**Transformative agendas and educational demands in the British and Dutch Overseas Territories of the Caribbean**

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**Abstract**

There are several small territories in the Caribbean that have not yet gained their independence and remain under the control of a metropolitan power. These include the territories governed by the United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands. This chapter analyses the way in which education policy and reform are enacted in these quite unusual circumstances – with pressures and influences both from the territories and their respective metropoles. The chapter is constructed around two-interlinked parts. The first considers the broader political and economic relationships that exist, and the place that education has within them. Both the UK and the Netherlands use language such as ‘partnership’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘renewal’ to describe their approach to the territories, including in relation to the education sector. However, both governments have used different mechanisms to facilitate change – the British have a slightly more detached approach, while the Dutch are more hands-on. This has important implications for the way in which education is managed in their territories and the consequences that result – and these issues are explored further in the second part of the chapter. By focusing particularly on the Dutch BES (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba) islands and Bermuda (a UK Overseas Territory), the chapter traces the contours of recent education reforms, and evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of the particular approaches taken. The more flexible approach of the UK is perhaps preferable, but here too concerns are raised about neo-colonialism and the lack of sensitivity when it comes to local norms and practices.

**Keywords**

Overseas Territories; metropolitan oversight; autonomy; viability; benchmarking; teaching and learning quality

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**Introduction**

Within the Caribbean there are several countries that have not yet gained their independence, and remain under the sovereign control of their former colonial powers. The United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands oversee the largest number of non-sovereign territories in the region. There are six UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs): Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Bermuda (actually located in the West Atlantic but considered as part of the Caribbean for the purposes of this chapter). In relation to the Netherlands, there are two groups of territories: Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten that are autonomous islands within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (BES) that are municipalities constituted as special public divisions within the Netherlands itself. The nature of the relationships between the territories and their metropolitan powers is extremely complex with powers and responsibilities divided and often shared, and this extends to the education sector as well. The intention of this chapter is to provide an overview of the general relationships in place, and how these help shape education policy-making in the territories. More especially, the chapter explores the multifaceted nature of UKOT governance as well as the complexities of the arrangements overseen by the Dutch. In addition, it highlights the key developments within education policy over the last decade and a half; the major challenges that exist; and the differences in approach between the British and Dutch territories. To encourage a more detailed analysis the chapter has a particular focus on the emerging education development priorities in Bermuda and the BES. Finally the chapter analyses the impact national policies and practices have had on local educational demands and decisions.

**The nature of relations between the metropoles and their territories**

The relationship between the UK and the Dutch and their respective territories has evolved over many centuries, but the foundations of the present relationship can be seen in the period after the Second World War, when debates over decolonisation were most voluble (Basdeo, 1997; Oostindie and Klinkers, 2003). The British and Dutch took somewhat different approaches and this section provides a brief overview of each. Decolonisation in the English-spefaking Caribbean was precipitated by the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1962, with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago gaining independence in that year. Despite the trend towards self-rule across the region a number of smaller British territories were reluctant to follow suit. As a consequence, the British authorities had to establish a new governing framework for them, and the West Indies Act of 1962 was approved for this purpose (WIA, 1962). The Act remains today the foremost provision for British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands. Anguilla was dealt with separately owing to its long association with Saint Christopher (Kitts) and Nevis, and the Anguilla Act 1980 became the main source of authority (Anguilla Act, 1980). Bermuda retained its link with the UK under the Bermuda Constitution Act 1967 (Bermuda Constitution Act, 1967).

Each Constitution allocates government responsibilities to the Crown (i.e. the UK Government and the Governor) and the Overseas Territory, according to the nature of the responsibility. Those powers generally reserved for the Crown include defence and external affairs, as well as responsibility for internal security and the police, international and ‘offshore’ financial relations (although not in the case of Bermuda), and the public service. The Crown also has responsibility for the maintenance of good governance. Meanwhile, individual territory governments have control over all aspects of policy that are not overseen by the Crown, including the economy, education, and health. However, because the UK retains ultimate control over the territories there is a commitment to support them in the areas where the territories have primary responsibility, such as education. So for example, in the 2012 UK government White Paper, *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability*, which sets out the government’s approach to the territories, there is a section on education (FCO, 2012a: 66-67). Within it the government talks of a shared vision with the territories ‘of building well educated societies’, and that through the Department of International Development (DFID) the government is ‘supporting improvement in the quality of teaching and learning including through teacher training and the development of partnerships between the Territories and the UK’ (FCO, 2012a: 66). So in education and in other sectors the balance of administrative responsibilities is in practice often ill-defined. This is in part because governance arrangements between the UK and the territories were not intended to be permanent; rather, they were originally proposed as stepping stones on the route to independence.

