

**EDUCATION FOR ALL IN THE CARIBBEAN: ASSESSMENT 2000
MONOGRAPH SERIES**

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Language is More Than Language in the Development of Curaçao

Joceline Clemencia

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FOREWORD

Education for All in the Caribbean: Assessment 2000 is a remarkable output, which is the culmination of intensive collaborative efforts between the countries of the Caribbean sub-region, the Regional Advisory Technical Group and the EFA Forum Secretariat, and relevant agencies and institutions.

The Country Reports, Monograph Series, and Case Studies highlight and pinpoint, in an extremely effective manner, some of the issues and concerns that drive education policy and action in the Caribbean. At the same time, the documentation presents a balanced and informed overview of the rich and varied educational and cultural experience of the sub-region; a knowledge which is critical to the understanding of the unfolding social and economic developments.

UNESCO is pleased to have been associated with this endeavour, particularly through our regional office in Kingston, Jamaica which, as co-ordinator of the Regional Advisory Group for the Caribbean Sub-region, was integrally involved in every aspect of the exercise. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Caribbean on activities of a mutually rewarding nature as the consequences and implications of the EFA Assessment become manifest.

Colin Power
Deputy Director-General for Education
UNESCO

SERIES INTRODUCTION

At Jomtien in 1990, member states of the United Nations adopted the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* and created the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum). One decade later, the EFA Forum embarked on an assessment of this initiative, intended to assist member states in examining their education provisions to inform the formulation of policy.

Once the Caribbean EFA Regional Advisory Group had embarked seriously on the assessment, it was quickly realised that it would be difficult to capture, in any one place, an assessment of all that had transpired in education in the Caribbean during the period 1990-1999. Moreover, the technical guidelines constrained assessors to specifics within quantitative and qualitative frames. However, because it was felt that education in the Caribbean is too dynamic to be circumscribed, the idea of a more wide-ranging monograph series was conceived.

Researchers, education practitioners, and other stakeholders in education were invited to contribute to the series. Our expectations were that the response would be quite moderate, given the short time-frame within which we had to work. Instead, we were overwhelmed by the response, both in terms of the number of enthusiastic contributors and the range of topics represented.

Caribbean governments and peoples have invested in the *hardware* for education—buildings, furniture, equipment; in the *software*, in terms of parent support and counselling services; and they have attended to *inputs* like books and other teaching/learning resources. They have wrestled with ways to evaluate, having gone through rounds of different national examinations, and modifications of ways to assess both primary and secondary education.

But, as the efforts to complete the country reports show, it has been more difficult to assess the impacts, if we take the eventual aim of education as improving the quality of life—we have had mixed successes. That the sub-region has maintained relative peace despite its violent past and contemporary upheavals may be cited as a measure of success; that the environment is threatened in several ways may be one of the indicators of how chequered the success has been.

Writers in the monograph/case study series have been able to document, in descriptive and analytic modes, some of the attempts, and to capture several of the impacts. That this series of monographs on Education for All in the Caribbean has been written, edited, and published in nine months (from first call for papers to issue of the published titles) is itself an indication of the impact of education, in terms of human capability and capacity.

It reflects, too, the interest in education of a number of stakeholders without whom the series would not have been possible. Firstly, the work of the writers is acknowledged. All worked willingly, hard, well, and, in most cases, without material reward. The sterling contribution of the editor, who identified writers and stayed with them to the end of the process, is also recognised, as is the work of the printer, who came through on time despite the severe time constraints. The financial contribution of the following agencies also made the EFA assessment process and the publication of the monograph/case study series possible: Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Department for International Development (DFID), International Labour Organization (ILO), Sub-Regional Headquarters for the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill; and the UN country teams based in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and Guyana.

We invite you to peruse individual titles or the entire series as, together, we assess Caribbean progress in education to date, and determine strategies to correct imbalances and sustain positive impacts, as we move towards and through the first decade of the new millennium.

Claudia Harvey
UNESCO Representative and Coordinator, Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG)
EFA in the Caribbean: Assessment 2000

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BVO	Preparatory Vocational School
CSS	Cognitive School Language Skills
ETAO	Education for Commerce, Tourism, and Office Work
FL	Foreign Language
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching
GDS	General Daily Language Skills
HAVO	Higher General Secondary Education
HHS	Elementary Domestic School
H-Status	High Status
L1	First Language/Mother Language
L-Status	Low Status
LTS	Elementary Technical School
MAVO	Middle General Secondary Education
SL	Second Language
SLT	Second Language Teaching

ABSTRACT

In the process of decolonization, well known in Africa from the fifties, in the Caribbean from the sixties, and earlier in the 19th century in Latin America, the people of these (sub)continents have realized that the thorough, especially mental, conditioning caused by European domination, needed strong, articulated visions and policies in order to build nations; to give content to the geographical boundaries called countries. The whole gamut of economy, social structure, culture, religion, and education had to be re-oriented inwards, perspectives readjusted, and paradigms reformulated. Even decolonizing the mind did not prove to be enough if limited to the above-mentioned, since once replaced, stubborn patterns of euro-centrism kept coming back. The Caribbean realized that the process was never-ending. Every minute vigilance was neglected, national development would be thrown back to unexpected depths. The process is on-going. The Dutch Antilles celebrated, on December 15, 1954, the declaration of Internal Government, the *Statuut* that shifted the right to decide on certain areas from the Hague to Willemstad. Crucial fields like external affairs, nationality, defence, education, and language were left untouched. The governor and lieutenant governor were--and still are--appointed by the Dutch government.

Since these are the areas, especially education, fundamental for nationbuilding, the decolonization process stopped at a turning point in the Antilles, and the country missed the momentum to take a new direction in its history. This monograph looks at education as *the* focal point that could have made a difference in the national development of the country. By reproducing the Dutch education system since the fifties, with slight changes in the late sixties and late nineties--a system that completely denies the linguistic context of both the Leeward and Windward Islands; with the socially dead Dutch language being compulsory, as mother tongue, at all levels of the educational system, from elementary through university, while the national languages are Papiamentu and English--the output of education proved to be insufficient and inadequate to provide leaders, professionals, and conscious citizens to carry the country through the succeeding 50 years into the new millennium. The massive migration, unemployment, unskilled labour force, demotivated youth, growing crime rate, low income rate, youth pregnancy, cultural disorientation, and incapacity shown to address these crises can be explained from the educational debacle. The monograph points to the fact that the absence of the Papiamentu language in school implied the absence of a driving force to grow as a nation.

