



**Excelsior  
Community  
College**

*Transforming Lives, Nurturing Global Citizens*



**THE EXCELSIOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**ACADEMIC**

**JOURNAL (ECCAJ)**

A Multidisciplinary Journal for Jamaica and the Caribbean



**DEDICATED TO THE LATE DR. GWYNETH JACKSON**  
FOR HER CONTRIBUTION TO ECC'S RESEARCH CULTURE

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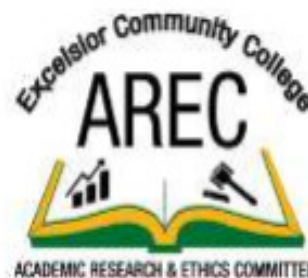
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# **Excelsior Community College Academic Journal (ECCAJ):**

A Multi-Disciplinary Journal  
for Jamaica and the Caribbean

**Volume 2  
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**The Excelsior Community  
College Academic Journal  
(ECCAJ):  
A Multi-Disciplinary Journal  
for Jamaica and the Caribbean**

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## **ECC's MISSION & VISION**

### **ECC 2024 Vision Statement**

We are a transformative, agile higher education institution with a Christian worldview, forging linkages and positively impacting our communities.

### **ECC 2024 Mission Statement**

We transform lives through quality education and training, applied research and partnership with local and international stakeholders.

## **ABOUT ECC ACADEMIC JOURNAL**

### **Journal Overview**

The Excelsior Community College Academic Journal (ECCAJ) is a collection of scholarly work done by students, lecturers, and other contributors. The scholarly collection includes research reports, conceptual papers, literature reviews and book reviews. It is a multi-disciplinary journal that features work from various disciplines, such as: education, psychology, health, and business. This volume is dedicated to Dr. Gwyneth Jackson and features four (4) articles that address issues identified in Jamaica and the Caribbean.

### **The Editorial Committee**

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Sheele-Ann Thaw (PhD)  
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Editor and Chair  
Editor

**EXCELSIOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE's RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION  
(ECC RID)**

**RID VISION**

The vision of the (RID) is to be the leading research unit in the Caribbean that contributes to the transformation of ECC through the design and execution of novel research inquiries guided by ethical standards to inform institutional decision making, effectiveness and efficiency.

**RID MISSION**

The Research and Innovation Division through a competent, motivated, and ethical team will provide world class research consultancy services to internal and external stakeholders aimed at fostering personal and professional development for staff and students; reliable, valid, and timely research reports; thus, building a healthy and rigorous research culture at Excelsior Community College. The Research and Innovation Division enables informed decision-making anchored on research by providing accurate and timely empirical data to guide sound institutional teaching and Management.

**ECC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (RID) TEAM**

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Dr. Sheele-Ann Thaw

Dean, Research and Innovation Division (Acting)

Mrs. Tamecia Adams-Robinson

Research Officer

Mrs. Tamara Scott McFarlane

ECCAJ Editor

Mrs. Stacy-Ann Moore Rhoden

Administrative Assistant

## **PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE**



The advancement of knowledge (discovery, innovation, and creation) is essential to any civilization. Excelsior Community College acknowledges the role it plays in advancing such knowledge through its research publications. To this end, the Excelsior Community College Academic Journal (ECCAJ), since its inception in January 2021, has been promoting excellence in applied research, through the scholarly work done by students, lecturers, and other contributors.

Research universities, across the world, have some of the most concentrated communities of scholars, facilities, and collective expertise engaged in these activities. But more importantly, this is where higher education is delivered, where students develop breadth and depth of knowledge in foundational and advanced subjects, where the skills for knowledge acquisition and understanding are honed, and where students are educated, trained, and otherwise prepared for successful careers. Part of that training and preparation derives from exposure to faculty who are engaged at the leading-edge of their fields, through their research and scholarly work.

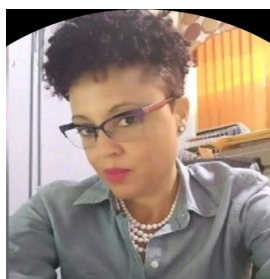
One such faculty was the late Dr. Gwyneth Jackson, who was instrumental in leading her team of staff, graduate and undergraduate students to advance their knowledge through research. Dr Jackson has had an illustrious career at Excelsior Community College where she gave twenty-nine years of outstanding service. She demonstrated vision and innovation in the development of programmes and curricula that were critical to the growth and expansion of the offerings at the College. Dr. Jackson has contributed her research to both the inaugural publication of the ECC Academic Journal and this year's publication. Additionally, even during her recent illness, she continued her work and research to ensure that findings would be available to be shared with peers and students. It is against this background that, we are pleased to dedicate the ECCAJ Vol 2 in honour of Dr. Gwyneth Jackson.

Globally, academic research continues to become increasingly important within the community college arena; hence the need for academic publications such as the ECCAJ. While community college faculty are not mandated to publish, as is the case with our four-year University peers, it is strongly encouraged to maintain academic-industry relationships. There is much research being done by community college faculty and the ECCAJ is one platform that has been making great strides in publishing the findings of such work.

So, I extend hearty congratulations to the Editor-in-Chief, editors and the RID team, faculty, and students, for the work they so generously commit to doing, as we all play our part in ensuring the continuity of our academic journals and ground-breaking research.

Philmore A. McCarthy  
*Principal, Excelsior Community College*

## **CHIEF EDITOR'S MESSAGE**



The road to Volume 2 of the ECCAJ has been plagued by delays and disappointments. However, as the popular saying suggests ‘Delayed is not denied.’ It is only fitting that the ECC Research and Innovation team dedicate this issue in memory of one of our biggest supporters, Dr. Gwyneth Elaine Jackson, affectionately known as Dr. J. Volume two (2) is particularly special in two regards – 1) it is in memory of Dr. Jackson and 2) it is an abbreviated version (not unlike Dr. J who was short in stature). Subsequent pages will provide a bio of Dr. Jackson’s contribution to the College. Having recently been conferred with her doctoral degree, Dr. J was excited about contributing even more to the research culture of the organization and similarly we were looking forward to future publications. We are indeed grateful to have known her and that the ECCAJ could have highlighted her as a published author in our first two volumes.

All the authors highlighted in this volume have offered insightful and thought-provoking articles for our readers. We are grateful to them for honouring us with their work while still in our embryonic stages.

Steven George Kerr utilizes a complex qualitative research design involving interviews, focus group discussions and concept mapping with 49 diverse stakeholders, representative of both low and high performing schools. Through a grounded theory approach, he develops and presents a model depicting 8 essential components: 6 key inputs and 2 processes which depict a turnaround model for poor-performing Jamaican schools. Dr. Kerr’s proposed Disrupted Agenda model seeks to offer a mechanism to transform underperforming schools while also providing a visual mapping of the factors that contribute to high-quality secondary schools in Jamaica.

Opal Smith Alexander provides a reflective overview of professional development (PD) approaches in the Jamaican school system and proposes cognitive coaching as the strategy which will address weaknesses in the current PD approach. Her article provides a detailed overview of cognitive coaching as a PD strategy, inclusive of the stages of planning conference, observation, modelling and post conference which are integral to the process. Ultimately, she proposes cognitive coaching as an important tool in teachers’ agency, professional development and overall improvement in the teaching and learning experience.

Gwyneth Jackson uses a multi-case study approach in the Jamaican professional landscape to gain insight into thirteen (13) employee’s experiences with knowledge creation at their places of employment. She highlights her participants’ prior knowledge of the concept and how they believe this translates within their own organizations. In so doing, she makes recommendations to organizational leaders on how to better ensure a competitive advantage via knowledge creation amongst their workforce.

Tamara Scott McFarlane provides a comprehensive reflection on some of the challenges facing today’s higher education institutions, particularly the need to ensure currency, accountability, and efficiency. In particular, she highlights the Jamaican community college system as a significant



model of innovation within the system despite being somewhat overlooked nationally. Through a focus on one such college, Excelsior Community College, she highlights some of the strategies employed by the institution to establish themselves as a successful higher education institution even while navigating the challenges facing the Jamaican higher education system.

Dr. Zaria Malcolm Walker

*Vice Principal, Academic Affairs and Institutional Advancement, Excelsior Community College*

## DEDICATION



This volume is dedicated to Dr. Gwyneth Jackson, fondly called Dr. J or Mrs. J. She was not only a remarkable marketer but a visionary who has left a legacy at Excelsior Community College (ECC). Dr. Gwyneth Jackson has been integral in supporting the Research and Innovation Division (RID), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as the development of the research culture at ECC.

Known for her team building and problem-solving techniques, Dr. J. contributed greatly to the work of the RID. She was always a member of the Research Conferences' planning team where she suggested many brilliant ideas that resulted in the success of the events. She assisted in obtaining keynote speakers for the opening ceremonies as well as entrepreneurs to be part of the trade show. Furthermore, she played an integral role in the successful publication of the Excelsior Community College Academic Journal (ECCAJ). In fact, for the first publication, she authored a paper as well as served as peer reviewer for several other articles. Her support remained unwavering as she also submitted a paper for this, our second publication, in dedication to her work with the RID. Additionally, as the Associate Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS), Dr. J. coordinated the graduate research activities for students to ensure that research remained at the core of the programme.

Dr. J. utilized her excellent communication and interpersonal skills as well as that trademark winning smile, to rally support for research activities. As the Head of School (HOS) for Business & Entrepreneurial Studies (SOBES) she urged her lecturers to organize their teaching and learning around the Research Conference activities, especially for the evening students. At times, she personally escorted the evening students to the evening symposium. As a lecturer, she actively encouraged her students to further benefit from the Research Conferences by making presentations, especially in market research.

ECC, and in particular the RID team, will surely miss this remarkable member of our academic community. Her impact is unquestionable. Rest well Dr. J. - you will be missed, but your legacy continues.

## MEET THE AUTHORS

### **Dr. Steven Kerr**



Dr. Steven George Kerr is a three times graduate of the University of the West Indies, Mona, and has spent the last twenty-nine years in the field of education at the classroom and policy levels.

Dr. Kerr joined the staff at the Ministry of Education and Youth as Assistant Chief Education Officer/Director, Policy Analysis, Research, and Statistics Unit. Prior to this, he worked as a Senior Staff Inspector at the National Education Inspectorate and spent nearly 25 years at the Planning Institute of Jamaica, advising and reporting to the Government of Jamaica on the education and training sectors.

Dr. Kerr has served in the past as the Technical Secretary for both Education and Training, playing an instrumental role in the development of the Government of Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan. He recently completed PhD research on 'What makes for Quality Schools in Jamaica'.

### **Mrs. Opal Smith-Alexander**



Mrs. Opal Smith-Alexander has twenty-five years' experience as an educator and has received numerous awards. This includes the Veda Latty Award for teaching Social Studies, Exemplary Leadership Award from JET UK Jamaica Education Taskforce, and Carlong's award for outstanding contribution to Education. She holds a Master of Education degree in Educational Measurement from the University of the West Indies (Mona), Bachelor of Theology from Parkersburg Bible College, as well as a Bachelor of Arts from Northern Caribbean University.

Mrs. Smith-Alexander is a principal of a primary school in Jamaica and serves as an Assessor for the Caribbean Examination Council. Additionally, she is a School Inspector with the National Education Inspectorate and a trained mentor registered with the Mentorship Association of Jamaica. She serves as the National Youth Secretary and Evangelist in her church organization. She has been writing poems, articles for newspapers and short stories since the age of ten, and has often been guest speaker and panellist on topical issues.

Currently, she is a PhD candidate reading for a degree in Education Leadership. She is also waiting to be commissioned as a Justice of the Peace. Opal Smith-Alexander is a wife and mother with two children.

### **Mrs. Tamara Scott-McFarlane**



Mrs. Tamara Scott-McFarlane is a Language Educator who is passionate about nurturing young minds. She aims to encourage the youth to be compassionate thinkers. Mrs. Scott-McFarlane utilizes her people management skills to establish cooperative professional relationships. Her research interests include curriculum studies, student engagement, second chance education and educational partnerships.

