

Issues of equality in jamaica



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Introduction

The following discussion will look around on the subject of equality in Jamaica using the experiences of an interviewee who is a female 63 year old British citizen that was born in Hanover in Jamaica on the 14th of March 1951 to draw out conclusions. She lived with family guardians as her mum died when she was 5 and her dad lived in the UK, but she had many brothers and sisters. She was loosely home schooled in Jamaica until she was 12 when she finally went to a Jamaican senior school called Mount Hannah. She had very a restricted education as her guardians wanted her to carry out manual work at home rather than pursuing an education. This resulted in here not having a structured education regime as even when she started to go to school she was forced into taking days off to look after her younger siblings or carry out manual tasks at home. Her childhood was in the middle of the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1953 (Ennew Et Al , 1982) and Jamaica's transition to independence that was pushed by Caribbean nationalists from after the Second World War (Mawby, 2012) to come to pass finally in 1962 (Welsh, 2012) . During this period there was educational reform especially in the early 60s with a big push to increase the number of schools since in the 1950s secondary school education in Jamaica was very limited (Miller 1990).

There were 25 children in her school year and their average school day was from 9-3. Her class had only one teacher that taught them all English and mathematics. She finished school when she was 15 years old without any major qualifications and then continued to carry out more rigorous labour work full time. Work ranged from doing house work and babysitting to

working on their house farm where she done tasks like carrying the water and the food to their home across long distances.

The interviewee was 16 in 1967 she came to live in Coventry in England with her step mum, dad and younger sisters and brothers. During this time she dreamed of becoming a nurse as she enjoyed looking after her younger siblings. She eventually got the opportunity to take a test to become a nurse but she unfortunately failed the test due to a lack of knowledge in the key areas that was essential to know.

After this she decided to go straight to work to help her family as a machinist as it was one of the few options that she had with her education. After a year she decided to move out and change job, but again the easier job for her to find with her experiences was as a machinist. In 1970 she had a daughter so took time off work for one and a half years to look after her. Afterwards she then went back to work for the same company but as a cable former but she also started to work as a barmaid at a pub during the weekends.

As she enjoyed bar work and with it being more flexible for her to look after her daughter she continued her career as a barmaid by moving to work full time at a bar in 1974. She however had an area of unemployment from 1976-1979 but she then began to work as a barmaid again for 4 years and then later worked in a wide range of bars and bingos and casino's behind the bar. During the late 80s she done various training courses as they became much more available in computing and shorthand writing with the hopes of becoming a receptionist, but in 1991 she became pregnant again had a baby Boy. For the rest of her life she brought up her son as a single parent and

done voluntary work at various charity shops and carried out a few cleaning part time jobs. Since 2013 she has become a pensioner and is no longer pursuing work.

Gender

Gender was an identify factor that effected the interviewee's education. The interviewee said that apart from the " major subjects" they had two extracurricular activities that they could do. It was compulsory for girls to do sewing and for boys to do gardening for the school garden. The interviewee said that when telling the teacher that she " wanted to go and do the gardening with the boys" he said " no" and when she refused she " went into the school and hide" because she " didn't want to do sewing". Because of this a teacher found her and said that if she didn't do the sewing she would be " expelled" so she went back in and do the sewing. However as a punishment she was hit by the headmaster as she says " he gave me the cane on my hand and told me to go and do sewing, he hit me twice, and then said sit down and do the sewing" goes on to say that she " hated him after that".

This would affect girls and boy's life chances because it would lower the possibility for boys to get the chance to be interested in sewing and the chance for women to be interested in gardening and thus meaning that their future career aspirations would be influenced away from either career paths.

This is also a sexist approach as it implies that women should do the sewing which is more of a house wife job, whereas men should do more hands on jobs such as gardening. This could potentially precondition how children

think about themselves and then lead them into believing sexist stereotypes. However if the children had the choice of what activity they wanted to do it would have been fairer and would have gave everyone the same equal opportunities. However when asked if she felt like there was less opportunity for girls than boys in the core subjects she replied “ no we all had the same classes and same subjects” meaning that at least for code subjects there wasn’t the same level of gender discrimination.

Social class

Social class has been a major factor to the participant’s educational background as she found that coming from a very poor background highly influenced her education into making an impact on some of her life chances.

If the interviewee had a different social upbringing then her family could have afforded the money for her to go to school from a young age instead of giving her house jobs to do. This was not a unique case in Jamaica during this period though as high adult unemployment contributed into generating households without male breadwinners thus meaning that children were expected to fend for themselves and to contribute in the household from a young age (Ennew Et Al, 1982). This resulted in many children dropping out of school around the age of 10 or 12 years, to earn money by working (Ennew Et Al, 1982). Because of this it directly affected her life chances as with little education it gave her the minimal opportunities to fully fulfil her potential in school. Education was compulsory in Jamaica back in the 50s but it wasn’t enforced, if parents were punished for children not going to school then this would have meant that the interviewee would have been in

education from beginning to end. This is partially due to the policies like the Education Act to define the functions, roles, rights, and powers of the Boards, the Minister, principals, teachers, and students to not being fully developed until 1965 (Ennew Et Al, 1982).