About the Author

Joceline Clemencia graduated from the University of Amsterdam in Spanish Language and Literature, and specialized later in Papiamentu. A sworn translator and former head of the government national language institute *Instituto Nashonal di Idioma Sede di Papiamentu*, she is particularly interested in the emancipation of people in all its various aspects. That is why language and education, vehicles of change *par excellence*, have been her fields of attention and work for many years now: as a language teacher, translator, publisher, writer of books, essays, and analysis, and as director of her own Cultural Institute Independence, her current job.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Measured on its output Curaçaoan education is in its present form a by the government subsidized, institutionalized crime, kept alive with trained professionals and victimizing yearly thousands of young people. Considering that of the 145.000 inhabitants of Curaçao 52.333 or 36% rank between 0-19 years, one can estimate the enormous damage done to the population, c.q. to the country. To strive for the development of a country, especially a developing country, without investing in education, means to strive for no development. Let us hope that the approaching *fin du siècle* will also mean the end of this outdated and paralyzing situation. (Clemencia, 1992, p. 5)

The above was the conclusion of an article written by the author in November, 1992, as Head of the National Language Institute (*Instituto Nashonal di Idioma Sede di Papiamentu*), for the local magazine *De Curaçaosche Courant*. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then. The same devastating figures still condemn hundreds of Curaçaoan children annually--likewise for Bonaire and Aruba, since the same language situation exists on the other islands--to illiteracy, unemployment, low wage jobs, and social and cultural instability. This monograph explores how the absence of the mother tongue in Curaçaoan education has led to a number of significant objective and subjective features in the population. These features have a direct connection with the overall development of the country. Special attention is paid to the majority language that has systematically been kept out of school and how to change this.

The monograph is based on the experiences of the author as a language teacher and dean at secondary level, Papiamentu trainer for teachers, member of the *Komishon Standarisashon di Papiamentu* (Government Committee for the Standardization of Papiamentu), co-editor of the *Papiamentu Explanatory Dictionary* (in preparation), and former head of the *Instituto Nashonal di Idioma Sede di Papiamentu* (National Language Institute). The data collected through the years have led to a number of presentations and articles that aim to draw attention to, and propose a drastic change in, Curaçaoan education (Clemencia, 1994, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Chapter two defines the general context of the island of Curaçao, including the complexity of the language. Chapter three deals with the concrete output of education in Curaçao. Both objective and subjective results of the output are taken into account. Many testimonies reveal what people think about both their education and their economy. The testimonies do not only reveal what they think about these issues, but also the impact of these issues on their lives. In the final chapter, some concrete proposals are presented from which a new national development might benefit. I am indebted to the thousands of young people from Curaçao who, despite the odds, are still our best investment for the future. They have inspired me and guided my work.

CHAPTER 2

Defining the Context

General Background

The territory of the Netherlands Antilles in the Caribbean Archipelago comprised, till 1986, the three Leeward Islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, the last being the largest, and the three Windward Islands of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten. The terms “leeward” and “windward” refer to the location of the islands in relation to the north-east trade winds. In 1986, Aruba separated from the Antilles, though maintaining its colonial status, like the other islands, within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Leeward Islands lie at a distance of 30 to 90 km from the coast of Venezuela. The area of Curaçao is 444 km². The population at December 1997 totalled 153,664 for Curaçao and 210,847 for the entire Netherlands Antilles. The average age of the population in Curaçao is 30.1 years for males and 32.8 years for females, and the island is home to more than 52 nationalities.

Table 1. Average Age of Population

	Total	Males	Females
Netherlands Antilles	31.0	30.1	31.9
Curaçao	31.7	30.5	31.7

Source: Population and Housing Census 1992 and Mid-Census 1997, Saba and St. Eustatius.

Historical Background

The Leeward Islands were inhabited by the Caiquetio Amerindians, belonging to the Arawak language group who, sources reveal, crossed over from the South American mainland onto the island of Curaçao about 4500 years ago: “Their lifeways were probably semi-nomadic with hunter-gatherer-fishing technique of food acquisition focused on marine resources and supplemented by whatever terrestrial flora and fauna they could find” (Haviser, 1991, p.199). With the invasion of Spanish slave hunters in 1499, headed by Alonso de Ojeda with his *piloto* Amerigo Vespucci, the history of the islands would change dramatically. The Spaniards used the Amerindians as slaves for their economic activities: the *encomienda* system, fishing, and mining. Along with this was their massive deportation (to Hispaniola, because the Spaniards considered the Leeward Islands useless islands--*islas inútiles*--for not having gold or pearls), the extinction, and the threat of European diseases brought to the Amerindian population. In the 17th century, the Amerindians were replaced as slaves by Africans. In the 18th century, there was still a registered Amerindian population present in Curaçao, and in the 19th century in Bonaire. The Amerindian population survived the longest in Aruba.

The Dutch West-India Company, founded in 1621, financed the search for new territories where salt could be found, smuggling, and piracy; activities that culminated, in 1634, in the seizure of Curaçao by the Dutch. They transformed the island into one of the most important centres for the slave trade for the Western hemisphere, from where captive Africans were transported to other islands in the Caribbean and the southern part of the United States of

America. Between 1637 and 1645, the Dutch West-India Company transported more than 20,000 captive Africans from Africa to Brazil. The board considered the slave trade “the soul of the Company,” understandable if it is considered that in the 17th century the Dutch brought 100,000 Africans as slaves from Africa to the Americas, and 400,000 in the 18th century. This total of 500,000 represents 5% of the total Atlantic slave transports (Palm, 1985, p. 443).

Linguistic Background

The mother tongue of the vast majority of the people of Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba is *Papiamentu*, a grammatically African structured Creole language with a Portuguese-Spanish lexicon, supplemented with English and Dutch words, which is one of the strongest Creole languages today. This Afro-Portuguese Creole developed originally as a *lingua franca* in the slave camps in West Africa, adopted the structure of languages of the West coast of Africa, such as Mandinga (Guinea Bissau), Twi, Ewe (Ghana and Togo), Yoruba (Nigeria), and several Bantu languages still spoken today in Gabon, Zaire, and Angola. It functioned also on the islands off the African coast controlled by the Portuguese, namely the Cabo Verde Archipelago, São Tome, Principe, and Anobon, where it is still spoken. Transported to the Americas during the 16th-18th centuries, it underwent a process of re-lexification, that is, adjusted itself to the languages of the new environment: English created the English Creole, French created the French Creole and, in Curaçao, Portuguese was replaced by Spanish and Dutch.

This Creole language, spoken by the widest possible variety of inhabitants of the islands, has conserved itself and developed into one of the strongest Creole languages, with documented grammar, a prolific literature, the language of six local newspapers, the majority of radio stations and the television station, as well as the language of the Parliament. As noted by Appiah and Gates (1997):

Probably the most firmly established creole in the Caribbean is Papiamentu, spoken on Curaçao and related islands of the Netherlands Antilles off the coast of Venezuela. This Spanish-related creole has not only a rich literature in many genres but also radio, TV and a thriving popular press. It remains to be seen if creoles will survive into the next century as autonomous languages of print and learning, or be relegated to oral and popular culture. The elites who dominate most creole speaking countries do not always promote creole literacy, and many creole speakers themselves have distorted, self-deprecating images of their own languages. (pp. 158-159)

The oldest known written document in Papiamentu goes back to 1775, and journals have been published since the 1870s in Papiamentu. In 1986, the Government of the Island Territory of Curaçao introduced Papiamentu as a subject matter in primary schools. Curaçaoan children get half an hour teaching in their own language daily.

