

Assessing Competing Perspectives: A Critical Analysis of Guyana's National Grade Six Assessment

by

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Acknowledgment: It behooves me to express my gratitude right from the start to the two anonymous referees whose suggestive evaluations helped me to theoretically ground this essay vis-a-vis what my investigation means for those interested in the Black Diaspora, thereby evoking the spirit of my Guyanese countryman, Walter Rodney, in me.

Abstract

This article critically examines a number of competing perspectives on the impact of the National Grade Six Assessment, a high-stakes examination that is used as a tracking tool for students that are eleven years and older transitioning from primary schools into secondary schools in Guyana, a sovereign state on the northern mainland of South America. Hence, there is an achievement gap between children of affluent parents and children of low-income parents in the country. The article concludes that low-income parents cannot afford extra tutoring and private schools and therefore low-income students are marginalized, and that primary schools are not the great equalizer in terms of creating equity between children of low-income parents and children of affluent parents.

Introduction

Originally a Dutch colony in the 17th century, by 1815 Guyana had become a British possession. The abolition of slavery led to settlement of urban areas by the former enslaved population from Africa (30.2%) and the importation of indentured servants from India (39.8%) to work the sugar plantations (10.5% indigenous population), together comprising about three quarters of Guyana's population. In 1966 Guyana achieved independence from the UK, and since then it has been ruled mostly by socialist-oriented governments. Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America and shares cultural and historical bonds with the Anglophone Caribbean. About one-third of the Guyanese population lives below the poverty line; indigenous people are disproportionately affected. Guyana's literacy rate is reported to be among the highest in the Western Hemisphere, the level of functional literacy, however, it is considerably lower, which has been attributed to poor education quality, teacher training, and infrastructure.

Thus, a number of competing perspectives on the National Grade Six Assessment in Guyana and its implementation has created an achievement gap between children that attend private schools and children that attend public schools. To systematize the analysis of these perspectives, the discussion will thematically be presented in three parts: (1) Historical Context of the National Grade Six Assessment, Public and Private Schools and the Extra-Lessons Syndrome, and the Achievement Gap; (2) Theoretical Implications; and (3) Conclusions. Before presenting the analysis of the findings, it is important to discuss in the reminder of this section the importance of the assessment and the critical analytical approach that undergirds this essay.

The National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) highlights some of the issues in the education system in Guyana. The assessment is a high stakes examination that is used as a tracking tool for students transitioning from the primary schools to the secondary schools. Students that did not score the required marks for entry into the top secondary schools are regulated to schools that focus more on the vocational aspect of education (Ishmael, 2012). Parents, cognizant of the importance of the examination as a tracking tool wanted to give their children a competitive edge over the other children taking the exam. Parents, on the one hand, began to pressure teachers that had good success rates on the examination to give private tutoring to their children. Teachers, on the other hand faced with economic difficulties and low salaries began to charge fees to tutor students for the NGSA (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2009). Consequently, an inequitable pattern emerged, families that can afford the cost of tutoring and/or private schools would choose that option; low income families that cannot provide or do not have the resources to pay for extra lessons and/or private schools risk the possibility of their children becoming educationally disadvantaged. This systemic issue has created an achievement gap between children of affluent parents and children of low income parents.

It behooves me to briefly state what critical analysis approach is before proceeding with the interrogation of the competing perspectives, since it is the technique that is employed to ground the examination that follows. Critical analysis necessitates the establishment of a sound comprehension of the various perspectives on a topic. This is accomplished by pinpointing and elucidating the viewpoints of the authors and furnishing the contretemps deduced from their arguments. This calls for the analysis to assess the distinctiveness, discernibleness, suggestiveness, and theoretical merits of the studied works.

Historical Context of the National Grade Six Assessment, Public and Private Schools and the Extra-Lessons Syndrome, and the Achievement Gap

The analysis on this theme focuses on the exam that preceded the National Grade Six Assessment in Guyana, which was first introduced in Great Britain in 1944, and it was called the Common Entrance Exam (Barrow, 2012). The test was used throughout the United Kingdom, but currently it is only used in a few counties and boroughs. Dorian Barrow (2012) considered it a high-stakes test that was an effective method to select the educational track of children. England terminated the exam in 1976 because of the strong bias in the exam favoring middle-class and upper class households.