## **A Model for Creating High-Quality Secondary Schools in Jamaica**

**Steven George Kerr, PhD**

**Abstract** - *The purpose of this journal article was to present a model for transforming schools and to provide an understanding of the factors that contribute to high-quality secondary schools in Jamaica. The research for this publication was conducted using a qualitative approach and a grounded theory design. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and an interactive participatory data collection mechanism—concept mapping. The outcome of this research was the design of a bottom-up School Turnaround Model described as the Disruptive Agenda Model, for creating high-quality schools. The findings revealed that there are 8 essential components: 6 key inputs and 2 processes that together constitute a school turnaround model for poor-performing schools in Jamaica. The key inputs were leading and managing for effective school transformation; promoting pedagogical excellence; reframing the culture and ethos of schools and learning; creating an enabling environment; engaging parents for effective teaching and learning; and engendering stakeholder support for effective teaching and learning. The processes included: a research and data-driven culture for effecting school transformation; and infusing a culture of accountability among internal and external clients. The study recommends the introduction of an incentivized teacher recruitment programme, a school turnaround principals' programme, more reliance on research, and a re-examination of the institutional and organisational structures of schools. The findings and recommendations provide the backdrop for policy and programme advice to the Government, the Education Ministry, international development partners, the educational transformation agencies in Jamaica, school leaders in general, educational planners, and principals in low-performing schools.*

**Key Words:** Grounded theory, low-performing, Jamaica, model, Secondary schools

Quality education remains a major concern for countries all over the world and there has been a growing recognition that, despite years of reform and the injection of huge spending on education, education quality has not improved significantly. This situation is no different in Jamaica, the largest English-speaking Island in the Caribbean with a population of over 2.8 million (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2018).

Jamaica has made significant progress in education and training since the country gained independence in 1962, largely due to the principal support provided via the Government of Jamaica (GoJ), its international development partners, the private sector, households, and community and faith-based organisations. The importance of education has been seen in progressive budgets in which education ranks first in government allocations, and its share of Gross National Product (6.0 percent) ranks amongst the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, in 2021, 59 years after Jamaica's independence, many of the indicators relating to these ideals are below societal expectations relating to quality schooling. At all levels of the education system, there are disparities among institutions in the quality of educational provision. A two-tiered system of education exists in which the quality of schools is determined by factors such as leadership and teacher quality, school size and type, location, resource availability, and the socio-economic background of the school community.

I capitalise on 28 years of experience as a teacher/lecturer, an educational planner and a policy analyst, to present a Grounded Theory methodological research that will explore a model to improve quality for some 86 poor-performing Jamaican high schools and, as referenced by the Vision 2030 National Development Plan (PIOJ, 2009), facilitate the creation of a globally competitive and quality workforce.

## **Situating the Study**

The National Education Inspectorate 2015 report surmised that 53.0 percent of our secondary schools were rated as being ineffective (NEI, 2015). The report also showed that 77.0 percent of our schools were performing below the MOEYI's established performance targets. This situation is more untenable if Jamaica is to achieve sustainable development and the achievement of targets set by the GoJ to improve the quality of the education system. These initiatives are outlined in the MOEYI's Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020, Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan & Education Sector Plan, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (PIOJ, 2017). I recommend that in light of the observed qualitative deficiencies and the national and international obligations that need to be achieved by 2030, there is an urgent need to consider a comprehensive school turnaround model for creating quality schools in Jamaica.

## **Research Questions**

Given the situation analysis and the overall purpose of this research, the following research questions were developed to guide this study.

Main Question:

What are the critical components of a school turnaround model for poor-performing schools in Jamaica?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on the critical processes required to create a school turnaround model for poor-performing schools in Jamaica?
2. How do school turnaround leaders accomplish school transformation?

## **Definitions**

This research is guided by the following working definitions:

**School Turnaround** refers to fundamental and comprehensive intervention in low-performing schools that,

- a) produces significant gains in achievement within two to three years; and
- b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organisation (Calkins et al., 2007).

**Poor-Performing Schools** refers to schools exhibiting wide disparities from the established performance standards and targets of the MOEY and which are rated ineffective by the NEI. The concept is similar to that of 'low-performing schools' (in other jurisdictions) and has similar characteristics. They are described as schools with a combination of community poverty, low expectations for student achievement, high teacher absenteeism, and high rates of teacher turnover (Corallo & McDonald, 2001).

## **Literature Review**

Guided by the perspectives of Dunne (2011) and the normative practices of constructivist grounded theory which promotes the use of the review of literature as a means of 'contextualisation' of the study, rather than a traditional literature review, this section will highlight how the review of the literature contributed to the shaping of this research. The initial conception and design of the research were heavily influenced by the reviews conducted on the global and local education reform movements. In particular, Barber and Mourshed (2007), provided a rationale for why the top 10 education systems were successful and outlined strategies they used to improve student outcomes. This research guided my decision to conduct an investigation aimed at developing a school turnaround model that would replicate a quality education system in Jamaica where students, teachers and quality teaching matter.

This research was also driven by the guiding theories: Systems Theory and Education Production Function (EPF). These theories advocate that there are stable relationships between the resources allocated to education and educational outputs. The substantive model created by this research is influenced by the view that the creation of quality schools is the result of systemic adjustments to the functions of leadership, teacher quality, quality teaching, ethos, family and resources.

The Disruptive Agenda model was also shaped by the education change theory which advocates strategic, incremental, and fundamental readjustment of an existing education system to

new ideas and norms, designed to enhance the system. Similarly, the model created by this research is premised on correcting deficiencies in policies and procedures and introducing new mindsets, roles, frameworks, and arrangements (Cuban, 1992; Fullan, 2001a; Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves et al., 1998; Waks, 2007).

Another important influence on this research is the perspective of renowned education change theorist Michael Fullan. Fullan (2001b) incorporated the dimensions of moral purpose, capacity building and strategic leadership undertakings to the educational change process. These propositions are important dimensions of this research especially as it relates to moral purpose and fits in with my objective of leading a bottom-up investigation to create a model for school transformation for Jamaica.

The multiple research studies examined have stressed the critical role of leadership, instructional interventions, change management initiatives, the use of school and system-level strategies to secure and sustain school improvement, community and central government support and varying other environmental factors in conducting schools' reform efforts (Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2007; Fullan, 2003; Harris et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Lezotte, 1994; Miller, 2016; Newman, 2005; Thompson et al., 2017).

### **The Research Methodology and Design**

I chose a qualitative approach for this study, guided by my research focus, the purpose, and my research questions. Grounded theory was particularly appealing to me for several reasons. The main rationale is that GTM emphasises theory development and conceptualisation (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and allowed me the space to conceptualise a model for the transformation of poor-performing schools in Jamaica. The argument is presented that Grounded Theory (GT) provides a strong intellectual justification for using qualitative research to develop theoretical analysis allowing researchers to discover theories and bridging the gap between theory and practice (Goulding, 1998; Reay et al., 2016).

### **Sampling and Participant Selection**

The qualitative sampling selection process used in this research was designed to ensure variability and made use of convenience, snowballing and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2000; Collins, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). In using the sampling techniques outlined, I was able to create a panel of 49 participants with known or demonstrable experience and expertise in school transformation (Florida Institute of Technology, 2018). Table 1 gives a synopsis of the participants, their experiences, and the method of sampling.

**Table 1**

*Interviewees, their Characteristics and Method of Sampling*

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Method of Sampling</b>
<u>Category One</u>		
Former Permanent Secretary	Turnaround principal and education transformation experience	Convenience
Former Permanent Secretary	Overseas and local school transformation experience; school inspectorate experience	Convenience
Quality Assurance Expert	Quality assurance experience in secondary schools	Convenience
Head of a Ministry Agency	Overseas and local experience in leadership training	Convenience
Acting Chief Education Officer	School turnaround expert	Convenience
<u>Category Two</u>		
Special Education Consultant	Ministry experience (Special Education)	Snowball
Leadership Consultant	Private sector-led project to transform non-traditional schools in Jamaica	Snowball
UWI Education Consultant	Governance experience (non-traditional and traditional high school)	Snowball
Education Consultant	School Transformation (non-traditional high schools)	Snowball
<u>Category Three</u>		
Principal of an All Boy's Traditional High School	Private and Public-School experience in school transformation	Snowball
Principal of an Inner City Non-Traditional High School	Renowned Turnaround principal	Snowball
Principal of a Rural Non-Traditional High School	Renowned Turnaround principal	Snowball
Principal of an Inner-city Non-Traditional High School	Renowned Turnaround principal	Snowball
<u>Category Four</u>		
4 Members of Staff – Rural Non-Traditional High Turnaround School	3 teachers and 1 ancillary staff member	Convenience
4 teachers from a Pilot School in MoEY School Turnaround Project	Senior teachers in Turnaround Project school	Convenience
<u>Category Five</u>		
Students and Parents	8 in-school students and 12 out-of-school students 8 parents (turnaround school)	Convenience

### Data Collection

Considering the positions taken, I affirmed the methodology most aligned to interpretive approaches, i.e., qualitative, naturalistic methods – interviewing and focus groups meetings. I opted to use three main data collection techniques: interviews, concept mapping, and focus group meetings. I was particularly fascinated with my use of concept mapping, a participative teaching and learning technique, which graphically illustrates the relationships between concepts and ideas and is fast becoming recognised as a mechanism that allows researchers to ground data within theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In research studies, this tool has been used both with groups and individuals to assess learning programmes, to develop conceptual models and to identify stakeholder perspectives, allowing shared meanings to emerge (Pegg, 2007; Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). The concept map activity in this research involved two groups of students.

### Data Analysis

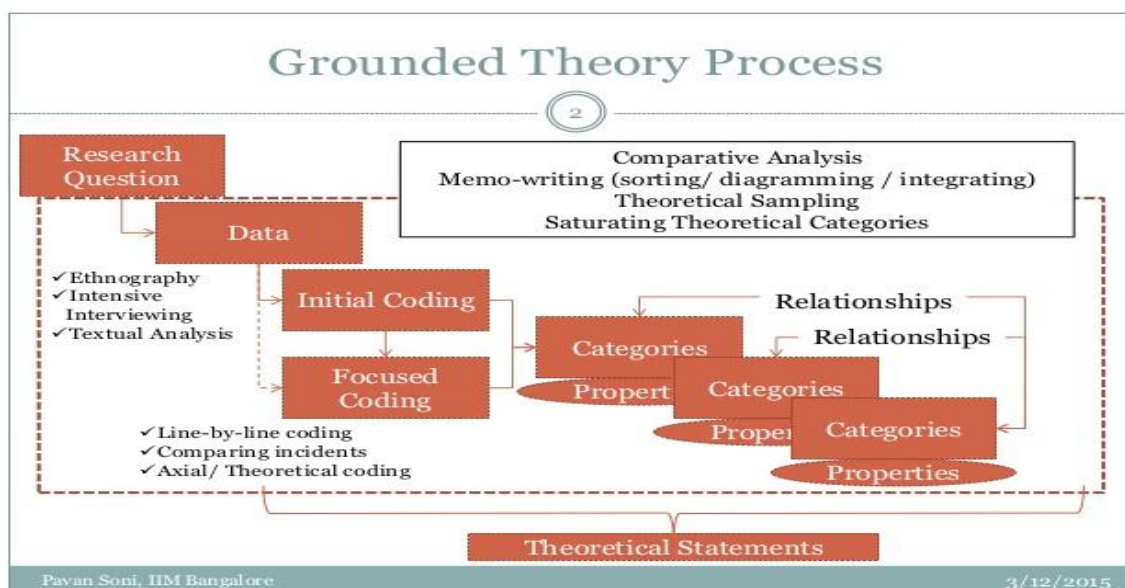
The main features of GTM (Charmaz, 2000) encompass the simultaneous collection and analysis of data; the creation of analytical codes and categories; the discovery of processes within the data; the construction of abstract categories; writing analytical memos; theoretical sampling; saturation of concepts, and the development of theory.