CHAPTER 3

The Output of Education in Curaçao

Historical Background

The present language of instruction in Curaçaoan schools is one of the factors responsible for the disappointing lack of efficiency of the school system. Since the end of the 18th century, there have been many expressions of concern for the language situation in particular, and the educational imbalance in general. In 1884, A. M. Chumaceiro declared it necessary to speak *Een ernstig woord over een ernstig onderwerp* [A serious word about a serious matter]. In the nineteen fifties, schoolteacher and later psychologist, A. C. Prins-Winkel (1955), started drawing attention to what she called: *Het taalprobleem in het Antilliaanse onderwijs* [The language problem in Antillean education]. Then, in 1973, she received her Ph.D. in Pedagogics on the thesis *Kabes Duru?* [Unteachables?], in which she searched for the effect of three determining factors on school success, that is, IQ, the stimulation received in family context, and the home language on the results of children in Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba. Predictably, the variables IQ and family stimulation correlated with the results, because children with normal to high IQ performed well, and children coming from families with cultural stimulation did better than those who did not have a stimulating environment. What was surprising, however, was the fact that children with normal to high IQ and sufficient stimulation failed because of the language they spoke at home, that is, Papiamentu, whereas children who spoke Dutch at home obtained better results.

On the invitation of the government of the Netherlands Antilles, UNESCO carried out an investigation on the efficiency of the Antillean school system in 1976, and concluded that, although large amounts of the national budget, in comparison with several countries, were destined for education, the results were very poor. Many children repeat grades and there is a very high percentage of dropouts. UNESCO proposed a system more relevant to the Curaçaoan circumstances and needs, including the use of mother tongue in education (UNESCO, 1976). In 1977, the Island Government of Curaçao finally adopted a motion to start the mother tongue school. But it would take almost a decade after the publication of Prins-Winkel's thesis *Kabes Duru ?* [Unteachables?] before the Central Government issued the *Brief aan het veld* [Letter to the field] in which the Minister of Education, Veeris (Curaçao. Ministry of Education, 1982, p. 5) declared himself in favour of the mother tongue school. Set against the current practically unchanged situation, the words spoken then are almost ironic: "If we start right now in this schoolyear and departing from an optimistic estimate, I would say that we would finish all preparations in August of 1986. More realistic would be however 6 years from now, that is August 1988" (Curaçao. Ministry of Education, 1982, p. 10). Previously, in 1979, the Central Government passed the Central Law on Primary Education # P.B. 1979 nr. 28 which prescribed in Article 7: "Papiamentu will be compulsory subject matter."

In August, 1986, nine years after the decision of the Island Government and seven years after the Law on Papiamentu, after very difficult negotiations, the introduction of Papiamentu in Curaçaoan primary schools became a reality. This delay was mainly due to the influence of the various interest groups, for example, the religious-based school boards--conservative on the surface but, in reality, economic groups with strong reasons to preserve the status quo, being large-scale importers of books from Holland; the government which did not have a clear vision of the direction education should take, and were, thus, easily manipulated by the boards; and a teachers' union that was not really prepared to present solid alternatives and inspire its members to force the government to implement these by being agents of change themselves. In his study *Learning in a Second Language: A Study in Curaçao Primary Schools*, Paul Vedder states that

“... it seems justified to characterize the Antillean schoolsystem as self regulating conservative or change resistant.” (Vedder, 1987, p. 16).

Language and Thinking

How to explain the on-going discussions that did not result in effective measures? Annually, approximately 3000 children enroll in primary schools in Curaçao. The percentage of students who complete elementary school without repeating grades is 38.8%, while the majority (61.2%) repeats grades once or more during those important first six years. This fact alone should be reason for serious concern because it indicates that the system prepares a majority of students to fail, or that the system invests--strange word in this context--in failure. Beforehand, we know that the majority of the group of 3000 will not be succesful. There are, of course, socio-economic reasons for many students to fail. But apart from that, the foreign language of instruction, Dutch, in which Curaçaoan students are obliged to perform, accounts for these results.

What is the language situation on the island? As stated before, the majority of people speak Papiamentu (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). Curaçao is a predominantly monolingual society with a constant influx of two foreign languages: Spanish and English; the former present because of the proximity of the continent. When the weather is very clear and there are practically no clouds one can see the northern coast of Venezuela from the south coast of Curaçao. Radio and television stations from Venezuela can be clearly received in Curaçao, and many literature books and magazines in Spanish are sold. Spanish is one of the important foreign languages taught--as a foreign language--in school. School results of Spanish are satisfactory to good. The influence of English enters primarily through television programmess received via cable, magazines, and school. The teaching method is the same as for Spanish: foreign language. Both Spanish and English are taught in the last year(s) of primary education and continued at secondary level. Dutch is a rarely spoken or heard language, however, it is the official language and it is taught as if it were the mother tongue of students. If we look at the status of the languages, we can state that Papiamentu is the majority language and not recognized legally as an official language. The proposals to legalize both Papiamentu and English, the latter as the majority language on the Windward islands, were presented to the Parliament since 1983 and still have not been approved. Despite the prolific production of literature, radio broadcasting in Papiamentu, most newspapers published in Papiamentu, and Papiamentu as the language of general communication in Curaçao, it still lacks legal status. Papiamentu is considered by many as a Low Status language and not required to obtain social, economic, and cultural success.

Table 2. Language Status, Presence, and Legal Status

<u>Language</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Presence</u>	<u>Legal Status</u>
Papiamentu	Low (L)	Large Majority	not official
Dutch	High (H)	Small Minority	official

In many cases, the L-Status language in a country is the minority language. In the case of Curaçao, however it is the majority language, the language of wider communication, still overshadowed by the H-Status Dutch language spoken by 8.6% of the population. In many cases, H-Status is granted to the language of sermons, speeches, news broadcasts, newspapers, literature, and education, and L-Status to the language of colloquial purposes. Papiamentu possesses all the H-Status features, except education. Because of the prominent contextual presence of Spanish and English and the limited presence of Dutch, many people are familiarized with these languages on various levels of commands. But because of the poor instruction in Dutch--primary school teachers themselves lack sufficient command--and the fact that both

Spanish and English are taught as foreign languages, plus the absence of mother tongue instruction--primary school children receive half an hour a day of Papiamentu teaching, and it was introduced in high schools in the 1998-1999 school year in an arbitrary way--what could have been an advantage for society, that is, a broad language disposition, results in very poor proficiency in all the mentioned languages. In the past, French was also taught as a compulsory foreign language in high school, but currently it is only present at the highest levels of high school and is optional. Against this background, some people are tempted to say they speak five languages: Papiamentu, Dutch, English, Spanish, and French. Which language skills they master in these languages are often forgotten as a measure of quality.