The UK is aware of the importance of maintaining relations with democratically elected governments, and this is particularly true of those Overseas Territories, the majority, that are no longer in receipt of British state funding. In order to manage most effectively this sometimes difficult relationship, the UK strives to allow territories the fullest autonomy that they desire; provide support where necessary; but also ensure that it can discharge its responsibilities and minimize its exposure to potential liabilities, such as when the financial viability of territories is threated (National Audit Office, 2007). The UK can face moral, political and legal obligations to give support when a territory’s resources are insufficient to meet its commitments, and thus the former feels it must retain certain levers of control.

Despite such constraints and occasional serious disagreements over policy, the territories’ constitutional link with the UK has largely retained its popularity, in particular, because it helps to preserve their stability. Many of the citizens within the territories regard the link as a ‘safeguard against weak or corrupt government’ (Taylor, 2000: 338). The political ties are also important for the economies of the territories, as they provide a measure of sovereign protection, which helps to reassure potential investors. The influence of English law and language and the UK’s responsibility for defence and external affairs has been valuable. Furthermore, the quasi-independent status that exists for the territories provides room for manoeuvre in political and economic matters and creates an ambiguity that attracts international capital (Clegg, 2005: 129). British support has facilitated the transition into successful economies of many of the territories. For example, Bermuda had a gross domestic product (GDP) per head of US$85,302 in 2013 (UN, 2015a), and is one of the world’s leading centres for international insurance companies, while Cayman Islands had a GDP per head of US$59,448 in 2013 (UN, 2015b), and is the world’s leading centre for hedge funds. In short, these territories have recognized the advantages of retaining their present status.

In relation to the Dutch territories the establishment of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was a key development. This was agreed in 1954 and laid out the arrangements for a federal state, comprising three self-governing autonomous countries of supposedly equal standing: the Netherlands, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten). Despite changes to the membership of the Kingdom (such as BES becoming special-status municipalities of the Netherlands) the original Charter remains in place, in part because any reform requires the consent of all parties. In principle, although not always in practice, the countries of the Kingdom are autonomous in relation to internal matters, such as government finance, social and economic development, cultural affairs, housing and education, while the Kingdom oversees defence, foreign affairs, Dutch nationality and extradition. However, the Netherlands Antilles have all replicated the structure of the Dutch education system that includes three distinct levels (kindergarten, primary and secondary education). For BES, Dutch entities, the Kingdom has exerted authoritarian educational action with the declaration that the Dutch education system should be followed (RCN, 2010). While in recent years Aruba’s educational system has benefited from a collaborative approach to the implementation of educational reform leading to innovations such as learner centred initiatives (Chieuw, 2007). However, due to the often centralised and sometimes inconsistent line it is unsurprising that only 54 per cent of citizens in the islands that formerly constituted the Netherland Antilles felt that education has improved since 2011 (Curconsult, 2013). Beyond the country-level autonomy, the Charter stipulates areas of communal responsibility, which by statute require the partners to co-operate. In the areas of human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and good governance, responsibility is shared between each country and the Kingdom, although ultimate responsibility for safeguarding standards in public life rests with the Kingdom. However, as with the UK, and for the same reasons, the Dutch authorities have been reluctant to use this power (De Jong, 2005).

When the Charter was signed it was expected that the Caribbean countries would seek their independence at some time in the future, and as a consequence the Netherlands agreed to give them a significant measure of autonomy. Although Suriname gained its independence in 1975 and Aruba came close (before deciding on status aparte, separation from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986) in the early 1990s a political consensus emerged on both sides of the Atlantic that the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba would be better off remaining part of the Kingdom, primarily owing to their relatively high standards of living (the Netherlands Antilles in 2010 had a GDP per capita figure of US$18,360 (UN, 2014) with key industries being tourism, offshore finance, and petroleum transhipment), sizeable financial help, the duty of support when faced with natural disasters, and safeguards to maintain the rule of law and good governance. Therefore the temporary nature of the provisions of the Kingdom became permanent, and the Dutch Government in turn felt that a stronger role for the Kingdom was needed to more effectively oversee the territories; although these efforts were often unsuccessful (De Jong, 2009).