According to Donald Lemke (1975), universal primary education had a strong bias in the colonial policies of the English-speaking Caribbean and Central and South America. Most of the children attended primary school from age five to 12. Children from eight to 12 had close to 100% attendance because of the strong emphasis placed on formal education in the region. Primary schools in the region had the effect of integrating children from low-income families with children from affluent families. Parents are aware that primary school education is where the basic aptitude and knowledge are acquired, laying the foundation for all future learning. Lemke (1975) continued by stating that secondary schools, on the other hand, were developed to fill a specific need, which is to prepare students to attend universities in foreign countries. The secondary schools at that time were private and attracted students from the middle and upper socio-economic classes. The issue at that time, therefore, was to find a selection process for students entering the secondary school system that would provide equity for all students.

To this end, the former British colonial countries in the English-speaking Caribbean and Central and South America adopted the Common Entrance Exam as a selection process for students to attend secondary schools. The Common Entrance Examination was introduced in Jamaica, in 1957 (Higgins, 2015). Garfield Higgins (2015) states that the exam was introduced because each secondary school used to hold its own entrance examination and parents with the necessary income would pay to get their children into certain schools, regardless of their grades on the exam.

The original intent of Common Entrance Exam was to select students based on merit. Henry (2012) agrees with Higgins that prior to 1958, the majority of high school students had to pay fees and they were children of affluent parents, only a handful of scholarships were available for children of low income parents that were talented.

Other countries in the English-speaking Caribbean and Central and South America gradually adopted the Common Entrance Exam in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a selection process for students to gain access into secondary schools. Corinne Barnes (2014) stated that for 57 years the Common Entrance Exam was used to decide the academic tracks of students. It was an accepted fact that students who did well on the exam were guaranteed a place in one of the top prestigious schools. The students were under a lot of stress to perform well on the exam. Barnes (2014) also stated that a 12-year-old boy in Jamaica committed suicide because he did not score well on the exam. There were also incidents of students that dropped out of school because of their inability to perform well on the exam. The population was therefore asking for new criteria to assess children's academic abilities for secondary schools.

As a result, countries in the region gradually began to replace the Common Entrance Exam with their own forms of assessment that were related to the norms and cultures of the communities. Jamaica replaced the exam with the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) as an instrument to bring equity to the admissions of students to secondary schools. The GSAT was criticized because it placed an unreasonable burden and stress on grade six students and because students had to remember material that they had learned in grades three and four. On the positive side, the Ministry of Education in Jamaica found that the old system placed 30% of the 50,000 students that took the exam into secondary schools. In one year, GSAT placed 42,000 children into secondary schools (Higgins, 2015; Barnes, 2014, Henry, 2012). Currently, Jamaica is analyzing options to replace the GSAT with the Primary Exit Profile Exam in 2017 (Higgins, 2015).

Trinidad and Tobago retained the exam as a placement tool for students entering secondary schools, but renamed it Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). Barbados changed the Common Entrance Exam to Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) (De Lisle, 2012). The objective was to achieve a strategic alignment with the local norms and cultures. According to Dorian Barrow (2012), Belize adopted a new examination to replace the Common Entrance Exam and it was called the Primary School Exam (PSE). The admission policies to secondary schools were no longer based on a single standardized test. The admission policies were changed to three criteria (1) a cut off score on the PSE, (2) positive evaluation of the applicants' primary school transcripts, (3) a written recommendation from the primary school principal or his/her designee analyzing the students' abilities to function at the secondary school level. This method gave the students more opportunities for success rather than relying on a single high-stakes test. Guyana also changed the Common Entrance Exam to Secondary School Entrance Exam and finally to National Grade Six Assessment.

The changes in the exam in the region were made to align the test with the social and cultural norms of the individual countries. Although changes were made, the exam continued to be an important part of a selection process for secondary schools. A high score on the exam would guarantee a place for a child in one of the top secondary schools in the country (Barrow, 2012). Parents are aware that the scores acquired on the exam will determine their children's access to higher education and future careers. Students who do not score the cut-off marks for entry into the major secondary schools are regulated to secondary schools that focused more on vocational education (Ishmael, 2012; Bacchus, 1980).