I conducted data analysis using Charmaz's (2006) coding strategy as seen in Figure 3 below. It utilises two main levels or types of coding:

- Initial coding – the process of generating initial concepts from data
- Focused coding – using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data

**Figure 3**

*The Coding Plan Adapted from Charmaz (2006)*



In the first stage of data analysis, initial coding was conducted after each interview, focus group meeting and with each concept map. One hundred and eighty-four codes were identified and then collapsed into 28 categories with their properties relating to three broad areas to include quality schools, poor-performing schools, and school turnaround modelling. In the subsequent stage, focused coding, the 28 categories were subsumed into 12 categories. As a result of three theoretical sampling activities, the twelve categories identified in the focused coding were redefined into 10 categories. In two subsequent theoretical sampling activities, the 10 categories



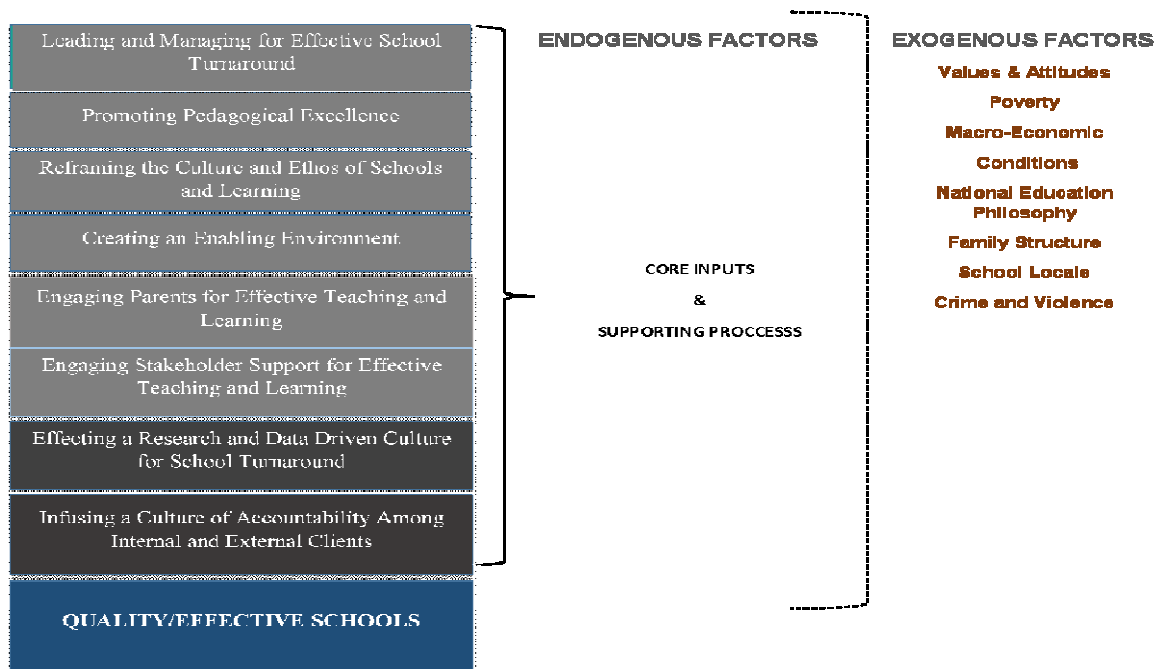
were collapsed into eight categories and their appendage properties. The eight categories emanating from the findings led the researcher to a point of theoretical saturation, where all concepts relating to the theory were deemed to have been fully developed and had no new insight. These findings ultimately led to the generation of a substantive theory.

### Overview of the Substantive Theory: Disruptive Agenda Model

The model, predicated on the findings, suggests that eight inter-related endogenous factors are seen as essential components of a school turnaround model for poor-performing schools in Jamaica. The model has six core interconnected inputs and two supporting processes. The features of the model are outlined in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

#### *Features of the Disruptive Agenda Model*



### Findings and Recommendations

The influence of leadership as a catalyst to school turn-around is the central theme of numerous pieces of research (Duke et al., 2008; Fairchild & DeMary, 2011; Fullan, 2006b, 2015; Herman et al., 2008; Impact, 2005; Kanungo, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2004; Liu, 2020; Murphy, 2008; Thompson et al., 2017). The findings of this study showed that leadership is the defining factor for the turnaround of poor-performing schools in Jamaica. However, the defining factor in these poor-performing schools is not based solely on the application of quality leadership and management as described in the body of associated literature. Transformation of poor-performing schools requires an understanding that these institutions have an ingrained system of inertia, compounded by low accountability and a continued culture of poor performance.

Researchers have advanced that transformational leadership is critical to successfully turning schools' around, as it is the most appropriate for the reconstruction of initiatives because it facilitates organizational and teacher support (Leithwood, 1992, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003). My findings are broadly consistent with those of the literature, as school turnaround in Jamaica requires transformational leaders who perform roles relating to initiating and managing the change process. The characteristics of such leadership require competence in managing the school turnaround, being at the helm of the instructional supervision process, and practicing distributive leadership.

One of the themes to emerge from the analysis of findings was the need to promote pedagogical excellence, which involves the hiring and retention of qualified and experienced teachers to enhance the delivery of effective teaching. Pedagogical training, collegiately and collaborative teaching will also need to be at the fore. The research also highlighted the need for teachers to possess a high sense of self-efficacy, and regard themselves as agents of change (Cheung, 2008; Cook, 2015; Maguire, 2011; Richardson, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Another finding surrounds the need to refocus school culture where its main purpose is teaching and learning to promote a climate that emphasizes a culture of learning for both students and teachers. The findings also determined that an infused culture of collaborative accountability by all internal and external stakeholders is a requirement for the achievement of school turnaround.

The analysis of findings from this research shows that in turning around poor-performing schools, there was a need for a new emphasis on the role of parents, shifting their focus as donors towards valuing their contributions, building their capabilities, engaging them via different modalities and empowering them to be effective supervisors of learning outside the school hours (Cunningham, 2012; Lipsitz & West, 2006; Mortimore et al., 1988; Munroe, 2009; Peck & Reitzug, 2018; UNESCO, 2004; Watson-Williams & Fox, 2013).

Finally, a critical finding is the central role of a data mining and research culture that is aligned to the decision-making related to school improvement planning, standards and target setting, and resource allocation for effecting school transformation. This data-driven culture requires the establishment of baseline data on the school, the creation of school development plans, and the monitoring and evaluation of progress beyond the initial school transformation activities.

### **Recommendations**

The research yielded several findings that have generated a suite of recommendations considered necessary for the transformation of poor-performing schools in Jamaica.

In relation to resourcing schools, there is a fundamental and urgent need for a policy that dictates a financing mechanism that disproportionately supports school turnaround programmes for poor-performing schools. In this model, there should be provisions for School Improvement Grants (SIG), similar to those provided in the USA, to support interventions aimed at school turnaround (United States Department of Education, 2015). In addition to the current government subventions to schools, poor-performing schools would benefit from an additional pool of funds. Scholars such as Fligstein (2013) and Meyers and Smylie (2017) recommend that this pool of funding should be continued beyond the initial project years, and mechanisms instituted for sustainable disbursements.

Also important to the policy development agenda is a supportive regulatory and legislative framework. In this regard, the findings of this research support the need for the entrenchment of school improvement processes in the Education Act of Jamaica. In the case of Jamaica, the legislative framework of the Education Act of 1965, and the Code of Regulation of 1980 would need to be revised expeditiously to meet the modernised operational requirements for turning around Jamaican schools. Implicit and emerging from the research findings is the need for legislation that makes provisions for: a rights-based approach to education; the institutionalisation of an accountability matrix for schools; the training, hiring and placement of transformational leaders; the recruitment, deployment and separation of teachers; the adequate resourcing of the transitioning schools; the reform of the current governance structure, and the standardised operation of schools including functions, roles and the sharing of resources.

Meyers and Smylie (2017) purport that most schools that are subject to turnaround are the same schools that have the greatest difficulty in recruiting and retaining the most credentialed and effective teachers (p. 11). In response to this finding, and in relation to promoting pedagogical excellence, one solution is the introduction of an incentivized Teach Jamaica Programme. The programme would attract and incentivize the most inclined graduates from universities in Jamaica to enter a contractual arrangement with the Ministry to be trained, and then placed as teachers in

poor-performing schools for a stipulated period. Incentives for these individuals could take the form of absorbing the cost of students' loans or providing other gratuities.

In relation to leading and managing for effective school turnaround, another recommendation is the call for the establishment of a unit of transformational team leaders that are trained by the National College for Educational Leadership under its Aspiring Principal Programme which currently includes practical, cooperative learning and mentorship strategies (Duke, 2014). The desired outcome would be leaders with the following basic traits/characteristics: being visionaries, innovative, inspirational, qualified, experienced, values-oriented, caring, and motivational (Fullan, 2015; Meyers & Smylie, 2017). These leaders would be assigned, tasked, and resourced with the mandate to transform within three to five years, poor-performing schools.

The findings of the research highlighted the need for a refocusing on the school culture and climate in poor-performing schools. In this regard, school boards and school leadership teams must play an integral role in institutionalizing, in their schools and among the main stakeholders, the view that the main purpose of school is for teaching and learning and maximizing learners' output.

The research findings concurred with the views of scientific research, concluding that school transformation in Jamaica requires parental engagement and not just parental support (Cunningham, 2012). The recommendations are that there should be a focus on valuing the contribution of parents (Watson-Williams & Fox, 2013), building their capabilities, engaging them via different modalities (Munroe, 2009), and empowering them to be effective supervisors of learning outside school hours.

### **Conclusion**

Concluding from my analysis was the design of a substantive school turnaround model, the Disruptive Agenda Model. The model, predicated by the findings, suggests the existence of eight inter-related endogenous factors that are essential for the school turnaround model. The originality of this research has therefore resulted in the designation of a model that will generate discourse on how schools in Jamaica are currently conceptualised, operated, staffed, financed, managed, and led. The research is also premised on the belief that school turnaround in Jamaica cannot be achieved using a "business as usual" approach, but rather on the concept of "*business unusual*" as noted by Smith (2010).

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## **Cognitive Coaching Practices as a Supervisory Tool in Education Reform in a Rural Primary School in Jamaica**

**Opal Smith-Alexander**

**Abstract** - *Coaching is an important tool often underutilized in the field of education. This article seeks to explore the importance of coaching as a supervisory tool and examines how this tool may be used effectively. Professional development is important to the process, and this is examined to ascertain its effectiveness of coaching as a useful tool. The writer explores cognitive coaching coupled with McLymont's work (2015) in writing this article. Incorporating mentoring to aid the use of coaching in an educational institution was used to improve the use of professional development in education. The article examines how pre-conferencing, observation, and post-conferencing sessions can be used to address a specific problem, challenge, or area of weakness in an institution.*

**Keywords:** Cognitive coaching, education reform, Jamaica, professional development, supervision

“...impactful leadership resides in the classroom among teachers. This all starts with meaningful, strategic, continuous, and quality professional development” (Thomas, 2019, p. 4). This statement, by one school administrator, is insightful in exploring the value of professional development practices for educators. This administrator intimated that teachers engage in ongoing professional development practices to increase student achievement and “ensure a successful education experience for every single child” (Thomas, 2019, p. 4). Ongoing professional development is one of the requirements for educational institutions. Therefore, there has been numerous professional development workshops aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes in the Jamaican educational sector. These include the professional development sessions coordinated by the Ministry of Education & Youth during the summer periods. Additionally, with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Jamaica Teaching Council has been very instrumental in coordinating numerous professional development sessions for public school teachers at all levels.

