th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.
- Becker, H. (1977). Social class variations in the teacher pupil relationship and personal change in adult life. In B. R. Cosin et al. (Eds.), *School and society*. London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107-128.
- Bernstein, B. (1961). Social class and linguistic development: A theory of social learning. In A. H. Halsey, J. Floud, and C. A. Anderson (Eds.), *Economy, education and society* (pp. 288-314). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1973). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In R. Brown (Ed.), *Knowledge, education and cultural change: Papers in the Sociology of Education* (pp. 71-112). London, UK: Tavistock.

*Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London, UK: Sage.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America*. London, UK: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Bradshaw, J. (2010). *Reclaiming virtue*. London, UK: Hachette Digital.
- Campbell, C. (1992). *Colony and nation. A short history of education in Trinidad and Tobago, 1834-1986*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Chang, J. (2011). A Case study of the “pygmalion effect”: Teacher expectations and student achievement. *International Education Studies, 4*(1), 198-201.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Cicourel, A. V., & Kitsuse, J. I. (1971). The social organization of the high school and deviant adolescent careers. In Cosin et al. (Eds.), *School and society: A sociological reader* (pp. 152–159). London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Crawford-Patterson, V. (2008). *An investigation of the principal's communication in the Comer School Development Model*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- Crossman, A. (2017). *Understanding symbolic interaction theory: An overview*. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/symbolic-interaction-theory-3026633>
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- De Lisle, J. (2012). Secondary school entrance examinations in the Caribbean: Legacy, policy, and evidence within an era of seamless education. *Caribbean Curriculum, 19*, 109-143.
- De Lisle, J., Keller, C., Jules, V., & Smith, P. (2009). When choosing might mean losing: A mixed method study of secondary school choice in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. *Caribbean Curriculum, 16*(1), 131–176.
- Deosaran, R. (2016). *Inequality crime and education in Trinidad and Tobago: Removing the masks*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Diamond, J. B., Randolph, A., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). Teachers' expectations and sense of responsibility for student learning: The importance of race, class, and organizational habitus. *Anthropology Education Quarterly, 35*(1), 75-98. doi:10.1525/aeq.2004.35.1.75
- Douglas, J.W.B. (1964). *The home and the school*. London, UK: McGibbon & Kee.
- edutopia. (2011, April 11). *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Motivating people to learn*. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi-motivating-people-learn>
- Feinberg, W., & Soltis, J. (2004). *School and society*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1971). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

- Giroux, H. (1983). Ideology and agency in the process of schooling. *The Journal of Education*, 165(1), 12-34.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- González, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gorski, P. (2008). The myth of the culture of poverty. *Educational leadership*, 67(7), 32-36.
- Guskey, T.R., & Passaro, P.D. (1994). Teacher efficacy: A study of construct dimensions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(3), 627-643.
- Halsey, A. H., Floud, J., & Anderson, C. A. (1961). *Education, economy and society*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Halsey, A. H., Heath, A., & Ridge, J. M. (1980). *Origins and destinations*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Hanushek, E. (2016). What matters for student achievement: Updating Coleman on the influence of families and schools. *Education Next*, 16(2), 18-26. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/what-matters-for-student-achievement/>
- Johnson, A. (2016, October 25). The poverty report hot potato. *Trinidad Express Newspapers*. Retrieved from <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/20161025/editorial/the-poverty-report-hot-potato>
- Jules, V. (1994). *A study of the secondary school population in Trinidad and Tobago: Placement patterns and practices: A research report*. St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago: Centre for Ethnic Studies, The University of the West Indies.
- Keefer, N. (2012). *Teachers' narratives of experience with social class*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5542&context=etd>
- Kinney, A. (2015). Compelling counter narratives to deficit discourses: An investigation into the funds of knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse U.S. elementary students' households. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 4(1), 1-25. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/qre.2015.54>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). It's not the culture of poverty, it's the poverty of culture: The problem with teacher education. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 104-109.
- Liggins, D. (2014). *Do teachers' backgrounds matter? Examining teachers with low-socioeconomic backgrounds' perceptions of teaching economically disadvantaged students*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from [https://uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/bitstream/handle/10106/24909/Liggins\\_uta\\_2502D\\_12868.pdf?sequence=1](https://uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/bitstream/handle/10106/24909/Liggins_uta_2502D_12868.pdf?sequence=1)
- Lupton, R. (2005). Social justice and school improvement: Improving the quality of schooling in the poorest neighbourhoods. *British Educational Research Journal*, 5(31), 589-604.
- Messing, J. (2005). Social reconstructions of schooling: Teacher evaluations of what they learned from participation in the funds of knowledge project. In N. Gonzalez, L. C. Moll & C. Amanti (Eds.). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing*