In the 1950s, secondary education in Guyana was similar to other English-speaking countries in the Caribbean and was for children of affluent parents. An inequitable pattern developed because children of low-income parents could not attend school after obtaining a primary school education. In an effort to create a more equitable system, the Common Entrance Examination was introduced in Guyana in 1960 to serve as a merit-based exam to award scholarships for admission into secondary schools from primary schools (Ishmael, 2012). The government's goal therefore was to award free places in secondary schools for all students who met the qualifying standards. Students who did not meet the qualifying standards had to attend all-age schools in the secondary sections of the primary schools. This secondary department was established in 1962 to cater for children ages 11 to 15 (Ishmael, 2012; Bacchus, 1980). According to Zellynne Jennings and Eric Miller (1999), there was space available in the more prestigious general secondary schools for only 40% of the primary school graduates, but there was no equality of education opportunity and each child was not given a chance to benefit from a good secondary education.

In Guyana, there are four basic levels in the education system, (1) Nursery, (2) Primary, (3) Secondary, (4) Technical and Vocational (National Development Strategy, 2000 & 1996). Nursery education is available to children from ages three years and six months, attendance is not compulsory, and they spend at least two years at the nursery school. Children are admitted to primary schools at the minimum age of five years and nine months. Primary school education in Guyana is compulsory and the program is for six years. The primary schools were owned and controlled by the church and it provided universal education for all children from age five to 11 (Ishmael, 2012; UNESCO, 2007). At the age of 11 plus, students take an exam to be awarded places in the secondary schools; those with the highest scores are awarded places in the prestigious secondary schools, and students with low scores are placed in Community High Schools or in the secondary department of the primary schools. The Community High Schools offer four-year programs oriented toward the acquisition of pre-vocational skills and the primary schools with secondary departments offer four-year programs that are similar to that of the Community High Schools (UNESCO, 2007). According to Lemke (1975), students that failed or did not receive a passing grade had to attend post-primary school until school leaving age. The burden was on the parents to make sure that their children were getting the best preparation for the high-stakes exam.

The Secondary schools offered three types of programs for children that have completed primary school (UNESCO, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2004). The secondary sections of the primary schools provide education for children between the ages of 11 and 15 that were not successful on the NGSAs exam. The Community High Schools (CHS) offered four-year programs designed to prepare students for life in Guyanese society by developing practical skills that can be used for blue-collar jobs. The first two years are for basic academic skills in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Health. In the final two years, emphasis was placed on vocational activities. According to Jennings and Miller (1999), the Community High Schools were unattractive, dull, and the environment was not conducive to learning. A survey on 71 CHS schools and secondary sections of the primary schools in 1990 found that 38.5% of the students graduated and 61.2% dropped out in their final year. The rationale for the high dropout rate was shortage of textbooks, lack of qualified teachers, poor facilities, and wasted class time (cited in Jennings & Miller, 1999). The students that graduated from the CHS schools took the Secondary School Proficiency Examination (SSPE). Employers hold this certificate in low esteem and it was very difficult for graduates to gain employment (UNESCO, 2007). The certificate, however, can get students into one of the technical or vocational after-school programs.

The General Secondary School offered a five-year program that prepared students for the Caribbean Examination Council Exam (CXC), a secondary education certificate, and/or the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O Level Examination). The programs in the schools are mainly academic and students that received at least five passes in subjects with high grades on the CXC or GCE examinations can proceed to Form VI at a designated Senior Secondary School, and at the end of two years can take the GCE Advance Level Examination (UNESCO, 2007). It was essential for students to get high qualifying marks on the NGSAs because the scores will determine the school that the student will eventually attend for secondary education.