Unfortunately, not all teachers have been benefiting from these workshops as many are held during school hours while others are hosted at night. However, educators need to recognize that they need to gather as much information as they can to be adequately prepared to challenge the creative and innovative minds of students. According to Allen (2020), teachers will be operating in a different world in 2021, and administrators are thinking now about how best to support them; thus “building highly effective teams is integral to teacher performance, teacher learning, and ultimately student learning” (p. 2). Therefore, teachers must adopt a growth mindset and try innovative solutions to classroom weaknesses without being afraid to fail, and by seeking feedback from colleagues and students to better understand their room for growth (Thomas, 2019, pp. 4-5).

One strategy for developing this growth mindset is to engage in cognitive coaching practices. This reflective paper explores the concept of professional development and cognitive coaching as an effective supervisory tool to reform education for improving teaching and learning. In addition, this paper will offer suggested recommendations for addressing the need for cognitive coaching skills.

### **What is cognitive coaching?**

Garmston (1993) considered cognitive coaching as a process during which teachers explore the thinking behind their practices. While each person seems to maintain a cognitive map, only partially conscious, cognitive coaching questions this consciousness and reveals areas of that map that may not be complete or consciously developed (p. 57). Ellinger et al. (2016), observed that the growth of an emergent ‘coaching industry’, in many countries, has resulted in some scholars calling for the development of a ‘coaching profession’ and contemporary human resource professionals conceive coaching as a necessary area of expertise. I believe cognitive coaching may

be utilized as a possible supervisory tool for education reform and teacher professional development. Professional development is connected to reform and may improve instructional leadership and accountability in the classroom as well as improve the overall achievement of students, teachers, and the institution. Darling-Hammond (2017, as cited in Perry & Booth, 2021) noted that professional development sits at the heart of improving teachers' skills, knowledge, and practice; therefore, professional development facilitators (PDFs), those practitioners who lead, plan and deliver teacher professional development activities such as workshops, programmes, and courses, play a key role in the education system.

Killion & Harrison (2017) stated that traditional professional development usually occurs away from the school's site, separate from classroom contexts and challenges in which teachers are expected to apply what they have learned, and often without the necessary support to facilitate transfer of learning. Knapp (2003) further argued that professional development is a critical component in improving teaching. As a result, teachers must maintain consistent classroom practices in order to maintain their experience, knowledge, and talents.

The value of professional development can never be overemphasized, but what are the factors that prevent teachers from engaging in this aspect more frequently? Well, during my first year as an administrator, I made preparation to host a professional development workshop by utilizing a resource person engaged to the National Education Inspectorate (NEI). The fee she charged seemed reasonable to me; however, my superiors were adamant that thirty thousand dollars for a professional development session aimed at informing staff on what to expect when a school is to be inspected by the NEI was too costly. Following that experience, I endeavoured to host professional development sessions that would be of no cost to the institution. This professional experience highlights the fact that money and time are major hurdles when planning professional development sessions. In fact, Bayer (2013) cited several studies that have emphasized time as one of the most influential factors impacting teacher participation in professional development (PD) activities.

Additionally, professional development sessions generally do not allow the individual teacher to reflect on his/her practice. In fact, professional development is so often about learning new skills and strategies, reflection is usually limited to: "Think about how you have been doing X. Now let's learn how to do Y" (Rucker, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, a teacher who is expected to plan, execute and assess learning activities in a typical week, will not have the time to reflect on new knowledge at a PD sessions. This is further compounded by the fact that teachers must also analyze students' results and determine how to move forward. As a result, reflecting on practice is an exercise that understandably gets tossed aside in the midst of crazy school days.

In my school, there is hardly any available time to allow for professional development to cater to the specific needs of the staff and students. The reality is that the Ministry of Education and the Jamaica Teaching Council are always putting on some developmental session for teachers, taking away from individual school's planning as teachers are expected to attend these formal workshops. Many of these sessions are held during school hours so it takes teachers away from their classrooms. Those teachers who get the opportunity to attend the sessions report that they are aware of the content but, they have not been utilizing same in their classroom practice. The formal sessions add to the knowledge base but very little guidance is given on implementing this to individual lessons. Therefore, I recognize a major challenge in my institution's context. There was no space for reflection in these workshops by having teachers participate in activities, as learners, and ensuring that there is a structured presentation about adapting the pedagogy being shared for their classrooms. Consequently, principals need to create a platform for teachers' reflection-based questions on these professional development sessions. Alruqi and Alharbi (2022) recommended that a PD platform be implemented as these would allow teachers to collaborate with peers in their subject and grade level, as well as with administrators, to provide ongoing support and discuss lesson plans and activities. It is hoped that, by gaining further knowledge of the importance of professional development and the impact of cognitive coaching practices on effective supervisory tools for education reform, educators will see that professional learning experiences influence the following:

(a) **Promote Freedom of Self-Expression.** McLymont (2015) noted that professional learning ought to take place within a team, network, or community of professionals. She stated that teachers experience growth when they begin to examine and question their teaching practices as well as those of others.

(b) **Promote reflection during the coaching approach.** Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) stated that reflective practice brings about principles of practicality, collegiality, and reflection as basic premises for professional learning (as cited in McLymont, 2015). These authors also believed that reflection, within the area of research and professional development constitutes the very heart of professional knowledge and action (McLymont, 2015).

There being so many scheduled activities in the school year, to attempt to complete the curriculum, along with the many other MOEY requirements of schools, it is often challenging for administrators to have their teachers leaving the schools to attend professional development sessions. Consequently, teachers have had to make tough decisions regarding attending these sessions and even tougher decisions to internalize and implement strategies obtained during these sessions. It is against this background, the administrative team at my school made the decision to use cognitive coaching as a professional development tool to encourage teachers to become more reflective in their practice. However, to successfully implement cognitive coaching participants must develop trust among themselves.

According to McLymont (2015), trust is a prerequisite for successful cognitive coaching relationships. Cognitive coaching is a technique used to build trust and establish a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment for teaching and learning (McLymont, 2015). I have been focusing on the creation of a trusting environment and view the keys to corporate success as the growth and empowerment of the individuals involved. It is a people-based art that presumes the relationship that teaching is a professional actor and that coaches support teachers in becoming more resourceful, informed, and skilful professionals. Cognitive coaching is about building trust first then thinking afterward. In the development of relationships, trust must be established (Costa & Garmston, 1994, as cited in McLymont, 2015, p. 46).

Furthermore, Smith (1998, as cited in McLymont, 2015) posits that, in building trust in any group, openness is needed to develop a supportive climate. Johnson (1997, as cited in McLymont, 2015) also agreed that openness needs to exist for the sharing of information, thoughts, and reactions about issues being discussed and for the offering of resources with others to assist them in achieving their goals. Trust is also necessary for successful collaboration among and between teachers. When trust exists in a relationship, anxiety about the collaborating process is non-existent or minimal. Trust is essential for the development of relationships especially “in cognitive coaching where teachers are encouraged to inquire, speculate, construct meaning, self-evaluate and self-prescribe” (Costa & Garmston, 2002 as cited in McLymont, 2015, p. 47). Costa and Garmston (2002) posits that cognitive coaching is “the non-judgmental mediation of thinking which takes place during interactions between coach and coachee through the skilful application and use of specific tools and maps while incorporating the values and beliefs integral to mediation” (as cited in McLymont, 2015, p. 42).

Klein’s (2018) argues that coaches need to change their mindset. He identified six mindset changes: moving participants to increase curiosity in the process, changing from following procedures to gaining tacit knowledge to get buy-in and belief, transitioning from getting through the material to encouraging curiosity about the ideas/concepts, from thorough explanation to focal explanation, diverting from explaining to discovery, and moving from evaluating to training and practice. These are constructive criticisms that would further enhance the ideas shared by McLymont (2015). The clinical supervisor should have hindsight, see invisible potential, subtle cues, and anticipate and work around issues as they arise. During professional development coaching exercises, hypothesis testing and the tendency towards problem-solving would translate well as part of professional practices in using cognitive coaching intervention strategies for failing schools’ principals/instructional leaders’ development.

There are several cognitive coaching tools for building trust. Costa and Garmston (2002) postulated that paralanguage, response behaviours, structuring, and mediational questioning are



essential in the building and maintenance of trust (as cited in McLymont, 2015). They defined paralanguage as the verbal and non-verbal behaviours such as gestures made by the body or body parts and voice qualities accompanying the words we speak (as cited in McLymont, 2015). When individuals are confronted with verbal and non-verbal messages, they inevitably choose the meaning behind the non-verbal behaviours. During social interaction, two-thirds of the meaning is derived from the non-verbal cues exhibited. Paralanguage includes posture, and use of space, intonation, rhythms, pacing, and volume of voice. These are all important aspects of the information conveyed during communication.

Bandura (1977), Costa and Garmston (1994), Donne (1624), and Costa and Garmston (2002) in their discussion about self-efficacy, flexibility, interdependence, consciousness, and craftsmanship, respectively conclude that cognitive coaching is a strategy for reflective teaching (as cited in McLymont, 2015). It allows teachers to look back and compare, analyze, and evaluate the decisions that were made during the planning and teaching phases. Cognitive coaching tools allow teachers to take from what was learned, engage in critical self-reflection, then project those learning to future lessons. Cognitive coaching promotes teacher reflection and enhances teachers' intellectual growth (McLymont, 2015).

Garmston et al. (1993) noted that cognitive coaching can help teachers expand their repertoire of teaching styles and explore untapped resources within themselves. Cognitive coaching does not require a teacher to follow a "formula," nor does it present a preconceived template of "correct" instruction. Instead, it supports teachers' existing strengths while expanding previously unexplored capacities. The cognitive coach would ask questions to reveal what areas of the cognitive map may not be complete or consciously developed because when teachers vocalize their thoughts, issues become clearer. The cognitive coach is often viewed as mentor, model or trainer. A model is a tangible symbol of an idea or ideal (a product) and one of the tasks of a mentor is to be a positive role model. In teaching, 'training' is often referred to as 'peer training', in which a teacher assists another in acquiring and developing teaching skills and techniques in a formal way, such as peer-conference, lesson-observation, and post-conference. Since a mentor helps in the development of others, the mentoring process also includes modelling because he also absorbs the messages and mentoring techniques taught by his/her mentor (s) and performs them in the right way.

As an administrator, to address the issue, I used cognitive coaching tools to build trust and foster collaboration. These tools included information pre-conferencing, observation, and post-conferencing sessions in addition to implementing strategies such as; mentoring, modelling, boosting teacher professionalism, allowing time to test new ideas, and providing opportunities for educators and staff to become computer literate. According to McLymont (2000), the involvement of the administration was crucial to the success of the professional learning process. I, therefore, saw it as important for me to be instrumental in the improvement of teachers' outlook on professional development. I first reflected on the impact of previous professional development sessions that were carried out in the school and examined what reforms I would like to see taking place in the institution. Having done that, I then met with my senior staff and encouraged them to share their views of professional development practices at the school and what changes, if any, they would like to see. It was not surprising that the staff and I were of a similar mindset.

I, therefore, decided to act as a cognitive coach utilizing diagnostic tools of cognitive coaching such as self-efficacy, flexibility, interdependence, consciousness, and craftsmanship. McLymont (2015) noted that diagnostic tools of cognitive coaching are constructs that a coach can use to assess and plan interventions for the cognitive development of individuals and groups. Costa and Garmston (2002, as cited in McLymont, 2015) posited that individuals with a high sense of efficacy set challenging goals, maintain strong commitments, persevere longer, and heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure or setbacks. The author also noted that individuals who are flexible and experiment with new ways of doing things grow as they identify and strive to develop their new abilities. So, having first met with the senior staff and garnered their feedback on our use of professional development in our school, I then met with the general staff and planned our professional development sessions. Through observations of staff, during

the different professional development sessions, I recognized the teachers would only change their practices through stages. Reed (2006) identified stages through which teachers' practices would change: implementation stage, management of task and impact of implementation. All these diagnostic tools will improve professional development and enact educational reform in an institution.