**Recent changes in governance: renewal or retrenchment?**

Although the underlying nature of the UK-Overseas Territory relationship has not changed significantly in recent years, a number of initiatives have been undertaken. First, the Labour Government published a White Paper in 1999 entitled *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity* (FCO, 1999). This brought about some important reforms, such as new constitutions for most of the UKOTs that afforded some further autonomy, and British citizenship, and so the right of abode, to citizens of all of the territories. This led subsequently to the UK changing the University fees structure so that students from the territories could pay the same fees as UK students, rather than the higher rate for overseas students (FCO, 2012a). When the Conservative-led coalition took office it too produced a White Paper in June 2012 as noted previously. The White Paper set out the nature of the existing links between the UK and its Overseas Territories and the measures required to ‘renew and strengthen’ this relationship (FCO, 2012b: 1). The Government felt, perhaps correctly, that towards the end of the previous Government’s time in power relations with at least some of the territories had become increasingly fractious and that several political and economic problems in the territories required stronger corrective action, supported by a ‘very strong positive vision’ (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2012: 1). Thus, the White Paper attempts a balance between promoting a more positive overall agenda while making clear the responsibilities and high standards of governance the territories must maintain.

From the outset, the White Paper refers to the ‘valued partnership within the Realm’ and the mutual benefits gained from the relationship (FCO, 2012a: 8 & 11). However, clear commitments were also embedded in the document. First, territories must ‘abide by the same basic standards of good government as in the UK’ (FCO, 2012a: 49), which means, *inter alia*, maintaining the highest standards in public life, strengthening the public service, and safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms. Second, territories must follow ‘prudent fiscal management and effective fiscal planning’ (FCO, 2012a: 32) to become as financially self-reliant as possible; if not, the British Government will intervene. However, the UK will strongly defend the territories’ offshore financial sectors and provide financial support, including investments to promote growth, when called upon.

The White Paper also makes very clear that all UK government departments, not just the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DFID, are ‘committed to engaging with supporting the Territories’ (FCO, 2012a: 8). So in the area of education, the Department of Education and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (responsible for tertiary education in England) have a role to play. Stronger political links between the UK and the territories are also encouraged through a new Joint Ministerial Council, supported by a small secretariat, which replaced the more ad hoc and rather ineffective Overseas Territories Consultative Council. Education has been a key issue of discussion at the Council. For example, the communiqué from the 2013 meeting highlighted the cooperation that was taking place in relation to tertiary, higher, and vocational education (FCO, 2013). Further, the White Paper highlights the British Government’s desire to promote broader engagement with the territories via local government, private companies and non-governmental organizations, as well as the sharing of best practice between the territories. Again, this has had an impact on education policy. For instance, Isle of Wight Council has established an educational partnership with Montserrat (FCO, 2012a: 66). The publication of the White Paper was timely in reaffirming the importance of the relationship and setting out clearly the priorities of the British Government, including in relation to education. However, the White Paper is, in many respects, very similar to the previous White Paper because there is no desire on the part of the coalition to change the fundamental nature of the relationship.

As mentioned previously there is significant focus on the economic position of the territories, and this has certainly been challenging in recent years. The territories suffered during the 2008–09 global recession from reduced activity in their financial services sector and declines in tourist arrivals and construction levels. International regulatory oversight was also tightened. As a result, economies stagnated and fiscal deficits increased. Bermuda, for example, experienced five years of recession between 2009 and 2013 (Government of Bermuda, 2014a: 1). While growing budgetary pressures were particularly acute in Anguilla, Cayman Islands and TCI. This led the British Government to take a stronger hand in economic matters. For example, in both Anguilla and the Cayman Islands the UK forced revisions to local budgets to cut spending and raise revenue (Clegg, 2013). Further, the UK and all the territories agreed Frameworks for Fiscal Responsibility—legislation that commits the territory governments to be prudent and transparent on fiscal and debt management, establishes borrowing limits, and lays down the stages that must be followed in the planning, development and execution of a project. This increased level of economic intervention from London has been controversial in the territories. But the UK government, with its austerity policies at home, feels it is necessary to encourage greater fiscal discipline in the territories.

For the Dutch territories there have been more radical changes to governing structures. In the early 2000s the operation and structure of the Kingdom was questioned by all sides and as a result all parties agreed that the Antillean construct should be disbanded and a new set of relationships established (De Jong, 2009). After a series of referenda in the territories and subsequent negotiations it was agreed in October 2006 that BES would become part of the Netherlands as special-status municipalities. This meant that the islands would be overseen by the Dutch while retaining local government functions. Then, in November, the two larger territories, Curaçao and St Maarten, signed an agreement with the Dutch Government to become autonomous islands within the Kingdom, a similar status to that of Aruba. However, there was a pact that the Kingdom would (temporarily) oversee the public finances and the rule of law of the two islands. It was also agreed that the public debt of the Netherlands Antilles and of the island governments would be largely forgiven.