Daily Language Skills and Cognitive Language Skills

It is important to distinguish between General Daily Language Skills (GDS) and Cognitive School Language Skills (CSS). A language skill is considered a General Daily Skill when a speaker has support of the context to exercise that skill. The skill often refers to concrete objects and situations and the speaker can manage with little language, because she/he can refer to the concrete context. An example of a GDS is asking the time. Speaker 1 can point to a watch and make a questioning gesture so Speaker 2 can easily deduce the question even if Speaker 1 has used (very) few words, have ordered them incorrectly in a sentence, or pronounces them differently from what is normally considered acceptable. Other examples of a GDS is introducing oneself, ordering food in a restaurant, asking the way, saying hello and goodbye, and so forth. Of course, a learner will first master the GDS when learning a new language.

Cognitive School Skills are of a different nature. These skills require much more from the speaker since they have little contextual support, refer to abstract matters and, thus, demand more abstractional skills from the speaker. They are very necessary for good academic achievement. Examples of CSS would be distinguishing in a text between important issues and secondary issues, to be able to apply a rule to a new situation, and the capacity to formulate conclusions, draw similarities, indicate contrasts, and so forth. None of these activities can count on contextual help to the same extent as the GDS provides. In some cases, there is no support possible at all. Another distinctive feature of the CSS is the fact that they are needed for all academic work, be it math, history, social sciences, natural sciences, and so forth. A good command of them is a reliable predictor for school success.

The issue is what kind of language skills have our educational system taught our students in Dutch? What are the aimed and the attained levels of achievement? The same question can be formulated for the other languages. When someone has good CSS in the mother tongue it will be a matter of transferring that skill to another language. So there is only one hurdle to overcome. But when the person lacks the CSS in the mother tongue, as is the case in Curaçao, gaining it in other languages is difficult, if not impossible. For many people Table 3 is true.

Table 3. General Daily Language Skills and Cognitive School Language Skills

<u>Language</u>	<u>General Daily Language Skills</u>	<u>Cognitive School Language Skills</u>
Papiamentu	very good	poor/very poor
Dutch	good	very poor
Spanish	good/very good	poor/very poor
English	good/very good	poor/very poor
French	poor	very poor

If this is the starting point for academic achievements, the results in Curaçaoan education are not surprising. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics the majority of schoolchildren speak Papiamentu at home.

Table 4. Language Most Spoken at Home

<u>Language</u>	<u>%</u>
Papiamentu	83.2
Dutch	8.6
English	3.6
Spanish	3.1
<u>Other languages</u>	<u>1.5</u>
Total	100.0

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (1996). Census 1992 .

Education in kindergarten is also in Papiamentu. Once in primary school at age six, children are expected, without any reason, to be able to perform the basic elements of literacy, that is, reading, writing, and math in a language completely strange and unknown to them. That means that the cognitive skills they need (basic reading, comprehensive reading, composition, oral skills, listening skills) to perform successfully, they have to express in a language they are still learning, or even worse just started to learn. Let us compare this situation with the following example. Out of pure curiosity for the new situation in Russia, you tune in to Radio Moscow. In the past, you learned a few Russian words from an acquaintance of yours. Because Radio Moscow also has a few programmes in English for foreigners, it was possible for you to follow a little bit of it. Now your boss is asking you, as of today, provided you want to have a successful career, to process all the company data in the computer, not in English any more, as was the case previously, but in Russian. One may guess the consequences.

After unsuccessfully attending school, repeating grades, being addressed in an unknown language, being expected to perform well in that unknown language, hearing year after year that Papiamentu is not important, that Dutch is a cultural language, and that they are not smart enough because they do not master Dutch, Curaçaoan children are ready to become helpless, frustrated, and demotivated citizens. They do not believe they can ever achieve success, and they internalize the negative concepts existing with regards to their appearance, their skills, and their possibilities. Language is much more than language. It defines self-worth and stability.

To complete the picture of how language influences thinking, the following are a number of language concepts, based also on the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* by David Crystal (1987) and their application in three cases:

Mother Language - Also referred to as mother tongue or L1 (first language) is distinguished from any further languages that may be acquired (L2, L3, etc.). The mother language is not necessarily the standard language of the country. Rural, regional variants of Papiamentu can differ considerably from Standard Papiamentu. Education should include the mother language of children in a significant way in the curriculum since it comprises their set of tools for mental, intellectual, emotional, and social development.

Home Language - Language spoken at home, not necessarily the mother tongue. In Curaçao, parents sometimes choose to speak Dutch with their children hoping this will improve their school results.

Official Language - Language accredited by the government as formally legal.

School Language - Language used in school as the medium of instruction. In Curaçao, Dutch is the school language. Outside the school it has practically no function.

Standard Language - The prescribed written variant of a language, considered the correct version, used in education, law, and literature. Schools are required to have the knowledge and resources to teach a common standard, while recognizing the existence and value of linguistic diversity.

Foreign Language (FL) - Any language that is not a native language in a country. English, Spanish, and Dutch are, in Curaçao, non-native languages taught in school; they have no status as a routine medium of communication. Dutch also has the status of school language/language of instruction.

Second Language (SL) - A non-native language widely used for purposes of communication (sometimes only as a medium of education, government, or business, for example, English in Nigeria). The term is also used with reference to immigrants and indigenous groups whose L1 is a minority language. In Holland, Dutch is the second language for the 90,000 Antilleans living there. In Curaçao, native speakers of Papiamentu have no second language, for their language is the general medium of communication. For immigrants living in Curaçao, Papiamentu is a second language. The learning aims, teaching methods, and achievement levels between FLT (foreign language teaching) and SLT (second language teaching) differ considerably; the presence of the second language being a tremendous support in the acquisition process.

Table 5. Mother Language/ Foreign Language

	<u>Mother Language</u>	<u>Foreign Language</u>
Learning aim	to succeed in life	to communicate
Achievement level of skills	complete mastering of GDS* and CSS*	complete mastering of GDS and transfer CSS from L1 to FL

*General Daily Language Skills /Cognitive School Language Skills

Now it becomes clear why school children in Curaçao will never be academically successful. The foreign language, Dutch, in which they have very poor command of the CSS, is the language of achievement, whereas their L1, necessary to succeed in life, is taught at FL level. This controversy is the essence of the linguistic, hence cultural drama of education; the children,

conceiving of themselves as failures, will not be able to contribute to the development of their country.

Application of Language Concepts

Case 1

Altagracia is 11 years old. She was born in Colombia but moved with her mother to Curaçao when she was 9. Her mother remarried a Dutch man who is fluent in Spanish and Papiamentu. She has a 5 year old brother, Dominico. At home they speak both Spanish and Papiamentu. She does well at school. The matrix containing Altagracia's linguistic situation will show the following pattern.

Table 6. Mother/Home/Official/Standard/Foreign/Second Language I

Mother Language	Home Language	Official/School Language	Standard Language	Foreign Language	Second Language
Spanish	Spanish Papiamentu	Dutch	Standard Papiamentu	English Dutch	Papiamentu

Case 2

Nestor is from the western countryside of Curaçao. The children at school often laugh at him because he speaks "funny." The only language Nestor's parents speak is Papiamentu.