### Intervention Results

From the application of principles applied, the diagnostic coaching tools enabled the teachers to become more reflective and collaborative. The teachers have now become more reflective of what is shared with them during developmental sessions. They are now "valuing, anticipating, acquiring, internalizing and reacting to" information gathered from professional development sessions (McLymont, 2015, p. 35). They are also wondering if what they are being exposed to would work and how they would translate their own experiences into the classroom. This is not surprising as McLymont (2015) observed that reflective coaching impelled teachers to listen as they acknowledged, empathized, synthesized, summarized, and restated what they understood from the message conveyed. The teachers have also begun valuing collaboration among themselves and with their students. They have recognized the importance of working together, as more is achieved when this is done. As a result of the implementation of the diagnostic coaching tools, teachers who were 'at heads' with each other, now work together with the aim of improving student attainment and for the overall benefit of the institution. Table 1 below reflects the ideas of coaching practices.

**Table 1**

#### *Coaching Practices, Descriptions and Reflections*

Coaching Practices	Descriptions	Reflections
Planning Conference	Setting goals and objectives. Getting clarity of goals. Specifying how the success of the plan will be evaluated. Reviewing lesson strategies. Identifying learning and teaching gaps.	Both coach and coachee jointly identified what specific focus for improvement should be in the classroom in order to achieve the improvements being sought after. This process allowed for clarity of goals and objectives sets so as to allow for a clear direction of what to prepare for.
Observation	Collecting data as evidence during observation of lessons in the classroom environment.	Direct feedback was shared with the coachee based on the methodologies used to pass on information.
Modelling	The Coach demonstrates to the Coachee how to use a specific strategy.	The coach showed the coachee how to use the strategy. The coachee was receptive to strategies being suggested and demonstrated.
Post Conference	Presenting data gathered. Processing and summarizing data. The coachee reflects on the experience. Plan for future lessons.	Coach shared strengths identified through teacher delivery and discussed what could have been done to improve delivery. The coachee decided to incorporate the suggestions for future lessons.

I believe that utilization of cognitive coaching concepts in the workplace is of great importance. It will allow workers the opportunity to set goals and work towards achieving them. . Coaching will also enable staff members to receive one-on-one feedback which will facilitate their personal growth and development as well as enable them to be better engaged at work. Becoming more engaged opens the gates for greater unity, the attainment of collective goals and improved performance. Consequently, it is recommended that educational institutions become more deliberate in using cognitive coaching practices, both for professional development and supervisory management. One way of doing this is by teachers sharing best practices either by

undertaking joint lesson planning or by analyzing recorded lesson using the coach/coachee or mentorship approach. Another way that institutions can apply these principles is through coaching conversations which include discussions of areas for improvement. Though the contents of this conversation will remain confidential, the record of the coaching discussion will be given to a senior teacher or leader.

Martin et al. (2017), in citing Allington (2009) and Shannon et al. (2009), stated that school reform is not new to our educational system. Historically, reform movements (local, state, and federal) have, in some way, impacted schools for different reasons (e.g., religion, materials, and textbooks, how one learns, and what is learned). Martin et al. (2017) in citing Rose (2010) noted both fields of research, educational policy, and professional development, focus on the importance of quality instruction in the schools. Consequently, Khan et al. (2019) noted that professional development is essential in supporting teachers as change agents to foster international educational reform. This is supported by Dillon and Hathorn (2018, as cited by Khan et al., 2019) who observed that professional development in education is increasingly becoming a focus for many countries that are moving towards educational reform. A common characteristic of professional development frequently provides a one-size-fits-all approach and limited opportunities to reflect and plan for the next steps and is considered to be meaningful and effective when teachers become active in their professional learning. Imants and Van der Wal (2020) noted that:

The model of teacher agency in professional development and school reform is built on five characteristics; it (1) presents the *teacher as an actor*, (2) depicts *dynamic* relationships, (3) treats professional development and school reform as inherently *contextualized*, including multiple levels, (4) includes the professional development and school reform content as *variable* and (5) considers outcomes as part of a *continuing cycle*. (p. 1)

According to Obara (2010), coaching gives hope to school districts that have struggled with traditional professional development programs. This is supported by Aguilar (2013) who noted that coaching is an essential component of an effective professional development program. Aguilar (2013) stated that coaching allows teachers to apply their learning more deeply, frequently, and consistently than teachers working alone. Coaching supports teachers to improve their capacity to reflect and apply their learning to their work with students and also in their work with each other.

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## Knowledge Creation for Organizational Growth: An Explanatory Qualitative Multiple Case Study

**Gwyneth Jackson, PhD**

**Abstract** - *The fundamental philosophy of knowledge is that it is a concept experienced by everyone and acquired through socialization. A debatable theory is that when an individual is removed from one environment and placed in another, it can cause a change in thoughts and behaviour which can impact the individual's knowledge base. In this competitive environment, there is a call for management to facilitate the creation of knowledge through employees to foster organizational growth. The purpose of this qualitative explanatory, multiple case study was to explore different views knowledge and how it is acquired. The study will raise awareness of the importance of knowledge creation for modern organizations to grow within a competitive environment. The findings of the research will be useful in contributing to management theories of knowledge creation, within organizations and assist leaders in the formulation of strategies through the acquisition and use of information from creating knowledge for competitive advantage.*

**Key Words:** Knowledge base, knowledge creation, knowledge scope, philosophy of knowledge

As individuals develop, their ability to know grows; thus, expanding their knowledge base. For this paper, knowledge base is considered the substance or content of knowledge (Bhunjje, 2013). Santosus and Sermacz (2008, as cited in Council of Multiple Listing Services, 2018) posited that an effective knowledge base of individuals should help businesses to foster innovation by encouraging the free flow of ideas. With growth, individuals move through different chapters of their life in their knowledge system which impacts the growth of their knowledge. Additionally, as employees move from one department to another or change organizations, their knowledge base changes. Milligan and Littlejohn (2017) support the view of the great contribution of knowledge workers to organizations' ability to survive in a knowledge-based economy. Consequently, Nonaka and Nishiguchi (2001) observed that knowledge is created through interactions among different individuals, types and context of knowledge. The same authors noted that there are four modes of knowledge conversion "socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization" (p.14).

Nonaka (1994) posited that ideas are formed in the minds of individuals; however, interaction among individuals plays an important part in developing these ideas. The author opined that communities of interaction contribute to the amplification and development of new knowledge. These communities to which Nonaka (1994) alluded can be seen as organizations as well as departments or units within an organization. Polanyi (1966) classified human knowledge into two categories – "explicit" and "tacit" knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language whereas, tacit knowledge has a personal quality which makes it hard to formalize and communicate (Polanyi, 1966).

Organizations existing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century thrive within an environment which is highly competitive and constantly changing. According to Nonaka (1994), any organization that exists in a changing environment ought not only to process information efficiently, but also create information and knowledge. This facilitates growth and, by extension, increased profits for the organization. However, according to the same author, it can be argued that the organization's interaction with its environment, together with how it creates and distributes information and knowledge, are more important when it comes to building an active and dynamic understanding of the organization (Nonaka, 1994).

**Statement of the Problem**

We live in an increasingly globalized world, where organizations are subject to immense economic, political, and technological changes as competition increases. Policymakers, leaders within organizations, and community leaders, have a responsibility to ensure that employees, within their organizations, engage in continuous professional learning and apply that learning to increase organizational performance. Accordingly, development of human resources has gained significant attention within contemporary organizational context. In fact, the global economy has shifted to a knowledge-based economy resulting in organizations relying on knowledge workers to create new knowledge for competitive advantage (Gioacasi, 2015). Furthermore, Milligan and Littlejohn (2017) posited that, with this shift to a knowledge-based economy, knowledge workers are agents of change. For years, employees have bought into this concept and choose to improve their knowledge by utilizing internal professional development programmes or pursuing post graduate programmes; including masters or doctoral degrees. For example, doctors, lawyers, educators, engineers, and people in a variety of professions participate in professional development to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job. Unfortunately, when these employees return to the organization, this newly acquired knowledge is often underutilized or not used to create new knowledge for the organization to remain competitive within its industry. Hence, Asghar and Siddi (2008) suggested that organizations exercising knowledge creation and management practices perform better than organizations that fail to do so.

While numerous studies have explored knowledge creation, (Nonaka, 1994), the focus of this qualitative explanatory multi case study is to explore knowledge creation for a competitive advantage within Jamaican organizations. The findings of the study will address gaps in the literature by exploring the need for knowledge creation within Jamaican organizations and how this can be translated into strategies for a competitive advantage.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory multiple case study is to get a complete understanding of employees' views on knowledge creation within their organization and how this process helps leaders create a competitive advantage. The study involved ascertaining how knowledge creation can increase the success of an organization by the employees' assessments of the contributions of each knowledge creation process. Knowledge creation and knowledge management has countless benefits that leaders can explore to create a strategic advantage for the organization (Skyrmes, 2003). Understanding the role of knowledge creation in transforming the strategic direction of an organization may inform leaders about the many possibilities of knowledge creation. Additionally, the results may give hope to employees pursuing higher education studies, that when they return to their organizations, after acquiring new credentials, they will make a greater contribution as a knowledge worker in the knowledge creation process. Consequently, leaders can create new knowledge by engaging the experiences of other individuals in the process (Heinrichs & Lim, 2005).

**Research Question**

The framing of a central research question and open ended survey questions for this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which knowledge creation can lead to creating a sustainable competitive advantage. The study sought pertinent answers to the central research question: How does knowledge creation, within an organization, help leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage? The open ended survey questions were:

1. What does the term "Knowledge Creation" within organizations mean to you?
2. What are sources of knowledge within your organization?
3. What is your organization's process to create new knowledge?
4. How do you, as an employee, contribute to your organization's ability to generate new knowledge?
5. What are the organization's strategies to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge?

6. How do you think that your organization's strategies to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge give them a competitive edge in the industry?

**Literature Review**

Rouhani et al. (2017) posit that knowledge creation is the process of continuously generating new knowledge; it is an important element of the organizational knowledge management system. Rouhani et al. (2017) further presented that knowledge creation is a vital component of the organizational knowledge management lifecycle because the external environment is constantly changing and employees, in learning organizations, can quickly adapt to these changes and create new knowledge suitable for the organization's sustainable competitive advantage. Nonaka et al. (2001) added that knowledge creation comprises three elements:

- The SECI process involves conversion of knowledge between tacit and explicit, thereby creating new knowledge;
- The *Ba* process considers the shared context of knowledge creation; and
- Knowledge assets include the inputs, outputs, and the moderator of the knowledge-creating process.

According to Nonaka and Voelpel (2006), fluctuation can promote knowledge creation in situations where a crisis produces creative chaos. Nonaka and Voelpel (2006) added that processes such as different business activity, management responsibilities, and redundancy of information, are commonly found within organizations and can be an unlimited source of knowledge which can be a powerful source of knowledge creation. There is a strong link between organizational performance and knowledge creation, (Zack et al., 2009). Knowledge creation is organic and the great number of knowledge workers, in organizations, who create new knowledge should always be active within the organization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Empirical studies suggest that improvement in performance outcomes exists with the application of knowledge creation within organizations. For example, Cua et al. (2001) underscored certain knowledge-creating practices that produced improvements in performance within manufacturing organizations. Contemporary organizations compete to utilize innovative business practices which will give them the competitive edge they need to function within the corporate industry. Organizations depend on knowledge to survive in the complex and continuously changing knowledge-based economy (Lin et al., 2015).

Leovaridis and Popescu (2015) observed that a knowledge-based economy has various dimensions, such as its complexity, uncertainty, and interconnectedness. Choi (2015) posited that the volatility of a knowledge-based economy is caused by disruptive innovation, changing consumer preferences, competitors, and government regulations that influence learning within organizations. Additionally, organizations knowledge management systems support employees' continuous learning goals. This is done by providing employees with the prompt and suitable knowledge and facilitating the conversion of their tacit knowledge into explicit organizational knowledge. Lin et al. (2015), support the view that a major role of leaders is to develop knowledge management processes to increase knowledge creation, innovation, resulting in their organization's efficiency. Through knowledge creation, employees can continuously build, protect, and leverage distinctive organizational knowledge to boost an organization's efforts to survive in the complex and dynamic environment (Ichijo & Nonaka, 2006).