Despite expectations, the deadline of 15 December 2008 for the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles was not met, following a series of disputes between the Kingdom partners. A new date of 10 October 2010 was then set for dissolution, and this was kept. However, the process continued to be difficult. For instance, there was strong opposition in those islands becoming Dutch municipalities to the introduction of gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia, but these changes were enacted in order to allow BES to accede to the Dutch Constitution. Further, on 15 May 2009 Curaçao voted in a non-binding referendum to support the island becoming an autonomous territory, but around 48% of voters rejected the plan. Opponents denounced the planned increase in administrative powers for the Dutch as ‘neo-colonialism’ (Nrc.nl, 2009). Another dispute arose in October 2009 when Bonaire’s new Government, led by a social democratic party, dismissed the idea of becoming a municipality of the Netherlands and instead argued for greater autonomy. Unsurprisingly, the Dutch were dismayed by the volte-face, arguing that everything had been agreed, and if public authority status was not acceptable the only other option would be independence. In the end, Bonaire agreed to adhere to the original agreement.

Since the dissolution tensions remain many stemming from the 2006 accords. For example, the Dutch have concerns over the poor level of governance, particularly in St Maarten. In a parliamentary debate in April 2013, Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations Ronald Plasterk stated that there were too many rumours about corruption and violation of human rights in St Maarten. Plasterk cautioned ‘[t]his causes much damage to the reputation of the Kingdom. The situation is very worrisome’ (*The Daily Herald*, 2013). Meanwhile, in Curaçao several former ministers are being prosecuted for corruption; while Gerrit Schotte, Prime Minister between 2010 and 2012, has been charged, together with his wife, with money laundering and forgery (De Jong, 2015).

In the economic arena both Curaçao and St Maarten have seen several draft budgets blocked by the Dutch financial supervision council. The council has felt the two governments had not done enough to balance their budgets at a time of economic difficulty, for example, Curaçao’s economy has experienced little growth since 2009 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Despite both territories agitating for the termination of the Kingdom law on financial supervision and accusations that this was ‘an immense abuse of power’ (De Jong, 2015: 11), strong Dutch oversight remains. Also, a report was published in 2014 that highlighted several problems in Aruba, most particularly an estimated budget deficit of 9.3 per cent of GDP and a national debt of 80.8 per cent of GDP. In response it was agreed that there would greater oversight of Aruba’s budget from The Netherlands (*The Daily Herald*, 2014). In the BES, meanwhile, significant funds are being disbursed by The Hague to improve schools, prisons and hospitals. However, the populations are not happy with other aspects of the relationship, from price increases in the shops to what is seen as Dutch dominance in many areas of policy, including as we have highlighted in education. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands there are growing voices across the political spectrum that looser ties between the Kingdom partners should be introduced and limitations placed on the free travel from the islands to the metropole, despite this being a key freedom of the Kingdom. On this issue there is alarm in some quarters that Antillean youth are over-represented in the crime figures, and lack the necessary language and educational skills to fully integrate into the Netherlands. However, De Jong (2015: 17) suggests an alternative approach:

Decades of freewheeling Netherland’s development cooperation and well-meaning social assistance have not uplifted the Caribbean underclass, especially on Curacao, causing an ‘Antillean problem trail’ indeed. This is not a border problem, to be tackled by keeping Caribbean Nederlanders out, but a result of sub-standard education, social welfare and prospects in life …

Looking at the governance arrangements in place and the policies that are being followed one can see some significant common ground between the approaches of the UK and the Netherlands, with both trying to reconfigure and on occasion strengthen their links with the territories. However, in both cases balancing local autonomy with the expectations of the metropole is a difficult one. As a consequence, there are often significant tensions when the metropole wants to do one thing and the territory another. These tensions, based as they are on cultural and historical difference and local territory pride, have been seen across a range of political and economic issues. However, with the recent changes to systems in governance affecting both sets of territories the level of interference now seems to be greater in the Dutch territories, particularly the BES. In comparison, UKOTs such as Bermuda have a degree of freedom which the BES do not. These differences are also highlighted in the sections that follow. Finally, returning to a point of commonality­, although the UK provides less direct financial support than the Dutch and many of the UKOTs (Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, and Cayman Islands) are wealthier, their collective reliance on a small number of key industries is clear and their resulting vulnerability stark. Therefore both sets of territories face the challenge of diversifying their economies, and education could play a significant role in this. The following sections delve deeper into the issue and explain the particular dynamics at play.