Table 7. Mother/Home/Official/Standard/Foreign/Second Language II

Mother Language	Home Language	Official/School Language	Standard Language	Foreign Language	Second Language
Rural Papiamentu	Rural Papiamentu	Dutch	Standard Papiamentu	English Spanish Dutch	-----

Case 3

Rigshelon (12) went to live in Holland with his entire family last year. He had a hard time adjusting to the cold weather, the school, and life in a strange country. He now goes to a school for special education. Rigshelon's language situation has changed very much since he left his island.

Table 8. Mother/Home/Official/Standard/Foreign/Second Language III

Mother Language	Home Language	Official/School Language	Standard Language	Foreign Language	Second Language
Papiamentu	Papiamentu	Dutch	Standard Dutch	German English	Dutch

And this was Rigshelon's situation while still living in Curaçao:

Table 9. Mother/Home/Official/Standard/Foreign/Second Language IV

Mother Language	Home Language	Official/School Language	Standard Language	Foreign Language	Second Language
Papiamentu	Papiamentu	Dutch	Standard Papiamentu	English Spanish Dutch	-----

Tables 10 and 11 show how influential language is with regards to school success. HAVO and MAVO are general high school departments, with HAVO being the Higher General Secondary Education (Senior High School) and MAVO, Middle General Secondary Education (Junior High School). ETAO, LTS, and HHS are vocational schools, with ETAO being Education for Commerce, Tourism, and Office Work, LTS is Elementary Technical School, and HHS is Elementary Domestic School for girls. The ETAO and HHS were replaced in 1991 by the BVO, Preparatory Vocational School, the only school type where Papiamentu is the language of instruction. It is remarkable that this innovation in the field of language, namely, the introduction of Papiamentu as language of instruction, did not take place in primary education where one would have expected it to be introduced first. The interest groups would not allow this development to take place and the government did not have the strength to carry it through. Instead, it took place at the vocational level attended by children of less educated parents, where the objections would be far less than at the primary level. The backprimary category comprises the students who did not qualify for secondary education and had to remain in primary; the last category is the not classified.

Table 10. Enrollment in Secondary Education in Absolute Figures

<u>Language</u>	<u>HAVO</u>	<u>MAVO</u>	<u>ETAO</u>	<u>LTS</u>	<u>HHS</u>	<u>backprima</u>	<u>notclass</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Papiamentu	223	950	417	507	341	359	151	2948
Dutch	141	71	9	7	4	5	2	239
English	9	19	10	5	4	4	0	51
Spanish	5	21	5	3	1	2	4	41
Portuguese	4	10	1	1	1	2	0	19
Other	1	8	0	0	0	1	0	19
TOTAL	383	1079	442	523	351	373	157	3308

Source: Ministry of Education, 1986.

Table 11. Enrollment in Secondary Education in Percentages Based on Home Language

<u>Language</u>	<u>HAVO</u>	<u>MAVO</u>	<u>ETAO</u>	<u>LTS</u>	<u>HHS</u>	<u>backprima</u>	<u>notclass</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Papiamentu	7.6	32.2	14.1	17.2	11.6	12.2	5.1	100.0
Dutch	59.0	29.7	3.8	2.9	1.7	2.1	0.8	100.0
English	17.6	37.3	19.6	9.8	7.8	7.8	0.0	100.0
Spanish	12.2	51.2	12.2	7.3	2.4	4.9	9.8	100.0
Portuguese	21.1	52.6	5.3	5.3	5.3	10.5	0.0	100.0
Other	10.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	100.0
TOTAL	11.6	32.6	13.4	15.8	10.6	11.3	4.7	100.0

Source: Ministry of Education, 1986.

The figures show that of the 2948 students who speak Papiamentu at home, only 223 enrolled in the highest form of secondary education, HAVO, whereas of the 239 Dutch-speaking students, 141 could continue their secondary education in HAVO. Expressed in percentages this means that 59% of Dutch-speaking students went to HAVO, as against 7.6% of Papiamentu-speaking students. The latter group of students scored high with respect to enrollment in the less successful departments, like ETAO, LTS, HHS, or going back to elementary school. But only 1.7% of Dutch-speaking students went to the domestic skills training school, where girls were prepared to be good housewives. Only 2.9% of Dutch-speaking boys went to the elementary technical school, as against 17.2% of Papiamentu speakers. The situation has not changed fundamentally since then.

Popular Consultation

During several days in May and June, 1999, a large group of citizens of all backgrounds gathered together in a meeting called *Vishon Kòrsou* [Vision Curaçao]. Their aim was to formulate a vision for development of Curaçao for the next 5 to 20 years. Many deep concerns were articulated, with education being very prominent among them. The next is a selection of remarks on education presented by those who attended the conference:

- About 70% of schoolchildren do not make it through school and graduate from high level vocational or from high school.
- We have to import people to do the higher jobs. Half of the teachers in secondary school are imported from Holland.
- The dropout rate is so high because the school system does not cater to the child; it is not quality driven and is antiquated.
- Every child should have a chance to realize their full potential.
- Our education is not running properly. The years are passing by, and we are staying in the same spot. The books in school are the same ... as I got when I was 10 years old. Our education is not changing according to the demands around us.
- The market place is changing so fast and we don't have the money to keep up. We can either put our money in education or we can spend on crime or social welfare.
- The problem with education is not money; it is that our educational system is not run right.
- There is a need to make intelligent decisions about where the education money goes. What should we achieve and what should our priorities be? ... Problems: (1) no sense of direction, (2) being stated again and again that the system is not functioning, (3) basic language in school, Papiamentu or Dutch, (4) social promotion, (5) teacher's aid, (6)

classrooms are too big--40 primary kids in a room, (7) no parents to help or to support them, (8) personal development of music, art, or social skills. They have to go to special education.

- One failing as a nation is the lack of identity-building in school. History is taught poorly in the schools.... What are the things which united us? Why do we always look to Holland?
- Education is the major priority; we should focus on developing the minds of our children. An effective education would help us with economics, leadership, or cultural development.
- We need to retrain teachers to know that teaching is not an 8-1 job; it is a commitment to produce leaders.... With fast change, retraining must be continuous. Revise curriculum. We should develop our own system, not use an inefficient system from Europe.
- In the past, young people did not need an education; they could get a new job anyway. Only 30% or less need a 4-year college degree, but now a person must have at least a technical education to get a good paying job.

And perhaps the last one summarizes all the previous statements best:

- In Aruba, the US, and Holland, the attitude is different than in Curaçao. The people in Curaçao do not want to make the effort successful. Whereas in the other areas, they make commitments and make projects a success. The problem in Curaçao is with the education system.