**Knowledge Creation Process**

Teece (2005) observed that knowledge has become a critical source of value generation and sustainability of organizations for a competitive advantage. Additionally, Autio et al. (2000) theorized that organizations that create and control knowledge achieve greater success than others who are more dependent on tangible resources for a competitive advantage. As such, leaders must find ways to effectively create and manage knowledge. Understanding the knowledge creation process is critical for organizations to use both explicit and tacit knowledge which exist within the organization. The process of knowledge creation, within an organization, may be through learning, sharing of experience, research, employee development, and participating in activities which translates into learning experiences. This may originate from internal or external sources to the organization (Autio et al., 2000).

According to Andreeva and Kianto (2011) knowledge creation is the ability to develop new ideas or solutions. As such Schulz (2001) identified three types of knowledge creation processes:

1. encoding existing knowledge in forms suitable for spreading within the organization
2. combining historical and existing knowledge
3. production of new knowledge to contribute to a new paradigm for the organization

Consequently, Intezari et al. (2017) opined that there are two major dimensions which form the concept of knowledge-creation: mind interaction to create knowledge and the culture.

The creation of organizational knowledge is increasingly becoming a priority for leaders and managers to create a competitive advantage for organizations. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) suggested that knowledge creation is achieved by the interface of implicit and explicit knowledge; therefore, knowledge conversion is integral to generating new knowledge. The conversion process includes four elements: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. Socialization involves the conversion of implicit knowledge to explicit knowledge, by sharing knowledge and experiences with colleagues. Externalization is sharing knowledge through theoretical assumptions. *Combination* is the process of storage, combination, and classification to make the explicit knowledge in an organized manner. *Internalization* role in the process for explicit knowledge to become implicit knowledge is, mainly through inspections and applications. The literature review highlights the importance of knowledge creation and related issues but there is a shortage of studies on knowledge creation in Jamaican organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997).

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how knowledge creation, within an organization, helps leaders in creating a sustainable competitive advantage. According to Yin (2017) researchers use the qualitative method to explore unknown phenomena by asking open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences freely. A qualitative explanatory multi-case study design was used for this study because this type of design helped to identify gaps in the theories that may be integrated into a new model for Jamaican organizations to adopt in order to survive in a multifaceted and competitive economy. To address the research questions, the qualitative method was useful to explore how knowledge creation within an organization helps leaders engender a sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, a qualitative explanatory multi-case study was the most appropriate design for this study because it allowed for a deep understanding of how knowledge workers can collaborate in order to create knowledge for a competitive advantage.

### **Participants**

The target population for this research is a group of employees actively involved in assisting their organization to maintain its core competencies. Sampling is the process of using a representation of a population to understand the characteristics of the total population (Alase, 2017). As such thirteen (13) participants from eleven (11) different organizations were selected. The selection process depended on factors such as an interviewee's accessibility, gender, number of years employed to the organization, participant's position within the organization, and their alignment to the goals of the research.

The qualitative researcher used two types of qualitative sampling: purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling (Alase, 2017). The initial invitation was sent through an email to a group of eight (8) students enrolled in a bachelor's programme and twelve (12) masters' students who are employed to different organizations and are studying part time; thus, a total of twenty (20) survey instruments were issued. The criteria for participating were discussed with the participants followed by emailing the survey questions. Due to COVID 19 social distancing policies, participants were asked to respond to the survey questions and return the questionnaire by email. The participants were asked not to discuss their involvement in the study with anyone and the instruments were returned to the researcher via email. The instruments were analyzed in the privacy of the researcher's home and kept in a locked desk drawer. Confidentiality issues were discussed with the participants to garner their trust in the confidentiality of the process.



**Data Collection**

Six open ended questions were used to collect data on how knowledge creation within an organization helps leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. The survey questions were emailed to participants. Data collection occurred over two weeks through electronic distribution and collection of the survey instrument. Participants were encouraged to respond openly and truthfully to the six survey questions. Data was collected directly using the email system which assisted in the high response rate from the sample.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2017) shared three stages of data analysis: organizing, transcription, and analysis. The data from the survey instrument was analyzed manually to interpret the information from the survey questions. The researcher read through the data several times to achieve familiarity of what existed; this constituted the first phase of the data analysis stage. The second phase of the data analysis involved the development of codes. The next phase began when all the data was coded and the themes developed, hence the relevant coded data were developed into themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Moore et al. (2017) shared six steps of coding which was used in the coding process of this research:

- Initial coding
- Revising the initial coding
- Creating a list of categories
- Adjusting categories based new data
- Redefining and adding subcategories
- Developing central themes and subthemes

The coding process involved labelling words, feelings, language, and relevant phrases that described the participants' experiences and thoughts (Moore et al., 2017).

**Ethical Considerations**

Carson (2013) posited that ethics focus on moral conduct or behaviour, judgment, and problems. Additionally, Wiles (2013) indicated that researchers need to acquire an ethical framework when conducting research. This ethical framework is necessary to assist in avoiding ethical dilemmas by helping to ensure moral behaviour in the research process. According to the Belmont Report (1979, as cited in the Office for Human Research Protections, 2018) there are three basic principles researchers are required to consider regarding the participants of the research study. These principles are respect for people, beneficence and justice. Respect for people consists of acknowledging autonomy, while beneficence consists of not harming the participants in the study and maximizing conceivable benefits and minimizing plausible harm. Justice, on the other hand, refers to who receives the benefits and endures the burdens of the study, such as equal share to each person conferring to individual need, individual effort, bestowing to societal contribution, and merit (Office for Human Research Protections, 2018). Additionally, researchers need to acquire an ethical framework when conducting research (Wiles, 2013). This ethical framework is necessary to assist in avoiding ethical dilemmas and maintain moral behaviour throughout the conduct of the research.

The abstract of this study was submitted to the Excelsior Community College Internal Review Board (IRB) before the start of the project. The IRB's primary function is the wellbeing and privacy of research participants, and scrutinizes the research processes of participant selection, and data acquisition, analysis, storage, and security. The IRB reviewed and approved the proposed approach of this study prior to the start of the data collection and analysis process.

**Limitations**

The goal of this qualitative multiple case study was to investigate how knowledge creation, within an organization, helps leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. The research examines only one geographical location within a limited timeframe. The study's scope only included employees from eleven (11) companies in Jamaica. Additionally, only one member from each organization participated. The participants were employed to the organization for five (5) years and beyond. It is essential to indicate limitations in a study because this helps to understand

factors which may have contributed to restrictions of generalizations of the findings (Neuman, 2005).

Another issue which contributes to the limitations of the study are the researcher's time frame to finish the research, the participants' time, question formats, number of variables, and the format of the survey instrument. Additionally, twenty (20) survey questionnaires were issued but only thirteen (13) were returned-this impacted the volume of data that could be used for comparative purposes. Other limitations or concerns are the literature which did not address the Jamaican economy and the absence of face-to-face interviews with the participants. As to the COVID-19 restriction prevented this. However, the interview questions were transformed into survey questions to attempt to get the same level of information from the participants as would an interview. The questions were structured to get the maximum information from the participants.

### **Analysis and Results**

Data analysis process aims to find patterns and themes from participants' data in the study (Creswell, 2005). The participants provided in-depth information on the knowledge creation process, within their organization for growth, which sustains their organization's competitive advantage in the rapidly changing knowledge-based economy. The participants were located in Kingston, Jamaica and accessed through MBA, Post Graduate Diploma and Bachelor's degree programmes at a Jamaican College. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the survey, to collect data from these participants, was done electronically. See Table 1 below for participants gender, tenure and job titles representative of the participants in the study.

**Table 1**

*Description of Participants and Job Titles*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Job Titles</b>
P1	Male	26	Airport Operations Coordinator
P2	Male	12	Supply Chain Coordinator
P3	Male	26	Senior Statistical Officer
P4	Male	12	Investigative Supervisor
P5	Male	5	Manager
P6	Male	5	Security Investigator
P7	Male	27	Supervisor
P8	Female	5	Procurement Specialist
P9	Female	16	Internal Auditor
P10	Female	10	Accountant
P11	Female	23	Executive Secretary
P12	Female	32	User Support Technician
P13	Female	5	Immigration Assistant

Twenty questionnaires were issued and only thirteen (13) participants returned their responses, thirteen (13) persons participated from eleven (11) organizations. Participants were able to respond to the electronic survey questions in their own time. The data was analyzed manually to interpret the information from the survey questions. This stage required reading the responses to the survey questions several times, giving an idea of what was in the data. The second phase of the analysis involved the development of codes from the data which required constant revisits to the data. In the next phase all the data was coded, and the themes developed (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2017) presented, for qualitative researchers, a six-step thematic analysis model which was used to analyze the collected data.

A theme is a pattern that helps a researcher to capture significant information about the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Table 2 shows a summary of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis process.

**Table 2**

*Braun and Clarke's Processes of Theoretical Thematic Analysis*

Stages	Description of Processes
Step 1	Familiarize oneself with data collected
Step 2	Generate initial codes
Step 3	Search for themes
Step 4	Review themes and sub-themes
Step 5	Define and name final themes
Step 6	Create a report

**Familiarize oneself with data collected.** The thematic data analysis started with numbering the survey questionnaires, followed by analyzing each survey questionnaire, then the information transcribed in a bounded diary. The data collected was rich and all transcript information was analyzed and compared with the information transcribed from the previous survey questionnaire. This process provided the opportunity for the researcher to become familiarized with the data, check for transcription accuracy, and to develop in-depth understanding of the rich data. The second transcript was analyzed and compared to the previously analyzed transcript. To maintain confidentiality of participants and their data, each participant's survey response was given an alias starting with the letter "P1" (for participant) and a number representing the order in which the survey was returned.

**Generating initial codes.** The general research question was the guide in the analysis of the data. The data was manually and systematically organized and hand coded. The initial list of codes (P1) helped to accurately track participants' data while keeping the coded data hidden from unauthorized users. The manual coding process helped with data management, analysis, and interpretation processes. Each generated code had explicit boundaries to prevent redundancy.

**Searching for and reviewing themes.** The themes were manually organized to show common patterns of thought and views of the participants. This process involved organizing the different codes beside the potential themes and assembling all the relevant coded data passages within the identified themes. The initial themes were reviewed, and a list of themes generated. Each theme was reviewed, along with its description, to ensure it was relevant to the individual survey questions and supported the central research question.

**Define and name final themes.** The purpose of this qualitative explanatory multiple case study was to get a complete understanding of employees' views on knowledge creation within their organization and how the creation of knowledge helps leaders generate competitive advantage. The study's specific sample consisted of thirteen (13) participants selected from eleven (11) organizations within the Jamaican economy. This stage included a final refinement of each theme, description, and its relevance to the research questions was conducted to ensure an in-depth understanding of the depth of each theme.

### **Final Report**

The final report covers the three primary themes discovered from the analysis of the data. **Theme 1: The use of secondary data for knowledge creation.** The theme was linked to survey question 2; participants frequently noted the source of their organization's knowledge is the utilization of training and the use of secondary data. Additionally, participants mentioned how their organization operates in a competitive environment in which competing firms are seeking to establish and gain a competitive edge. P3 mentioned the use of qualified employees as a source of knowledge creation, while P10 argued that the organization uses published statistical data, along with information provided by external stakeholders. In the new knowledge-based economy knowledge creation is critical for strategic survival. A combination of the use of research, information from the internet, the use of public policies, world trends, and the capturing and sharing of undocumented knowledge and experiences from external sources.