To this end, the focus was on getting good grades on the exam. Students were originally drilled in Arithmetic, English, and Verbal Reasoning for the Common Entrance Exam and no emphasis was placed on the other subjects. According to Ishmael (2012), students were placed in various streams from as early as standard two: i.e. the students' fourth year in primary school. Those in the "bright group" were placed in separate classes and given extra lessons. The extra-lessons at this time were designed for remediation and giving support to all students because a school's reputation was at stake and the head teachers were given an extra stipend depending on the number of students that were accepted into top tier schools. According to Ishmael (2012), the fees for extra lessons were not based on the parents' ability to pay because in some instances students from low-income households were given extra-lessons at no cost. This equitable system had children of affluent parents and low-income parents given the same preparation for the exam. This special streaming, however, resulted in some children believing that their academic level was low and they were not expected to do well on the exam.

The education system in Guyana continued to use the Common Entrance Examination as the selection process for high schools. After Guyana became independent in 1966, the ruling party, the Peoples National Congress (PNC) introduced reforms in the education system. The reforms were guided by the Socialist ideology of the government; the goal was to break the social, economic and intellectual ideology that Guyana inherited from the colonial master, the British (Dans, 2014; Jennings & Miller, 1999). The ruling party in government was anxious to “decolonize” the education system by removing the old colonial and capitalist values and replacing them with a new socialist education. To this end, in 1976, the Minister of Education Vincent Teekat stated that the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) would be introduced to replace the Common Entrance Exam. The exam will not be used to select a small group of students for placement into secondary schools, but it will be used to place all students who wrote the exam into schools that have programs from which students would benefit the most based on their abilities and aptitudes (Ishmael, 2010). The students that had high scores were placed in the premier secondary schools and those with low scores were sent to the lower echelon schools that were not very reputable such as the Community High Schools.

In an effort to make the criteria for entering secondary schools more equitable, the government introduced the National Grade Six Assessment and a percentage of the marks from grade two and grade four assessments were combined with the grade six marks. The grade two marks were five percent and the grade four marks were ten percent of the total score. The grade six marks were 85%, which made it imperative for students to obtain high scores if they wanted to attend the top secondary schools (UNESCO, 2007).

According to Jennings and Miller (1999), the first sign of the deterioration of the education system in Guyana was in 1966 when 9,673 students took the Common Entrance Exam and 2,191 achieved passing scores. The authors concluded that the fall in standards was due to a system of recruiting teachers directly out of secondary schools, lack of supervision by the head teachers and education officers, teachers absent from class to attend university, and the excessive number of substitute teachers.

The decline, however, clearly started in the 1970s. The economy of Guyana was dependent on rice, sugar, and bauxite exports for 90% of the revenue. The economic decline was triggered by the socialist policies of the government (UNESCO, 2007). The government wanted state ownership of the key sectors of the economy and to achieve its political ambitions it nationalized the rice, sugar, and bauxite industries. This action that resulted in poor management was exacerbated by the rise in oil prices, fall in the price of key exports, and the flight of skilled professionals to other countries (UNESCO, 2007).

The country had one of the largest external debts in the region and the Guyana dollar was one of the weakest in the English-speaking Caribbean (Jennings & Miller 1999). There were also racial tension between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese. The Indo-Guyanese felt that they were marginalized because of the philosophy of the ruling party in government (Dans, 2014; Bacchus, 1980). These issues resulted in a reduction in financing for education in the country.

In moving forward with its socialist ideology, the government announced in 1976 that there would be free education in the country from nursery to tertiary level, including textbooks (National Development Strategy, 1996 & 2000; Paul, 2003; Ministry of Education 2009). The government did not allocate a lot funds for education; funds allocated to military and paramilitary groups comprised 11% of the National Budget (Ishmael, 2012). The government, however, needed a strong military force to keep the dissidents from agitating and demanding changes in the political system.

The huge foreign debt that was almost US 2 billion dollars hampered economic growth. The government was using half of its budget to repay the national debt. The economy of Guyana was unable to sustain the increase in finance for education and this resulted in the government spending less on education (Bacchus, 1980). The state was supplying textbooks, paper, pencils and other writing materials for all school children. The low financing of education contributed to the decline of the conditions in all schools, the infrastructure needed repairs, textbooks requirements were not met in the primary schools, attendance was low, the national attendance rate was 68%, with levels as low as 50%, and qualified teachers migrated to other countries for better working conditions and salaries (UNESCO, 2007).