**Educational desires, decisions, and demands**

The goal of developing an educated population is one that is often admired (Lubin and Serieux-Lubin, 2014). As previously identified it is considered to be the basis for both economic and social enhancement (Castro, Carnoy & Wolff, 2000; Ozturk, 2001). Such a desire habitually results in global campaigns and promising national strategies that seek to promote efficiency and equality (Crossley, 2001; UNESCO, 2007). In the pursuit of ‘productivity’ and ‘people building approaches’, emerge a range of priorities that link explicitly to the education of the young and more mature (Jules, 2008; Wint, 2010). For small states in the Caribbean region, policies and action are often affirmed as ‘educational development’ (Wint, 2010). The prominence of developmental notions has much to do with the emergence of small states, in a post-colonial era, as independent polities that are still dependent in some form on governing powers such as the UK and the Netherlands. For example in 2010 the Dutch Ministry of Education declared that Dutch entities in the Caribbean, specifically the BES, should implement the Dutch education system (RCN, 2010). Previously, the islands had an autonomous status within the Kingdom, from 1954, and educational practices varied during the twenty first century. For example, English is the main language of instruction in schools across the Windward Islands while in the Leeward it is Papiamento. Therefore variances in the language of instruction in schools (as well as poverty) were perceived as the cause for high school dropout rates and pupils repeating academic years between the ages of 14 and 18 (De Jong, 2005; Salsbach, 2008). Comparatively schools in the Netherlands had fewer students repeating academic years and 92 per cent of primary schools achieved basic educational quality (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2010). ‘In internationally comparative studies Dutch students aged 10-15 achieved well above the international mean scores for reading and mathematics’ (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2010: 10). Combined with the need for educational stability and cooperation between the Dutch territories, intervention by the Netherlands appeared essential for educational progression. Therefore in 2010 schools in the BES islands became part of the education system of the Netherlands located more than 7,000 kilometres away.

The distinctive shift in political governance, enacted since 10 October 2010, set in motion plans to implement benchmark educational improvements for BES islands (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2011). In Bermuda, meanwhile, the education system has been influenced by the historiographical origin of the school inspectorate for the Caribbean region (London, 2004). For example in 2007 a *Review of Public Education in Bermuda* took place with a team of individuals from the UK, which made specific recommendations for the central Ministry of Education (Hopkins et al, 2007). The guidance to restructure resulted in distinctive educational change through the amendment of Bermuda’s Education Act 1996. Consequently strategic priorities are noticeable in Bermuda’s Ministry of Education and Department of Education that overtly seek a reformation of the public school system (Department of Education, 2014; Ministry of Education 2010). Indeed such examples of control and intervention by the UK and Netherlands over territories can have strong benefits for education systems in strengthening local leaders, improving the curriculum, and facilitating accountability. Yet it is also probable that the correlation between desires for an education system and local democracy is destabilized through the external imposition of an educational vision, policy and structure (Glaeser, Ponzetto & Shleifer, 2007; London, 2002).

The decision to implement the Dutch education system in BES from 2010 led to many educational policies and actions from the Netherlands. Initially inspections occurred across the BES islands which identified that school improvement was needed to meet Dutch educational standards (Job-Van der Zwan, 2014). ‘The inspection report published in 2008 estimated the learning disadvantage in the field of math at the Caribbean Netherlands FO-schools to be at least three school years in comparison with the Netherlands’ (RCN, 2010: lines 31-33). The resulting Improvement Programme (IP) sought to upgrade the quality of teaching and learning, enhance school environments, strengthen educational leaders and raise pupil achievement. Funds were provided for the renovation of school buildings, school books and other teaching materials across BES. Subsequently, the *Education Agenda for the Dutch Caribbean* was established by the spring of 2011 and continued the purpose of the Ministry in the Netherlands to promote educational quality especially with school boards and local stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2011). This policy ensured that school coaches were available to support schools through the period of change and educational modernisation. The implementation of the education agenda through the use of school coaches suggested that educational policies could be focused on the local need through a ‘bottom-up instead of top-down’ development approach for integration and consultation (Job-Van der Zwan, 2014: 297). However, the 2010 shift in country governance resulted in a wealth of inspections and guidance documents (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2013; 2014; Scheerens and Sleegers, 2008) that formed three emerging educational concerns. First, based on the IP developed for BES schools, standards were set in core subjects such as Mathematics and Reading to raise achievement on a par with the Dutch education system. Phillips (2014) suggests that such educational transfer or copying has always been unsatisfactory where a deep historical analysis and knowledge of the system is not completely addressed.

We can only know whether a policy has been ‘borrowed’ and whether the borrowing has been successful or not, by examining historical examples and attempting to explain the processes involved which in turn might serve to inform any present-day attempts to import educational policy from elsewhere (Phillips, 2014: 81).