On the issue: Language of instruction

The participants of the Vishon Kòrsou conference had very specific ideas about the language issue in Curaçao and proposed the following:

- We should teach Papiamentu as the primary language.... We have always used Dutch. Why can't we change?
- The fact that Papiamentu is not the primary language contributes to our high dropout rate.
- We ought to change the primary language to Papiamentu
- But we have no emphasize on arts, culture, education Our educational system is mostly directed on the intellectual development of the student. The result is we only have about 30% of our young people graduating from higher level vocational school or high school. A major reason is we don't use our mother language as the primary language. I don't agree I learned Dutch and had no problem. The answer is that when we got our education, we lived in a Dutch culture; that is not true today. We must have a multilingual education with Papiamentu as the primary language with Dutch, English, and Spanish as secondary languages.
- We do not want to change the education primary language to Papiamentu because we do not have an identity. We do not understand who we are.
- By forcing our children at age 6 to begin trying to learn in a foreign language, we create a 6-year learning gap. This gap is never overcome. The 10% who are the best students, cope. The next 20% will get by, but the last 70% drop out. These 70% dropouts are creating a poverty disaster that will be very difficult to overcome in the new global knowledge economy. We must immediately change the primary language in school to Papiamentu. When we say we can only converse in Papiamentu when thinking, why should we expect our children to learn in a foreign language?

- Young people drop out because they have no food, their parents dropped out and they are forced to change from their mother language at 6-year old. As a result, they do not learn to communicate in either Papiamentu or Dutch. The parents do not, or cannot, help the children with Dutch.

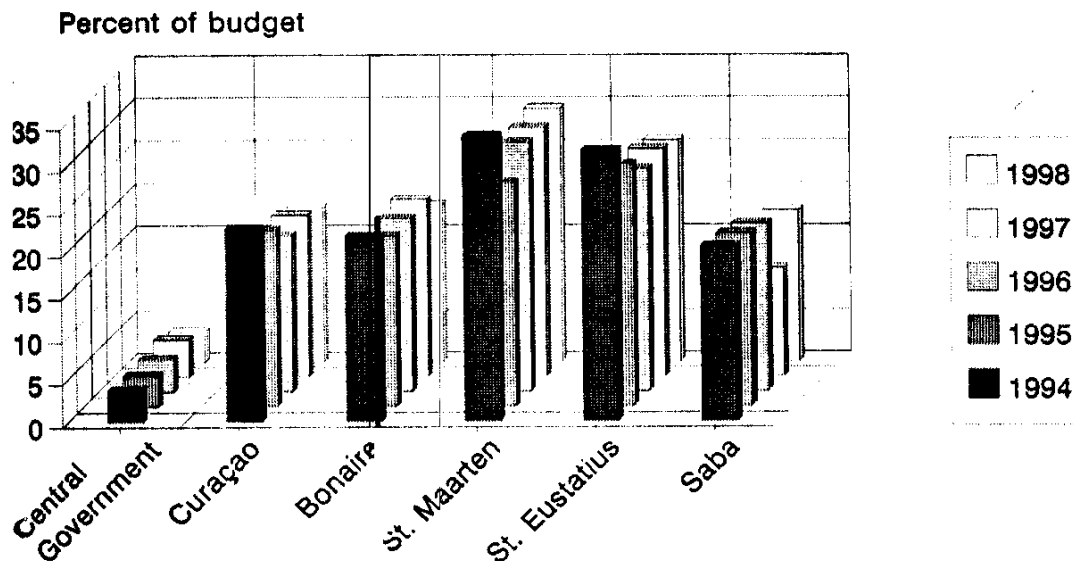
Facts Through Figures, Education, and Well-Being

Government expenditure on education

The failing educational system requires investments that will enable individuals to be successful, attaining their maximum potential in order to meet the requirements of the modern, technological, and global community. Figure 1 provides data on government investment in education related to the total budget of the country and of the islands. In the years 1994 through 1998 the Curaçaoan government allocated around 15% to education and the Federal Government less than 5% to education.

Figure 1.

Government Expenditure on Education As percentage of total budget 1994 - 1998



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics 1998.

When related to participation in the labour market and employment rates, the following is a picture of the effectiveness of the education system: The unemployment rate is 16.7% in Curaçao, which compares to St. Vincent and the Grenadines (35%), Guadeloupe (31.3%), Martinique (23.5%), Grenada (20%), Bahamas (10%), The Netherlands 5%, US Virgin Islands (6%), USA (4.9%), and Aruba (6%). The rates for dropout, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, population

growth, and gross domestic product are also benchmarks for the achievements of the country over the last years.

Dropout rates

Measured by its output, the investments in education from 1994 through 1998 proved insufficient. Only 50% of the students who start in primary school graduate due to a high level of dropouts (see Table 12). An average of 60% of these students graduate from either a secondary or higher school. This means that about 30% of local students graduate from secondary schools. This compares with 28% of Curaçaoan residents over 25 who have a high school degree or higher. Apart from the above, The Focal Groups Sessions of the Team Curaçao Vision concluded that: “In the competitive world of this decade and next century, a high school education will be a strong indicator of whether a person lives above the poverty line. In almost all good paying jobs knowledge is essential” (Vishon Kòrsou, 1999).

Table 12. Dropout Rates for Pupils in Educational System

	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Total
Curacao	50.4	38.9	41.5	42.6
Bonaire	56.6	37.6	35.5	39.6
St. Maarten	58.5	43.2	35.9	45.5
St.Eustatius	23.8	46.3	40.0	42.0
Saba	64.0	47.0	33.0	48.0

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics. Census 1992.

Teenage pregnancy

Birth to teenagers varied from 279 to 329 per year from 1990 to 1996, about 10% of total births (see Figure 2). According to government sources, this is a major factor in 65% of female-headed households earning less than 10,000 guilders per year.

Figure 2. Teenage Pregnancy 12-19 Age

Insert Figure 2 here

Unemployment

Curaçao ranks 5th (in comparison to 32 cities and islands) with an unemployment rate of 16.7%, compared with 10% in the Bahamas and 0.6 % in the smaller (and with less resources) Aruba (see Table 13). Between 1996 and 1998 more than 2,700 jobs were lost, and between the years 1991 and 1996 only 1,340 new jobs were created in the labour market. The loss of jobs include sectors that have a spreading effect on other sectors. The aim is to increase income by 1.5% each year, inflation excluded.

Table 13. Unemployment (in %)

1	St. Vincent & the Grenadines	3.5
2	Guadeloupe	31.3
3	Martinique	23.5
4	Grenada	20
5	Curaçao	16.7
14	Bahamas	10
22	Breda (Netherlands)	7
24	US Virgin Islands	6
	The Netherlands	5.2
	United States	4.9
31	Haarlemmermeer (Netherlands)	3
32	Aruba	.6

Population growth

According to the reports of the Focal Groups for a common shared future vision for Curaçao in the year 2,000 and after, that the population growth should receive more attention. Curaçao ranks 16th among 33 cities and islands with a one-year growth rate of 9% (see Table 14). Population only increased by 6,000 from 1980 to 1887. Therefore, out-migration exceeded in-migration by 28,000, or an average of 1,650 per year. Half of the young people left the island in the migration stream. In the next 20 years there will be an additional 1,150 elderly people each year.