**Theme 2: Training, workshops, and seminars to create knowledge.** This theme was linked to question 3, in response to the organization's process to create new knowledge. P2 specified that the organization uses training and development, employee rotation, feedback and suggestions to create knowledge. Participants commonly noted the use of internal and external training for knowledge creation. P1 to P8 listed training as frequently used. P10 indicated that the organization invested in high-technology equipment for knowledge creation. Whereas P12 indicated that there is a continuous collaboration using different social media platforms.

**Theme 3: Sharing of information, knowledge, and skills.** This theme was linked to question 5. Participants specified strategies the organization uses to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge, including mentorship programmes and workplace collaboration. P2 suggested the following, setting up of focus groups, reports from employees, research and the use of industry best practices. P6 suggested policy formulation, conducting seminars, training, and sharing ideas. P3 revealed he is not involved in the process, additionally, P11 signified the use of technology, training, and the use of professional and social networks. Finally, P4 mentioned the use of mentorship programmes, cultural ambassadorship and being given additional responsibilities.

### Summary and Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory multi-case study was to explore how knowledge creation within an organization helps leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. Data was collected to address the following central research questions: How does knowledge creation within an organization help leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage? The data revealed insights into knowledge creation within organizations for a sustainable competitive advantage. The findings show that leaders are utilizing secondary information for knowledge creation. The results also confirmed prior research which suggested that knowledge creation is a significant process for creating a competitive advantage. The central research question, along with six survey questions, was used to explore the knowledge creation strategies executed within eleven (11) Jamaican organizations for a competitive advantage. The first survey question was:

***SQ1: What does the term "knowledge creation" within organizations mean to you?***

In addressing this first survey question the findings revealed that all participants were aware of what the term "knowledge creation" meant. Participants discussed in depth their definition of knowledge creation, and the high level of the knowledge worker's involvement in knowledge creation within the organization. The data also revealed the awareness of the participants that the organization benefited from the knowledge creation process, as discussed by Nonaka, (1994).

***SQ2: What are your organization's sources of knowledge?***

The second survey question explored the view of employees on their awareness of the organization's source of knowledge. The findings show that the popular source of knowledge for their organizations are secondary data, electronic and research. Participants discussed the use of training workshops as a knowledge source. The literature emphasized the advantage of knowledge creation within organizations (Nonaka, 1994).

***SQ3: What is your organization's process to create new knowledge?***

Participants discussed the use of the different processes to create new knowledge. The findings indicate leaders are becoming creative in integrating teamwork, training, employee job rotation, meetings, training workshops, and collaboration as part of the process of creating new knowledge. This supports Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) model of converting employees' tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through socialization.

***SQ4: How do you as an employee contribute to your organization's ability to generate new knowledge?***

Participants discussed their level of participation in the organization's ability to generate new knowledge. Additionally, participants shared how employees contributed to the organizations ability to generate new knowledge. P3 and P13 discussed that they are not involved in this process. The findings show the sharing of information as a priority, using higher education training, and the sharing of knowledge and skills falls within the realm of knowledge creation.

**SQ5:** *What are the organization's strategies to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge?*

This fifth survey question gathered information on the strategies the organizations use to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge. Participants deliberated on strategies such as setting up focus groups, using industry best practices, the use of professional networks, conducting seminars, and mentorship programmes. P3 and P5 indicated that they are not involved in the process. The literature explored knowledge creation through the SECI model of creating knowledge within organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

**SQ6:** *Do you think that your organization's strategies to transfer employees' tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge has given them a competitive edge in the industry?*

The objective of the final survey question was to ascertain the participants' views on whether the data gathered from the survey questions provided answers to the central research question. Based on the information provided by each participant, it was seen that each organization participates in some aspect of knowledge creation. Nonaka et al. (2001) showed a three-element knowledge creation process. To thrive in this competitive environment, leaders need to create and foster a culture of continuous knowledge creation. The findings of this study illustrate how a balance of continuous knowledge creation, using knowledge workers and complimenting this with secondary data, may contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization. In response to this question, four participants responded "yes", five responded "no" and "four" indicated that they are "not sure." The study is significant because it filled a gap in the literature regarding how Jamaican organizations can utilize the knowledge creation process to develop new ideas or solutions (Andreeva & Kianto, 2011). A resounding discovery from the findings was that of the 13 participants from 11 organizations only four participants shared that they felt the knowledge creation activities have given them a competitive edge in the industry.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory multi-case study was to investigate how knowledge creation within an organization helps leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. The results illustrated employees' views on knowledge creation within their organization and how the creation of knowledge helps leaders create competitive advantage to operate within the modern business environment. The qualitative results were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model to analyze clusters of themes that could help to analyze employees' views of the operations of knowledge creation within their organizations. The results of the survey show that all participants had an awareness of what knowledge creation was, though two participants indicated that, despite their level of involvement in leadership activities based on their role within the organization they were not involved in the strategic process to transfer employees' tacit knowledge to organizational knowledge. The literature review highlighted the importance of knowledge creation to increase an organization's competitive edge. Additionally, findings highlighted that all participants knew what it means to create knowledge for the organization to sustain their organization's competitive advantage. To survive in a rapidly changing environment, business leaders, managers, and knowledge workers are required to focus on knowledge creation within their organization. Participants noted the role of knowledge creation and the sources of knowledge creation that their organizations use. Participants also noted the sources were mainly secondary sources.

The significance of this study was to explore how knowledge creation within an organization help leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. Participants' views vary on the main survey question which would provide answers to the central research question on how knowledge creation within an organization help leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage.

## **Recommendations**

The primary goal of this study was to investigate how knowledge creation within an organization helps leaders create a sustainable competitive advantage. The sample size in this study was relatively small compared to the nation-wide knowledge workforce. Future research that includes a larger sample is recommended. The study was mostly limited to a specific geographic

area in Jamaica. Additional studies in different areas of the country with a larger sample size may add to the body of knowledge. Rather than focusing on the magnitude of secondary data, as a source of knowledge creation, leaders need to develop a relationship with their knowledge workers to involve them in the knowledge creation process, which will enable them to contribute to their organization's core competences by converting their tacit knowledge into organizational knowledge.

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## Characteristics and Function of Higher Education: Imperatives for Excelsior Community College

**Tamara A. Scott McFarlane**

**Abstract** - *The last decade has seen an explosion in the number of institutions, private, government and overseas, offering higher education courses in Jamaica. This situation has forced leaders of institutions of higher learning, particularly community colleges that have suffered from a chronic status problem, to rethink their professional practice as well as find innovative ways to maintain currency, accountability and efficiency. Therefore, there must be an assessment of the nature and functions of higher education to ensure that it meets population expectations. Despite the seeming invisibility of community colleges, they have been heralded as the greatest educational innovation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This paper presents some criteria that can serve as a guide in determining the basis on which the success of an institution of higher learning can be assessed -it is not an exhaustive list; neither is it representative of a formulaic approach to exploring the features of higher education. These criteria will be examined in light of what obtains at Excelsior Community College to determine the extent to which it meets the characteristics and expectations of higher education.*

Key words: *Excelsior Community College, higher education institutions, nature and function of HEIs*

***“Higher education is critically important to the future of this country. It can unlock the talents of our people, provide the research and scholarship our economy and society need, and play a critical role in maintaining a competitive and innovative economy” (Rt Hon John Denham MP, Secretary of State, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, p 2)***

These words, as expressed by the Secretary of State, in the British Labour Party, aptly summarizes the function of higher education in the United Kingdom and, by extension the world, as well as ultimately, what the population expects of it. The acquisition of tertiary education is inexplicably linked to the development of the economy. In fact, Miller (2018, as cited in Trines, 2019), equates the application and advancement of knowledge with human, social and economic progress (Hayek, 1945; Machlup, 1962; OECD Report, 1998; The World Bank, 2000). This situation could easily be applied to the Jamaican landscape; unfortunately, very few persons have access to higher education. Actually, the UNESCO report of 2015 indicates that the gross enrolment ration (GER) in tertiary education in Jamaica is only 27%. Consequently, with fewer persons having access to higher education in Jamaica, Trines (2019) posits that it will perpetuate the country's shortage of educated professionals required to build the knowledge economy.

The World Declaration on Higher Education, adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, defines higher education as: “all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent state authorities” (as cited in JICA, 2004). Therefore, higher education may include any approved institution (universities, colleges, polytechnics and technical specialty schools), offering post secondary studies, short term education and training courses. For the purpose of this paper, higher education, institutions of higher learning, higher education institutes (HEIs) and tertiary institutions will be used synonymously, unless otherwise indicated.

The last decade has seen an explosion in the number of institutions, private, government and overseas, offering higher education courses in Jamaica. As a result, the landscape in higher education is constantly changing. These changes have placed increasing demands on all stakeholders to ensure accountability. Consequently, leaders of institutions of higher learning are forced to rethink their professional practice as well as find innovative ways to maintain currency,



accountability and efficiency. Furthermore, the transformational needs of customers and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom dictates the need for teaching strategies that facilitate understanding, develop inquiring minds and explore complex processes. Therefore, there must be an assessment of the nature and functions of higher education to ensure that it meets population expectations.

There are various parameters on which to assess the function and characteristics of higher education. This paper presents some criteria that can serve as a guide in determining the basis on which the success of an institution of higher learning can be assessed. It is not an exhaustive list; neither is it representative of a formulaic approach to exploring the features of higher education. Finally, there will be an examination of a higher education type, the community colleges in Jamaica – particularly Excelsior Community College- to determine the extent to which it meets the characteristics and expectations of higher education.

### **Characteristics of Higher Education**

de Moura Castro & Levy (2001) noted that the functions of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are inextricably linked to societal expectations. Therefore, one of the primary functions of institutions of higher learning is the provision of academic leadership. Consequently, HEIs are expected to have a ‘highly prepared faculty; sophisticated original research published in rigorously reviewed, internationally recognized outlets; graduate education; and selective undergraduate education’ (de Moura Castro & Levy, 2001, p.1). Consequently, one defining characteristic of higher education is the emphasis placed on research, curricula development and teaching and learning. In fact, Camilleri et al. (2004), in discussing the pillars on which the purpose of higher education stands, observes that it involves ‘creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation’ (p. 5). Globalization, as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century reality, with its ‘international knowledge network’, has forced HEI’s to change the way they operate and the need to produce new knowledge.

Globalization has brought with it an explosion in the number of programmes and research perspectives that have surpassed national boundaries (Altbach et al., 2009). The changes have also included the demographics of students, funding arrangements and technological improvements. Society, therefore, will expect institutions of higher learning to adjust their mission to meet the changing demands and developmental needs of a country. Additionally, society expects institutions of higher learning to prepare students for the job market in terms of advanced, extensive formal education, general education and technological training. The technological training would allow for the development of ties with the industry in matters relating to curriculum and instruction as well as programme evaluation.

Furthermore, there is an increasingly diverse student population which is putting pressure on the higher education system to find innovative approaches to pedagogy as well as provide sufficient academic support (Altbach et al., 2009). Consequently, Xu (2009) posits that institutions of higher learning are tasked with utilizing heuristic and interactive teaching methods with a focus on hands-on practical ability, exchange of ideas through questioning and discussion as well as stimulation of creative thinking. In fact, there is a focus on a “...student-centred service system for students” (p. 2).

Camilleri et al. (2004) have expanded this function of higher education when they note that the purpose of higher education rests on four pillars including that of “preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparing students for active citizenship” (p. 7). Therefore, a second classical function of institutions of higher learner is that of human capital formation. The knowledge driven society, within which institutions of higher learning now operate, demands graduates with the requisite knowledge and skills needed for the labour market. In fact, institutions of higher learning, primarily universities, are viewed as centres of learning and ‘expedient agents of development in nation building (de Moura Castro & Levy, 2001, p.1). Accordingly, Purcell (2005) posits that HEIs are expected to provide opportunities for individuals to develop their full potential. That same author highlights society’s expectation of institutions of higher learning to produce morally sound individuals who are capable of multifarious roles in the society (Govt. of Pakistan, 1999, as cited in Purcell, 2005).