## *Teachers' Views of the Learning Potential of Students From Low-Income Households*

- practices in households, communities, and classrooms* (pp.183-198). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). (2009). *Creating effective teaching and learning environments first results from TALIS (teaching and learning international survey)*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/43023606.pdf>
- Payne, R. (2009). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: RFT.
- Rist, R. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40(3), pp. 411-451.
- Rodriguez, M. (2013). Power and agency in education: Exploring the pedagogical dimensions of funds of knowledge. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 87-120. DOI: 10.3102/0091732X12462686
- Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1992). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development. Expanded edition*. Carmarthen, UK: Crown House.
- Ryan, S., Rampersad, I., Bernard, L., Mohammed, P., & Thorpe, M. (2013). *No time to quit: Engaging youth at risk: Executive report of the committee on young males and crime in Trinidad and Tobago*. St Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago: Authors.
- Sugarman, B. (1970). *Social class values and behaviour in schools*. In M. Craft (Ed). *Family, class and education: A reader*. London, UK: Longman.
- Sugarman, S. (2010). Seeing past the fences: Finding funds of knowledge for ethical teaching. *The New Educator*, 6(2), 96-117.
- Tomlinson, C. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- The University of the West Indies, Faculty of Humanities and Education, School of Education. (2016). *Postgraduate Diploma in Education*. Retrieved from <https://sta.uwi.edu/fhe/education/diped>.
- Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education. National Task Force on Education. (1993). *Education policy paper: (1993-2003), White Paper*. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago: Author.
- Trinidad and Tobago. Central Statistical Office. (2012). *Trinidad and Tobago human development atlas 2012*. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago: Author.
- Tzanakis, M. (2011). Bourdieu's social reproduction thesis and the role of cultural capital in educational attainment: A critical review of key empirical studies. *Educate- The Journal of Doctoral Research in Education*, 11(1), 76-90.
- United Kingdom. Department for Education. (2015). *Policy paper 2010 to 2015 government policy: Poverty and social justice*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-poverty-and-social-justice/2010-to-2015-government-policy-poverty-and-social-justice>.
- UNDP (United Nations development Programme). (2011). *Income inequality and the condition of chronic poverty*. Retrieved from [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Towards%20Human%20Resilience/Towards\\_SustainingMDGProgress\\_Ch6.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Towards%20Human%20Resilience/Towards_SustainingMDGProgress_Ch6.pdf)

*Benignus Bitu, Dyann Barras, Stephen Geofroy, Shahiba Ali,  
Samuel Lochan, Lennox McLeod, Lystra Stephens-James & Antoinette  
Valentine Lewis*

- UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Paris, France: Author.
- UNESCO. (2000). *Dakar framework for action: Education for all: Meeting our collective commitments*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2000). *Education for all: Is the world on track?* Paris, France: Author.
- UNESCO. (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. Paris, France: Author.
- UNESCO. (2009). *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*. Paris, France: Author.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Latin America and the Caribbean. Education for all, 2015. Regional Review*. Paris, France: Author.
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- United States. Department of Education. (2002). *Title I – Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged [No child left behind]*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html#sec101>
- United States. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to the top program executive summary*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>
- Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Van Vechten, D. (2013). *Impact of home literacy environments on students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1249&context=education\\_ETD\\_masters](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1249&context=education_ETD_masters).
- Willis, P. E. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working-class kids get working class jobs*. Farnborough, UK: Saxon House.
- Wilson, D., & Conyers, M. (2013). *Five big ideas for effective teaching: Connecting mind, brain, and education research to classroom practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. London, UK: Sage.