The government was unable to maintain the high standards in education and this resulted in a decline in financial allocations by the state for education (Bacchus, 1980). At this time, the government was spending just over five percent of its GDP on education while other Caribbean countries were spending around 16% of their GDPs. The results were low teacher salaries, a shortage of funds to improve the infrastructure and supply materials to the schools (National Development Strategy, 2000). Many qualified teachers departed from Guyana to seek employment in other areas such as the Caribbean, North America and Africa because of low teacher salaries and political discrimination against teachers. This was exacerbated by the government not spending money on education, lack of facilities, water, sanitation, books, high dropout rates, and large class sizes.

Parents are cognizant that primary school education in Guyana is the platform for all future learning, where the basics in reading, writing, and numeracy are taught and learned. Primary school education culminates with the National Grade Six Assessment. Based on the results of this exam, some 11-year-old children are directed into schools that have good academic programs, more qualified teachers, and good infrastructure.

The other students are placed into schools that have programs of shorter duration than the regular secondary schools, unqualified teachers, and poor infrastructure. This tracking system seals children's educational fates based on the scores of a single exam (National Development Strategy, 1996 & 2000; UNESCO, 2007). Based on their scores, children are placed in either the academic or vocational track.

Parents, being aware of this tracking system, would try to get their children into schools that have good records of passes on the NGSAs, causing an influx of student populations and overcrowding. On the other hand, schools with poor records are under populated and located in the areas that have low socio-economic families. Parents became very anxious about the future of their children and their success on the examination because of overcrowding in the schools, unqualified teachers, and teacher absence. Parents began to pressure teachers to provide tutoring or private coaching for their kids. Teachers, on the other hand, faced with economic difficulties developed a pattern of after-school lessons. Because of the economic gains, teachers are more concerned with private lessons rather than their classroom teaching; they charge 4,500 Guyana Dollars (1 US is equivalent to 200G) per student per class (Ishmael, 2012).

To supplement their income, teachers started holding extra-lessons and charging fees for their services. A student has the option of not attending the lessons, but many parents complain that topics that were not taught during normal school hours were done in the extra lessons. The children have to attend or they will miss vital aspects of the curriculum because it is during the extra-lessons sessions that much of the preparation for the high-stakes exam is done (Ishmael, 2010). The children of parents who cannot afford to pay for the extra lessons are at a disadvantage and are also neglected during regular school hours because the teachers place more emphasis on the extra lessons. As a result, children of low-income parents do not get the same training rigors as their affluent counterparts in preparation for the exam and they have less chance of passing the NGSAs. According to Ishmael (2010), a majority of students achieve over 60% of marks on the exam; but because of the competitive nature of the exam, only those with the highest marks are selected for places in secondary schools. The number selected depends on the places available in the secondary schools.

During school hours, students are not getting the rigorous education that is required for them to be successful. Teachers take long-term sick leaves, they leave the schools to attend higher education programs, and they encourage their students to attend private lessons. It became obvious that children who attend lessons are better prepared and have an advantage over their peers when they take the exam (National Development Strategy, 2000). This parallel system has developed in all critical areas of examinations in Guyana and culminated into the development of private schools. The exorbitant prices charged by these private schools and extra lessons made it highly improbable for children of low-income families to attend these institutions of learning. The education system in Guyana had become commercialized, with the affluent parents purchasing a better education for their children by sending them for extra lessons or to private schools. Students that attend extra lessons and private schools receive a more rigorous education and are better prepared for the global arena.

The Ministry of Education as early as 1963, realized the potential problems derived from the high-stakes testing and the tracking system it created. In an effort to create equality in the education system and the need for equity by opening avenues for the children of low-income and affluent parents to get the same opportunities to learn, the Ministry of Education authored the White Paper on Education Policy. According to Ishmael (2012), the education minister Carl Nunes outlined this policy. He recommended abolishing the exam and aligning the education system similar to the education system in the United States of America. He wanted to establish more secondary schools in the community sending children from primary schools to the secondary schools in their local communities. The objective was that primary school children that are exposed to all aspects of the primary curriculum without the stress of a competitive national exam will continue the learning process on the secondary level, where their aptitudes in academic, technical, or vocational education would be better recognized after three years in high school. The government did not follow up on this policy and this bold policy died after another political party won the general elections in 1964.