In developing the human capital, higher education systems are best served by their flexible management system. For example, there is the credit system where a student can do credit courses throughout the academic year. This system takes into account the varying levels of learning needs of students and is reflective of the “people-centred philosophy of education” (Xu, 2009, p. 2). Consequently, curricula reform becomes a critical component of the function of higher education as emerging economies require specialists “trained for science and technical professions as well as strong leaders with generalist knowledge who are creative, adaptable, and able to give broad ethical consideration to social advances” (Altbach et al., 2009, p.11).

#### **Governance/Quality Assurance/Accountability**

Institutions of higher learning have varying approaches in carrying out their mandate of teaching, research and public service. The development of the human capital is now demanding value for money systems of quality assurance. In fact, de Moura Castro & Levy (2001, p. 1) in highlighting the critical importance of suitable accountability frameworks, noted that there are “persistent calls for accountability ...[which] will only grow louder as accrediting agencies, taxpayers, students, legislators, and other entities call for institutions of higher education to account for themselves.” Therefore, institutions of higher education must be characterized by quality assurance and accountability frameworks. Stakeholders, in education, are now demanding certification of the institutions and the qualifications they are awarded (Altbach et al., 2009). In fact, the issue of quality assurance becomes salient in light of the number of institutions now offering post-secondary studies. Consumers must become vigilant in distinguishing legitimate institutions from those simply milling diplomas and degrees without the appropriate accountability framework. Furthermore, institutions are now being evaluated against their own self-defined mission as well as those outlined by regulatory agencies (Altbach et al., 2009).

Xu (2009), in his discussion on institutions of higher education in Canada, observed that they have a “high degree of autonomy and academic freedom” (p. 2). As a result, HEI’s have flexibility in determining their admission procedures, expertise, and professional direction, setting up their courses and credit allotment, managing their personnel (including the assignment of faculty) as well as forging partnerships which will enable them to achieve their mission. This can be compared to the system in Dutch provinces. Sigers et al. (2005) highlighted the Dutch government’s 1985 white paper “Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality” which introduced the concept of ‘steering from a distance’ and argued that the national government should fulfil a facilitating role instead of managing the system through detailed regulation. The system of autonomy in higher education is reflected in the Caribbean context as institutions have developed their own mission and vision which articulate their purpose. The mission defines the standard by which their performance will be measured. However, these institutions are not operating in isolation; consequently, they are influenced by tradition, the region within which they are located and the characteristics of their students. In fact, HEI’s are now placing more emphasis on responding to societal requirements, employability characteristics as well as enhancing the role of higher education within the lifelong learning concept (Camilleri et al., 2014).

#### **The Excelsior Community College**

Academia is highly stratified; therefore, higher education institutions have often been characterized by those that form the centres and the outliers or those on the peripheries. The strength of an institution of higher learning is premised on their prowess in research as well as their reputation for excellence (Altbach et al., 2009). The community college system is often perceived to be on the periphery of HEIs. In fact, Castro & Garcia (2003) noted that community colleges suffer from a chronic status problem; consequently, they remain invisible. Despite this seeming invisibility, community colleges today have become a force for reckoning. Clark Kerr (2002 as cited in Castro & Garcia, 2003) has heralded community colleges as the greatest educational innovation in the 20th century. Consequently, community colleges, as a type of higher education institution, and particularly Excelsior Community College (ECC) will be assessed to determine the extent to which they conform to the characteristics and functions of HEIs.

Excelsior Community College is a Methodist tertiary institution that serves the needs of various volatile communities in Kingston and St. Andrew; however, their client base stretches

across the island through satellite campuses and online learning centres. The College has four campuses in St. Andrew and two in St. Thomas. The College serves the post-secondary needs of approximately two thousand five hundred students annually. The College boasts a Triple A strategy – access, affordability and applied learning - which is grounded in its Vision “...a transformative, agile higher education institution with a Christian worldview, forging linkages and positively impacting our communities” (ECC’s Vision, Mission and Core Values, 2022). The tagline of the institution is “Transforming Lives, Nurturing Global Citizens” which mandates the College to provide a student-centred environment that will enhance their intellectual, moral, social and professional development. This mandate is also exemplified in the diverse co-curricular, and student engagement activities.

One of the defining features of community colleges is their ability to offer access to the academically deficient clientele. In the case of Excelsior Community College, access for students is through various avenues including the K-13 programme which offers various pathways to educational advancement ranging from the National Vocational Qualification (NVQJ Level 2) programmes to the Associate of Science level. Entrants to this programme are usually high school graduates some of whom failed to attain traditional matriculation requirements into post-secondary institutions. The College also offers various absorptive capacity programmes, short courses in Information Communication Technology to cater to individuals wishing to upskill or retool as well as extended high school programmes, associate, bachelor’s degrees as well as post graduate studies.

Another outlined function of higher education is that of preparing a sustainable workforce, opportunities for personal development, achieving their full potential and ethically sound persons who are capable of diverse roles in the society (Camilleri, 2014; de Moura Castro & Levy, 2001; Purcell, 2005). Excelsior Community College has played a unique role in meeting these societal expectations and has been at the forefront of preparing students for diverse functions in the workplace. The College fills a distinct niche in the market as it provides skills that can be immediately applied on the job (de Moura Castro & Levy, 2001). In fact, the College maintains close ties to businesses in the area and monitors labour market information in order to develop short courses to meet the demands of the industry. To this end, the College offers programmes in technical areas including aesthetics and cosmetology, automotive repairs, architecture and construction, renewable energy and electrical technology, small appliance repairs as well as other STEM related courses. ECC also offers programmes in business, computing, hospitality and tourism, humanities-based courses including; education, social work, criminal justice, psychology, paralegal and library information studies.

Furthermore, ECC is tasked with developing and facilitating entrepreneurship endeavours including incubators and work experience at community organizations. In this regard, the College has facilitated a programme for the development of robust business ventures, either directly through the establishment of learning enterprise operations such as its Salon Excellence, Eagles Bookstore and the Auto Repair & Diagnostic Centre, and indirectly through support provided for stakeholders and planned research consultancy through the Research and Innovation Division (RID) and other support services. The College maintains close ties with the community through various scholarship programmes as well as a fully functioning Community Empowerment Unit. This Unit is tasked with directly interfacing with the communities served by the College and identifying areas for development. To this end, members of the community have free access to a dedicated Computer Lab, scholarship programmes, meeting room as well as the services of the Wellness Centre, Gym and Bookshop.

Furthermore, all students enrolled in associate degree programmes must complete Work Experience and Social Outreach modules. These modules provide the College with a unique opportunity to develop partnerships with business and non governmental entities to serve the needs of the students. Consequently, the Career Services Unit, in consort with the Workforce Development Unit, is able to determine the needs of the businesses in the area and make recommendations for the development of short industry relevant courses. Also, the Social

Outreach module encourages volunteerism which allows the College to observe the immediate needs of the community and source appropriate assistance to alleviate such needs.

The approach used by ECC is in congruence with the notion that community colleges have various units and advisory committees where representatives of the business and social communities operate in advisory capacities. Therefore, this type of higher education institute is uniquely positioned to respond quickly to the needs of the students, parents, and communities within which they serve. In fact, de Moura Castro & Levy (2001) noted that, in reality, the community colleges face the same problems that the community faces as in many instances they “have found themselves at the forefront of local responses to welfare reform, providing soft-skills and career training” (p. 2).

Community Colleges have been identified as powerful vehicles of social mobility as it offers open access. Graduating from a community college is often a crowning moment for many as they would represent the first generation in the family to attend an institution of higher learning. The community colleges do not have the same rigorous admission policies as the universities; therefore, they are able to serve students at varying levels and abilities. Consequently, community colleges offer second chance opportunities for high school dropouts and those with marginal entry requirements. They also allow for opportunities to retool and upskill. It is against this background that de Moura Castro & Levy (2001) posit that community colleges would prefer to provide all the remedial support for weak and marginal students rather than ‘weed’ them out. Community colleges provide expanded opportunities for their ‘academically underprepared clientele’.

This position of community colleges fits well within the experiences of Excelsior Community College. The feedback from clientele indicates that their enrolment presents a first-generation college student. In fact, the experience below presents an excerpt from the Munroe College application of one recent graduate of the Renewable Energy Technology programme at Excelsior Community College. This experience underscores the power role of ECC in facilitating upward mobility, empowerment and hope for many academically unprepared individuals. One applicant to a college wrote,

Upon leaving high school, as my reality would dictate, there was nothing for me to do – no job opportunity or scope for higher education. This situation, along with the prolonged exposure to social and emotional violence, reduced my ability to respond rationally to events. Consequently, the inevitable happened - I got into a major fight with another boy and we both almost got arrested...Eventually I was offered a scholarship for an Occupational Associate Degree in Renewable Energy Technology. I was grateful for the opportunity as I know it is possible for good to come out of my community –I have seen persons elevating themselves and making a difference in various fields. I wanted to be like them as well as proudly hold the title of being the first person in my family to attain a degree (Lindsay, 2020).

One of the pillars on which the purpose of HEIs rest is academic leadership. While community colleges are unable to boast of the variances in research and becoming leading academics, they can address innovations in teaching. Community colleges cannot perpetuate the conventional teaching methods as would a university type HEI; however, the diversity of the students that community colleges serve presents fertile ground for innovations in teaching; including technology (de Moura Castro & Levy, 2001). Excelsior Community College has positioned itself to join the thrust for academic leadership. To this end, the College has created various units including that of Curriculum Development Teaching and Learning (CDTL) and the Online and Distance Education Centre (ODEC). These Units are tasked with ensuring that faculty keep pace with innovations in teaching and learning; therefore, it facilitates training in pedagogy, including online instruction. The Units also monitor the development of course delivery and work with the Office of the Vice Principal of Academic Affairs to ensure that the students are getting the best educational experience. The College has also instituted a full Research and Innovation Division (RID) which is tasked with carrying out institutional research as well as facilitating more robust student and staff research activities. The RID has created a platform for showcasing these research initiatives as it hosts an annual Research Day and has launched the ECC Academic

Journal. This publication is a phenomenal step for the College in making its mark in the area of rigorous research, the international knowledge network and producing new knowledge.

Clientele of community colleges also demand a system of accountability. The new buzzword in Jamaica, for example, is that of accreditation. Prospective students have been moved to question the viability of a course of study before embarking on such. As a result, community colleges are now pushed to ensure that their programmes are of requisite quality, and they seek accreditation from the relevant regulatory bodies. Excelsior Community College takes the issue of quality standards and accountability seriously. To this end, they are the proud title holder of being the first community college in Jamaica to apply for institutional accreditation from the regulatory body University Council of Jamaica. This will enable them to become a degree granting institution. Before taking this path, the College has been very active in seeking programme accreditation. In fact, during the 2020 Quality Assurance week scheduled for March 8-13, the College received Certificates of Accreditation for five new programmes and reaccreditation for five previously accredited programmes. Additionally, the College has achieved ISO 9001:2015 accreditation status. To achieve this task, the College developed a robust Quality Assurance Unit.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, tertiary education is both the smallest and the least developed level of Jamaican education. Unfortunately, there appears to be little focus on tertiary education; especially in light of the fact that there is no 'legal framework for tertiary education' (Miller, 2018) which leaves room for ambiguity. Furthermore, the Education Act of 1980 does not sufficiently account for the realities that exist within the tertiary sector. It is therefore critical that the government take decisive steps in ensuring that quality tertiary education is provided for all sectors of society. This provision will involve confronting some of the social inequities that are deeply rooted in history, culture and economic structures that limits an individual's ability to compete (Miller, 2018). The foregoing discussion is a clear indication that Excelsior Community College has met the criteria of a successfully functioning institution of higher learning. Therefore, the imperative for the College is to continue to take the lead in advancing knowledge while serving the education and training needs of the community.

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DEDICATED TO THE LATE DR. GWYNETH JACKSON  
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