Table 14. Population Growth Rate 1996-1997 (in %)

1	Almere (The Netherlands)	5.5
3	Cayman Islands	4.2
5	Belize	2.42
8	Bahamas	1.39
16	Curaçao	.9
	The Netherlands	.6
26	Barbados	0.1
29	Arnhem	-0.05
30	Haarlem	-0.12
32	Groningen	-0.6

Gross national product per capita

The facts reveal that in 1997 the government of Curaçao had a deficit of approximately US\$ 55 million on its budget. Since 1996, the government of the Antilles has not paid its debt to the Netherlands. The same government has lent more than half of the total capital of the National Pension Fund (for public servants) in order to pay its debts and pay its employees their monthly salaries. The Gross National Product per capita--considered a measure of quality of life--is US\$ 12,287 in Curaçao, which is less than half that of Bermuda (US\$ 30,757) and less than that of the

smaller (and with less resources) Aruba (U\$ 18,225) (see Table 15). A total of 41% of heads of families (of which 65% are women) earn less than U\$ 5500 a year. Several sectors are aiming at increasing the GNP per capita by 2% per year, inflation excluded (Vishon Kòrsou, 1999).

Table 15. Gross Domestic Product per Capita (U\$) 1997

1	Bermuda	30.757
2	Cayman Islands	28.900
3	US Virgin Islands	26.903
	The Netherlands	22.000
4	Bahamas	19.400
6	Aruba	18.225
7	Curaçao	12.287
8	Martinique	10.304
9	Guadeloupe	7.833
10	Barbados	6.538

This section closes with a revealing selection of statements from participants at the Vishon Kòrsou conference on the areas of Human Resources and Lifelong Learning, Economic Development, Quality of Life, Health, and Government. The statements give a clear indication of how people feel at this particular moment about the improvements made and to be made. Many of them refer to education and its vital role to achieve progress. They are most valuable for their contents as well as for their actuality. They are sincere and express true concern and show again that language is more than language.

On human resources and lifelong learning

- We need to educate our adults in the workforce today and provide the leadership to change the mentality of our current workforce. The leadership must come from each of us and, by definition, that means the private sector must provide greater leadership.
- For 500 cars that got stopped recently, 30% did not have a driver's license. Mostly this is because the person is not skilled enough in reading to pass the driver's test.
- It is the adults who are making the decisions today and we need to be concerned about adults. We need serious adult education to prepare them for the future. Fast change makes most education obsolete in 5 to 10 years. If we do not learn, we will not be competitive.
- We must improve adult education. Moral and spiritual things are just as important as money.
- We have a human resource problem in providing people to fill the key positions in the public and private sectors.
- Netherlands Antilles University must be better and develop a better image in the community. The tuition is 650 guilders per year, which is ridiculously low.

- Our Netherlands Antilles University students (1) are not able to communicate in Dutch. If they do not speak in Papiamentu, they will not say anything, (2) they are very negative about the future, and (3) they do not read the newspapers.

On economic development

- We need to build visionary models of what it means to have more tourists.
- I would like us to be Japan of the islands. They do not have raw materials, but they have the people. We have the people, we have a common cause. Last year when we had the solar eclipse we had a common cause. We do not know ourselves good enough. We need to know and appreciate our culture and what we are. I think our future lies in the service industry like banking. We need to stop externalizing and taking money from other countries. In everything I think, we want it all. We need to decide what we want without wanting too much.
- It takes 4,000 guilders per student per year to educate a child during 10 years and 2,000 guilders per year for food and clothing, health care, and so forth. For 20 years, a total of 80,000 guilders for each young person. We have exported 1,650 people per year times 80,000 for a total of 132 million guilders that we lose every year.
- We must go down to business and work our butts off to change things.
- One of the reasons we do not see the suffering is because we export our unemployed and suffering. We mask or cover up our failures and problems.
- We have a long history of golden times. When the second World War came we had a golden time. The people have no fear even when things are going wrong.
- We can benefit from our uniqueness in the Caribbean in architecture, the fact that we are multi-lingual and multi-cultural.
- We are a small island that gives us tremendous opportunities. We have highly qualified people who have studied and travelled abroad. This gives us a clear view of events. Our people are flexible and can fill many roles. We do not need to restrict people into little employment slots, but allow them freedom

On the quality of life

- In general, we do not demonstrate that we really care for our young people.
- In 5-7 years we should be leading the Caribbean in friendliness and adaptability to circumstances of life.
- I talk with 8-year old kids who go home after school to an empty house.
- Some of our youth are no longer afraid of dying because they do not expect to live many years past 20.
- We are in a cultural gap for two reasons:

- 1) the establishment of the oil refinery on the island forced us to adopt the European culture in a period of less than 30 years.
- 2) the education that came with the refinery does not pay enough attention to our history and we were not allowed to speak our own language at school. The consequence is that we did not develop our identity.

On government

- We have a big leadership problem on the island and at the neighbourhood level.
- There is a lack of accountability at all levels, from the government to the family. (Vishon Kòrsou, 1999)

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions

Proposals

- Start a strong national motivation campaign to involve all citizens in the new tasks to be carried out.
- Mark change, success, science, wealth, and well-being as goals within the country's reach.
- Establish a firm language policy connected to national development.
- Officially declare Papiamentu and English as the national languages of the Antilles.
- Determine Curaçao as a predominantly monolingual society, where consequently all other languages are foreign languages.
- Start the Language Faculty as part the University of the Netherlands Antilles, with the specific task of research for, and support to, the community needs in the area of national and foreign languages.
- Entrust a Language Institute with the planning and instrumentalization of the language:
 - develop a national, practical, functional language curriculum for all formal and non- formal education
 - promote the instruction of languages according to their status, that is, mother tongue and foreign languages
 - determine the foreign language with status of first foreign language, gateway to the world
 - normalization of Papiamentu
 - evaluate and adjust the present Papiamentu spelling
 - develop textbooks for all levels of education
 - teachers' training directed at empowerment of teachers
 - literature for all levels and ages
 - publish Papiamentu dictionaries
 - research
 - advice for governmental and non-governmental agencies
 - develop Curaçao as a regional language centre
- Reinvent an educational system based on the socio-economic reality of the Antilles and the Caribbean region that grants the citizens of the Antilles:
 - an emancipatory perspective
 - strong connection with their cultural heritage
 - clearly defined aims
 - democracy

- personal, professional, national development
- leadership training directed to control of their own lives
- conscience to preserve natural environment
- integration of spirituality, information technology, arts, sports, agriculture
- elimination system of repeating grades
- special, protected, privileged attention for the development of their mother tongue in the overall curriculum
- mother tongue schools
- language programmes focused on
 - orientation:** students learn how to explore language with the medium language
 - execution:** training of oral and writing skills
 - control:** independency to measure execution

Language is more than language. Curaçao is currently going through a deep national crisis, which may manifest itself as a financial one, but if more closely analyzed reveals the profound negligence to define a long-, middle-, and short-term national agenda. An agenda that unmistakably indicates the vision, the unifying aims, the determination, the resources for every one to focus on and to execute, guided by well-prepared leaders, conscious of their history and present, and ready for the future; leaders that would characterize themselves by their power to unify the people to succeed. For too long, it was taken for granted that we would survive because we were Dutch; because Holland would take care of us. In our ignorant innocence or innocent ignorance we overlooked the fact that they were, and historically are, the rulers and we the ruled ones, and that power never renders itself; it has to be conquered, if not by sword then by the mind. And we neglected the mind. We have not studied our rulers well enough, otherwise we would have known that we were programmed to think that we are not programmed; that if we looked the other way long enough and denied the existence of colonialism it would automatically disappear. We forgot that we were trained *not* to see colonialism as colonialism.