The Ministry of Education is cognizant of the extra lessons and the impact it has on the low-income population. It is aware that extra lessons may not be necessary if teachers deliver rigorous instruction during regular school hours. It has made promises to address the issue, but nothing is being done to correct the issue. As a result of these discriminatory and corrupt practices, children of low-income parents do not have an equal opportunity to a rigorous education and they have a lesser chance of passing the NGSA Examination (Hinds, 2013).

According to David Hinds (2013), the Ministry of Education admitted that it would be very difficult to stop paid lessons after school. He suggests that the Ministry should put a policy in place to have school administrators make a concerted effort to see that teachers cover the syllabus and deliver effective instruction in the classroom during regular school hours. One of the underlying factors that give rise to extra lessons is that many teachers deliberately neglect students in the classroom so as to force them to take extra lessons, thereby earning the teacher huge financial rewards. Some teachers claim that they make more money from extra lessons than their regular salaries. The need to make extra money propels them to continue exploiting students and parents.

Principal Swami Aksharanand of Saraswat Vidya Nketan School (SVN), a private Hindu church school criticized the reliance on extra lessons (Peters, 2012). He stated that extra lessons outside of school hours are harmful to the present-day school system, children are unable to participate in extracurricular activities, and it harms their social development. He noted that children need recreation time to be involved in physical activities and they need all round development and rest. He added that the situation also places a financial burden on parents and other logistical difficulties such as after school transportation (Peters, 2012). Children with low scores on the NGSA examination have done well at SVN, proving that placing children in vocational schools based on low scores on the NGSA is not the right policy for the education system in Guyana.

Some children are late developers and they need a second chance at the academics; providing students with the discipline and an environment that is conducive to learning will make ordinary students produce extraordinary results. Although Principal Swami was not in favor of extra lessons, he did not address the issue of low-income parents affording extra lessons or a private school such as SVN. This practice of extra lessons has become a major issue within the education system in Guyana (Peters, 2012).

The extra-lessons issue attracted the attention of the Guyana Government. The government passed a policy in 2008 that stated in part that extra lessons cannot be held in public schools in the morning, evenings, or on weekends. The Minister of Education in 2008, Shaik Baksh, said in part that many of the teachers who offered extra lessons shortchange the students during normal school hours (Stabroek News, 2015). The current Minister of Education, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, hopes to control the extra-lesson syndrome that costs parents hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly. He stated that teachers do not provide the students with a rigorous education during regular school hours or teach in alignment with the curriculum, thereby creating a demand for the extra lessons they offer. Poor economic standards, inflation, and low teacher salaries have contributed to the development of extra lessons. These lessons have caused students to attend classes from 6 am to 8 am in the morning before school and from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm after school during the week, and sometimes on Saturdays and Sundays. The focus on extra lessons has contributed to academic burnout and it has deprived children of playtime, which is essential for developing social skills (Stabroek News, 2015).

Newly elected president and former leader of the opposition, President David Granger equated education in Guyana to apartheid. He stated that the children that do well in high-stakes exams are those whose families can afford to send them to private schools and do extra lessons. The private schools yield better results than the public schools. According to Granger, there would always be unequal performance, but the gap would not be so wide if the Ministry of Education would play an active role in controlling the extra-lessons syndrome and holding public schools administrators and teachers accountable (Stabroek News, 2013).

Theoretical Implications

The major question that arises here is quite straightforward: What are the theoretical implications of the preceding analysis for those interested in the Black Diaspora? To answer this question, I first briefly discuss two major and relevant works: (1) Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2011) and (2) Lauren A. Rivera's *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs* (2015). After that, I state the implications of my findings in relation to these scholars' postulates.