Although policies and inspection reviews express desires to support local schools as key sites for change (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2014), these have for example in Bonaire resulted in a significant increase in professional workload and conflicts with local language practices (given that Dutch is perceived by many as a foreign language—the native language is Papiamentu) (Becker, 2012). The conflicts between traditions, policy and practice at the micro and macro level are often labelled as quality goals when seeking ‘... global competitiveness, combined with contemporary preoccupations with assessment, accountability and value for money’ (Crossley, 2000: 320). Second, the redefining of the curriculum and outcomes for pupils contributed to changes with content knowledge, learning practices, and student care (pastoral) (Ministry of Education Culture and Science, 2011). Hence for small islands like BES achieving long term goals are proving extremely challenging. According to the inspection report of 2013 it was estimated that only 5 out of 12 schools would reach standards set for 2016 (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2013). Third, in order to achieve quality evidence goals, evidence-based designs required the professional development of teachers and educational leaders. Jennings (1993) highlights the importance of training and acknowledged teachers as change agents in order to achieve primary and secondary schooling targets within the Caribbean. Professional development processes should be on-going, communicated clearly and not constrained so as to exclude professionals from the creation of the goal itself (Edwards-Gumbs, 2014).

The education agenda and regular inspections in BES have been externally created and conducted by the Netherlands; this can contribute to feelings that local BES professionals are not actually the change agents. At a glance these three educational aspects enacted across the BES islands appear commendable ambitions for educational development. Yet, it could be argued that if schools in BES islands had the capacity for improvement independently then quality standards and academic results throughout the inspection periods would be much higher (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2008; 2013; 2014). The desire to apply comparative measures, which are linked to the metropole and global education agendas, often results in a top down style of governance. Consequently educational outcomes and practices are persistent challenges of macro-governance and there is always a need to incorporate the local context within the curriculum and in every other aspect of policy assimilation (Becker, 2012; Bond, 2006; Jules 2008).

In Bermuda – although constitutionally aligned with the UK – its proximity to North America is important. Indeed educational decisions have been allied with the business opportunities that have developed in association with the United States, particularly around the international insurance sector. Bermuda’s strong economic performance coupled with the development of curriculum standards for education, oriented towards a North American model, has led to the popularity of private schools within the territory. In 2003, approximately 35 per cent of the student population studied in private schools (Christopher, 2014). In the following years the local media demanded improved public school standards (similar to those producing higher outcomes in the private education sector) and this created the impetus for private and political transformations. Consequently a significant review of public education was undertaken in 2007 by a team of academics led by Professor David Hopkins. The review of Bermuda’s public education system, commissioned by the Government of Bermuda, was undertaken by this group of educational consultants and was published in its entirety by the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Institute of Education. The report confirmed the concerns of the local media by stating:

... that standards in Bermudan schools are not as high as they could be. Students in the great majority of pre-schools and primary schools achieve at least satisfactory standards. Students make a slow start and insufficient progress in middle schools and generally achieve standards that are too low by the end of this phase (Hopkins et al, 2007: 7).

In particular the report noted lack of clarity within senior education jobs; inconsistency in application of educational policy; the high turnover of personnel; ineffectiveness of the middle school system; and needed improvements with technical and vocational provision. The latter observation is one that is often considered a crucial component for a small country seeking to use education to increase the skilled work force whereby assisting in economic and social development (Bacchus, 2008; Bacchus and Brock, 1997; Ozturk, 2001; Saint-Paul and Verdier, 1993). Hopkins et al (2007) in their final recommendation for Bermuda’s public education system allude to the importance of autonomy. The advice to ‘Harness the power of parents, business and the community in the reform effort’ (Hopkins et al, 2007: 37) encouraged the sharing of good practice and resources. This was particularly important for a collaborative effort to be seen in senior schools and Bermuda College; the point where students would leave either onto to further technical and vocational training, higher education (HE) or the world of work. Subsequently local businesses such as the National Center for Construction Education Research (NCCER) and others offered programmes with qualifications (City and Guilds) and future employment. Numerous recommendations were made by the Hopkins et al (2007) review which resulted in a range of national political decisions. For example the restructuring of the Central Education Office and senior personnel job roles. This change ensured organisation and responsibility was distinctive at school level as well as ministerial level through performance accountability and the issuing of job contracts respectively.