The Curaçaoan poet and senior ethnologist, Elis Juliana, asked himself once how come we accept that only--if it is possible to speak of only in this respect--5 years of Nazi domination could leave scars that deep and still felt in Holland's skin, and deny the effects of 365 years of colonization in us? We thought it was not necessary to define ourselves because the good old motherland would solve all our problems. We defined neither our culture or language. That is why we opposed independence so strongly and fiercely. We regarded it as a threat to the "peace" and "wealth" we enjoyed. In the 1993 referendum to determine the future political status of the Netherlands Antilles people, could choose between 4 options:

- A. Maintain the status quo of Dutch colony with internal self-rule
- B. Separate from the other islands of the Antilles and preserve ties with Holland
- C. Become a Dutch province like the *départements d'outremèr* Guadeloupe and Martinique are to France
- D. Independence

Tragically, but understandably, 74% of the population chose Option A, being the most comfortable because it required less thinking and change. But then again, its slogan explains everything: "With Option A you do not lose one single thing." They forgot to tell what you would gain voting for that option. Tragically, but explicable, Option D got 0.5% or 325 votes. Gordon Lewis pointed out both the necessity as well as the relativity of independence. "Like emancipation before, it is a necessary condition of such reconstruction. But it is not the reconstruction itself. At its best, it promises an end to the colonial psychology of self-contempt." (Lewis, 1993, p. 517)

But the tragedy continues. This year, 1999, marks 500 years that the Europeans landed in the Antilles in search of economic expansion and took them by brutal force. Throughout the year, the air is filled with festivities “commemorating” 500 years of written history. Former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams stated that: “ ... it takes more than a national anthem, however stirring, a national coat of arms however distinctive, a national flag however appropriate, a national flower however beautiful, to make a nation” (quoted in Lewis, 1993, p. 515). While other countries engaged seriously in their decolonization process, we stood by and celebrated the fact that we would have the status of an observer in international fora, accompanying the Dutch ambassador. We would protest when the Netherlands was denied admittance at a Caricom meeting because it was not a Caribbean, but a European, power and we demanded they be admitted because they are not strangers, but friends. We objected to calling the Dutch language a foreign language--which is a linguistic concept, not an emotional one--because the denomination foreign could sound hostile towards our friends. We demanded that our Caribbean friends treat our Dutch “friends” as friends and could, thus, not define our linguistic situation well and act properly upon it.

Because we did not know ourselves, we could never know the ruler. We did not think it necessary to know ourselves. That is why the crisis is, in the first place, a cultural, mental, and spiritual crisis, that requires leadership to address it properly. Never before has this country had so many people with an academic degree and never before has the crisis been so deeply felt. The question is: What did the education system prepare people for? The University of the Netherlands Antilles started off as a Law School in 1970, joined forces with the Higher Technical School, founded in 1972, and officially became the University of the Netherlands Antilles in 1979, consisting of three faculties: the Law Faculty, the Technical Faculty, and the Social-Economic Faculty. The country forgot to found the faculties of Humanities to teach us history and herstory, geography, anthropology, sociology, languages, and our own language. The discussion about starting a language faculty has been going on for more than a decade now with no results. While denying colonialism we did not only get scars, but it penetrated deeply into our genes and, in a very civilized way, cultivated in our schools, academies, and university we pass on to our children a very low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, an inferiority complex, distrust, fear of responsibility, absence of creativity and initiative, and non-scientific thinking. Gordon Lewis (1993) described the tasks to be attended to as follows: “West Indians, as persons, ... have to emancipate themselves in their innermost selves from the English psycho-complex. It will not be an easy task It will be the task, obviously, of a generation or more, working through education and experience” (p. 517). And this considering the fact that they have been independent for 30 years. The solution lies in our own hands. It is not easy. But who said a solution has to be easy to be a solution?

Invitation

This final part consists of--maybe rhetoric--questions; expression of the longing for a change in favour of an authentic national development.

What if we decide that it is possible to overcome problems? That we are not victims of circumstances, not even of colonialism, but agents of change. Not Africans, Asians, or Europeans, but Caribbeans of the 20th century. What will happen if we integrate instead of fragmentate our reality? Economy has everything to do with education. And culture everything to do with public finances. Fishing is as much a science as mathematics is. What will take place if instead of broadcasting that we are facing a financial crisis (which we do not have; the banks have a surplus of liquid funds), we start broadcasting that every balanced initiative that generates more economic activity will be honoured with the National Prize for Economic Creativity? Or that all serious inventions can compete for the National Science Prize? What would it be like if

every professional in the field of social research would know that from now on it is important to rewrite our history and herstory. And now not seen from the outside, but from the inside. That is why they will engage in reading, studying, and publishing about the strong persons who really made a difference in their surroundings, but until now have been kept out of the history and herstory books.

What will it be like if we develop an eco-cultural tourism that will enable visitors to savour what makes us different from the Bahamas and Torremolinos? How will our youth perform if they can do every day scientific, agricultural, and artistic experiments at school? What about developing an emancipatory educational system, integrated in the Caribbean? What about not closing our schools anymore in the afternoon and evening, but let them vibrate with courses for parents, to teach budgeting, mechanics, drawing, singing, and furniture making? If we encourage boys to respect girls precisely because they are boys? And girls to respect themselves precisely because they are girls? And if we re-programme ourselves that someone who came into this world with testicles will not turn into a homosexual overnight if he expresses his feelings, or cries, or admits that he has moments of weakness? And that a person who came into this world with ovaries does not have to resort to seduction tactics in order to achieve her goals? What if we restructure our vocabulary: "He is black, but a fine person." What if we stop these self-inflicting wounds? What would happen if, at last, conscious that it is culture (the mind) that generates change we start our Language Faculty to really exchange with the Caribbean and the world? How would it feel when young and old protect our natural environment? Who can be against us if we stop blaming the other islands of the Antilles for our national problems and start cooperating with them, knowing that together we have far more options than alone?

And what if, despite all these positive developments, we still face a lot of difficulties? What if we decide to regard each and every difficulty along the way as a challenge to continue? What if we start looking for solutions from the inside, not from the outside? What if we decide not to be afraid to be afraid? And how will it be if every time we feel fear we admit that and support each other to overcome it? What will happen if we take the decision that as of today we will start growing?

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