According to Annette Lareau (2011), class is a significant predictor of the life and future an American child can have. Based on her in-depth observations of Black and White middle-class, working-class, and poor families, she paints a portrait of childhood in America today depicting “the frenetic families who manage their children's hectic schedules of ‘leisure’ activities” versus those “families with plenty of time but little economic security.” She shows that “middle-class parents, whether Black or White, engage in a process of ‘concerted cultivation’ designed to draw out children’s talents and skills, while working-class and poor families rely on ‘the accomplishment of natural growth,’ in which a child's development unfolds spontaneously—as long as basic comfort, food, and shelter are provided” (Laureau, 2011). Consequently, each approach yields its own advantages and disadvantages. The differences between the two approaches, according to Lareau, undergird “the power and limits of social class in shaping the lives of America’s children” (Laureau 2011).

As Lauren A Rivera (2015) points out, Americans have been made to accept the myth that “upward mobility is possible for anyone who is willing to work hard, regardless of [his/her] social status,” albeit “often those from affluent backgrounds who land the best jobs” (Rivera, 2015). Employing data she collected from behind the closed doors of top-tier consulting firms, law firms and investment banks via in-depth interviews and firsthand observations of hiring practices at some of America’s most prestigious firms, Rivera provides the real picture of “who really gets hired for the nation’s highest-paying entry-level jobs, who doesn’t, and why” (Rivera, 2015).

Rivera goes on to reveal that “every step of the hiring process, the ways that employers define and evaluate merit are strongly skewed to favor job applicants from economically privileged backgrounds” (Rivera, 2015). She also shows that the ways “decision makers draw from ideas about talent—what it is, what best signals it, and who does (and does not) have it—are deeply rooted in social class” (Rivera 2015). To display the “right stuff” for which elite employers are looking, she adds, requires “considerable amounts of economic, social, and cultural resources on the part of the applicants and [his/her] parents” (Rivera, 2015).

In that case if Guyana, family income appears to determine the educational success of students more so than race. Guyana has six races: (1) Indo-Guyanese, (2) Afro-Guyanese, (3) Portuguese decent, (4) Chinese decent, (5) the original inhabitants, and (6) a mixture of the races (Dans, 2014). The racial division is not the determining factor about who receives a top class education. The socio-economic status of families determines the type of education one will receive in Guyana. Thus, the affluent families can afford to send their children to private schools and for extra-lessons. Consequently, as Reardon (2011) points out, children of affluent parents perform better in school than children of low-income parents. On an average, affluent children have better grades and higher standardized test scores.

Reardon argues that the differences in education success between high and low-income students have grown substantially and family income is a better predictor of children success in school than race (Tavernise, 2012). Nonetheless, since there is a significant correlation between race and income, the Afro-Guyanese occupy the lowest stratum on the economic totem pole, thereby suggesting an indirect relationship between race and educational success.

Indeed, affluent parents invest more time and money into their children's education, resulting in a larger growth for those at the top of the income ladder. They perform well in school because of the time and money invested in their children both in academics and in extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, low-income parents are stretched both for time and for resources to invest in their children. The gap has grown significantly between high and low-income parents.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis provides a lot of useful information for the topic to be investigated by future researchers. First, educational researchers acknowledge that there is an issue of inequality in terms of the education offered in Guyana. Second, children of low-income parents lack the resources to compete with the children of affluent parents that can purchase an education for their children. Third, the affluent parents can afford to send their children to private schools and/or extra lessons while poor parents cannot. Fourth, schools are supposed to be the great equalizer in terms of creating equity between affluent and low-income children, but schools in Guyana are not performing that function and education has become commercialized, with the affluent purchasing education for their children and the low-income children are disadvantaged regardless of their abilities and talents. Finally, the system has created an achievement gap between the children of the affluent and those from low-income families.

There are also a number of limitations in the proffered perspectives examined. First, the different foci of the various schools of thought do not provide a comprehensive picture on the topic. Second, most of the analyses are simple case studies of particular issues on the subject; thus, they are neither theoretically nor methodologically grounded. Third, the few quantitative analyses that exist do not compare the differences between the children of the affluent and those of the low-income families in Guyana. Finally, no theoretical framework is provided that encapsulates the issue debated. A study is needed that will add an epistemological value to the existing positions because, in addition to providing new information, it will be expansive and theoretically and methodologically grounded.

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