As noted in the professional development literature the education professional must have clear procedures linked to accountability, support and encouragement not just from national government but consistently applied at the local level (Bottery, 2004; Harris and Muijs, 2005). In Bermuda the latter was enacted through a system of local monitoring and auditing of teaching practice to address improvements leading to quality teaching and learning. The review distinctly recommended the alignment of the curriculum in the public education system. This suggestion was integrated further by the Government of Bermuda through embracing the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) for primary and middle schools in order to assess students according to international standards. This enhanced curriculum coordination as all staff worked towards this standard and there was identifiable links to the GCSE standards operating in secondary level schools. In more recent years, the Ministry of Education (2010) identified target outcomes for various levels of schooling in the *‘Blue Print for Reform in Education: Bermuda Public School System Strategic Plan 2010-2015.* Taken together this encouraged the reshuffling of leadership in schools whereby deputy principal roles were recruited and teaching and learning professional links established. Although the Hopkins et al (2007) recommendations resulted in this range of vertical and horizontal changes in standards, administration, curriculum, assessments, and pastoral care, ensuring every aspect of education was locally appropriate could never be guaranteed. Therefore discussions on the practical and systemic applications of recommendations often arise. For example, the debate regarding the dismantling of the middle school system in Bermuda has more recently resulted in the Department of Education producing a ‘*Middle School Transformation Plan for 2014/15’* (Government of Bermuda, 2014b). Conflicts arising from policy and research recommendations create opportunities for critical examination in the field (Thomas, 2015).

… There is a basic and apparently irredeemable tension at the heart of education policy research. A tension between the concerns of efficiency and those of social justice… Both sides of the tension are political—although the proselytisers of efficiency do not typically see it that way. And indeed, I find it difficult to imagine what non-political research might look like. Individual researchers must address, or try to resolve, the tension as they see fit; although it just may be that some of one side has to be sacrificed to achieve more of the other (Ball, 1997: 271).

These tensions are a substantive concern in responding to educational desires when teachers are left the responsibility to make the curriculum relevant to local history, cultures and social agendas rather than working for the examination assessment (Bacchus, 2008; Bacchus and Brock, 1997; Jennings, 1993; Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008; Thomas, 2014a). The restructuring of the ministry, target outcomes and middle school transformation plans are all attempts by the Government of Bermuda to localise the educational research recommendations of UK based consultants. These actions are unique to the country context given the assertive demands from the Bermudan economy, media outlets, public voices and political parties (Government of Bermuda, 2014b).

To a very large extent educational development policies and programmes are also prevalent in other UKOT and Dutch Caribbean territories. In the British Virgin Islands there has been expansion within the HE sector, particularly in 2006 when the Tuition Assistance Programme was introduced. This scheme provided some support with tuition payments to students proving citizenship. The internal decision by the British Virgin Islands government had a direct impact on enrolment figures in 2008 at the local H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC). Enrolment rose from 836 in 2007 to 1,200 students in 2008 (Dawson and Smawfield, 2014). It is internal decisions such as this that suggest growth from within a country has a deeper self-actualising impact. Recruitment and retention can be directly influenced through targeted education policy. In the case of the HLSCC this required designated and targeted funding to ensure that educational barriers (such as low family income or student migration) were eliminated. Access and opportunity is then possible for the local community. Unfortunately, like many other Caribbean countries and territories British Virgin Islands students are often susceptible to the attractive HE systems abroad (Lubin, 2014). The appeal of education and economic opportunities abroad is attributed to high levels of migration from the Caribbean region (Mishra, 2006). When nationals do not return to their country of origin the negative impact is associated with economic contributions. Lost economic contributions hinder opportunities at the local level both within education and the expansion of professional occupations. Thus migration of the student leaving population remains a priority for the Caribbean region.

In Dutch Caribbean territories such as Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten there is an eclectic history of influence from the Netherlands. For example, in Curaçao and Sint Maarten there was the implementation of Foundation Based Education (FBE) throughout government primary schools in 2002. This imposed plan sought to provide student centred education and equal opportunities for all (Ministry of Education of Dutch Antilles, 1995). Yet, in Aruba educational direction has been dominated by localised demands and decisions. For example, teaching methods and community participation are priorities for educational development and governance. Unlike the other Dutch territories Aruba implemented a National Strategic Plan in 2007. The plan was constructed through consultation with a large section of the Aruban community (Job-Van der Zwan, 2014). Set up to be student centred and operating small scale education projects such as the Multilingual School Pilot Project [Projecto Scol Multilingual] (PSML), the plan became regarded as community based-education. High teacher satisfaction and improved student performance have been recognised for Grade 1 pupil results (Job-Van der Zwan, 2014).

**Comparative educational representations in the overseas territories**

The educational governance policies for UKOTs and territories of the Netherlands vary on each country location. Much action for development has emerged as a consequence of periods of colonialism (Jules, 2008; Thomas, 2014b). This being said there is distinctive comparative evidence of action between the UKOTs and territories of the Netherlands in the twenty first century. First, UKOTs and the BES of the Netherlands have both experienced amendments to education legislation. Although, UKOTs such as Bermuda have changed legislation as a result of a review by consultants, BES have found themselves yet again subjected to dominance from an education department (and inspectorate) located in the European continent. In 2015, Bonaire had three primary schools approved as good by the Dutch inspectorate (Dutch Caribbean Legal Portal, 2015). Whilst in Saba there are public concerns about the turnover of teachers as a consequence of poor pupil performance. Educational stakeholders have expressed some resistance to change, especially teachers in Saba, given that schools need to manage both the Dutch and Caribbean curriculum and the diverse student population (Saba-News, 2014). Considering this pressing situation and the need for co-operation the Netherlands still proceeds with its investment strategy of US$6.3 million into the recruitment and retention of teachers to BES (Statia News, 2012). It would appear that large capital investment from the metropole is able to quieten the voices of stakeholders that have localised workload and diversity concerns. Therefore, schools in both the UKOTs and BES are regularly inspected with targets set for teaching and learning, although the administration and capital investment of this varies. Second, quality standards for school improvement have been core features of educational development in UKOTs and BES. These targets have included the physical improvements of school buildings as well as the enhancement of educational professionals. While investments for such improvements come from the Netherlands for the BES islands, for the UKOTs local government funding, support from regional partners (such as Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)) and research bodies is primary. Third, the drive for educational change has emerged in many UKOTs from the local community whereas for the BES it has been enacted in sovereignty rule from the Netherlands. Specifically, in Bermuda the local media and community voices were able to push for gradual change that is even more evident today in political decisions (Johnston-Barnes, 2014). Aruba is an exception in that it too used local knowledge and feedback to a National Strategic Plan for education. It is these local voices that are crucial in ensuing that educational policy moves beyond a set of targets and towards actual outcomes. Taken together, it appears that for some of the small states of the Caribbean there is a recreation of dependency rather than the creation of independency long after colonisation.

**Conclusion**

Transformative agendas within the Caribbean region are both complex and remarkable. The longstanding cooperation between the UK and Dutch with their Caribbean territories indeed marks desires for sustainable development. For the Caribbean region this is pursued in the aspirations of enhancing teaching standards and raising student achievement. It is no simple task to analyse the historical relationships in place between small Caribbean countries and their European nations. Twenty first century political and economic decisions are increasingly considerate of the global context. It is to this end that the various British governments have utilised constructive language such as ‘partnership’ and ‘prosperity’ and more recently ‘success’ and ‘security’ when publishing White Papers on the relationship with its Overseas Territories (FCO, 1999; 2012a). Indeed the British government suggests that good governance should come from within each country and is vital for success. This rhetoric has affirmed private self-sufficiency in Overseas Territories except for with challenging global economic anxieties where interventions replicated austerity measures in the metropole. Clearly within educational development the British are active in consultative roles and the apparent longstanding idealised legacy of participating in the three tiered education system. To some extent, this has promoted self-governance in many Overseas Territories such as Bermuda whereby educational change occurs as a result of applied local voices. However, recommendations made and decisions taken seem to create educational transformations that affirm neo-colonial patterns. The Dutch, on the other hand, have sought to be more assertive in their relationship with their Caribbean territories. Further to negotiations the Dutch have created special-status municipalities that exert some control over finance and legislation particularly in the BES islands. Although this has enabled the reduction of public debt, it has maintained an overriding relationship that creates disagreements on many social and cultural matters.

Change that challenges inequity must include acquiring literacies that are powerful enough to enable citizens to critique negative social patterns, local and global, and help to change them. Taking this kind of public action would require citizens with high self-esteem, a strong cultural identity, and a commitment to improving their societies (Hickling-Hudson, 2015: 9).

A variety of local and metropole demands are at conflict with the Dutch and the Antilles that have limitations on a number of sectors. The implementation of Dutch educational standards in the BES islands from 2010 resulted in increased funding for school infrastructure. However, it has also amplified inequalities, such as the language of instruction, curriculum content and teacher recruitment/retention challenges, which emerged due to the imposition of external educational goals.

This chapter has outlined the general relationships of the UK and the Netherlands with its Caribbean territories, and more specifically how these have become apparent within the education sector in Bermuda and the BES islands. The balance of governance has in part created some positive ideals for development. Yet, as this chapter suggests, it is the movement towards appreciating the longstanding rich culture and empowering the population that can achieve sustainable development for its local communities and their environment (Thomas, 2015). Although on-going connections with the UK and the Netherlands in the Caribbean region are substantive, they need not and should not be intrusive, including crucially within the education sector.

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