One positive however was when the interviewee said “ everyone wore uniform” which showed an effort was made to make everyone feel equal. However as The interviewee’s family was poor she didn’t have shoes to wear to school unlike other children. She did however say that people didn’t look down on others for not having much money and that “ I go to school without any shoes, I didn’t have shoes, and they didn’t bully me. They didn’t laugh at me or anything”. This was a positive aspect of her schooling; as they didn’t judge her for it even though it would have identified that she was from a low class background.

When asked if children that were richer at school, had better job opportunities when they left school, The interviewee replied “ yes “ as it directly affected her opportunity to get O levels. She said that when she was fourteen the headmaster asked her to “ write to your dad” and “ make him give you five pounds for books” so she could take her O levels but as “ he didn’t send the money” for the books she couldn’t take her O levels. She goes on to say that “ all the others took their O levels because they had the money to buy books”. Her life chances were affected by this as it could have helped her get a wider range of job and educational opportunities, but children with money would have had a better chance in life. Costs for books, uniforms, lunch, and transport deterred some families from sending their

children to school altogether (1987, Meditz S) so for allot of parents any extras costs to school would be looked down upon.

She goes on to say that she “ needed” O levels to be able to go into college which could have been a place where she could have strongly expanded on her education and increased her chances in getting a job she desired. After the interviewee left school at fifteen she had a year of carrying out manual jobs for her family , she said ‘ if id stayed in Jamaica maybe I would have ended up been a cleaner or something like that, because I didn’t have the qualifications to get a decent job’. This shows that by her not being able to carry out her O Levels that social class and wealth affected what the interviewee was able to do as a job after she left school.

Disability

The interviewee said that in school “ everybody was the same” when asked if there were any students with disabilities meaning that for our participant didn’t get much visibility of any inequality that people with disabilities faced. This shows that everyone was treated equally but this doesn’t mean that there weren’t any issues out there for people with special needs.

Before the 1970s Jamaica’s had very limited capabilities in being able to identify and manage learning disabilities in children. Because of this Jamaica’s educational system was unable to deal with the special education needs of physically and mentally exceptional children. It took until 1974 for the government to provide special education services, until then it was provided by voluntary organisations.

This would have resulted in students with disability's not getting the appropriate help and support that they would have needed to get the most out of the educational system.

Even though this didn't necessarily directly affect our participant it was clear that extra support wasn't available to her if it was needed as In Jamaica the late 1960s only about 50 per cent of Grade 6 students reached the functional literacy standard.(Miller, E, 2011). With more additional help and support for those who needed it this could have been vastly improved and could have helped the likes of our interviewee to get more out of education. This would have had an impact on children's life chances as by not having an education that is adapted to children's needs

Conclusion

These topics all affected the interviewee in their own individual way during her life. Gender effected the interviewee because the extra-curricular activities that she could partake in was solely based on her gender and not her personal preference, this meant that for these circumstances her education was different dependant on her gender and not on her personal choices meaning that she was not getting everything out of education that she would have wanted . Social equality effected our participant as it meant that she didn't have a good quality of education because of it due to not being able to be in school as much as others and not being able to get a qualification due to her dad not being able to afford books for her to take her exams. This resulted in her not being able to have an adequate degree of knowledge to pass her nursing exam that she could have gained through

taking her O levels and going to college. Disability inequality affected her to a lesser extent but special support wasn't there for her even though she didn't go to school until she was 12 year old, and this would have strongly impacted on the potential achievements she could have obtained.

These issues relate to each-other because they have all limited the scope of what was possible for the interviewee to achieve. Due to a substandard education with different elements of inequality she was not able to live up to her full potential. She instead for most of her life she carried out minimum wage jobs as she didn't have many options with potential jobs that she could do with her skillset or even opportunities for her to go into education part time while earning a living. Sadly by being limited to only doing these kinds of jobs it made her not able to gain a diverse enough experience at work to be able to expand skills that could help her in other roles. This created cycles that lead her into carrying out minimum wage jobs for the rest of her life.

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Appendix

Transcription

Did you enjoy senior school?

Yeah I did

What kind of classes did you do?

Classes? When I was at school I went till I was 14, and then I was in a mixed class with boys and girls. And I just do maths and English.

Did you do science?

Dint do science, just two subjects.

Where about did you grow up

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in Jamaica, Mantana.

Did you go to school here afterwards.

No just in Jamaica.

Did you feel like your schooling was limited because you only did maths and English?

Yeah very.

Would you say there was rich and poor people at your school?

was rich and poor, I was one of the poor ones

Did people wear different uniform, if they were rich would they wear better clothes?

No we all wear uniform.

Did you feel like anyone was horrible to the poorer people?

No no everybody got on, just there to learn, everybody was interested in learning, no time for any bullying or anything like that. I go to school without any shoes, I didn't have shoes, and they didn't bully me. They didn't laugh at me or anything.

Did you feel like race mattered at school?

No no no race nobody knew about race until she came to England. Because everybody is black, some was white and some were black, but nobody knew about it, didn't have things like that.

Did anyone at your school have disabilities, extra help?

No everybody was the same; all seem to be on same wave length.

Did you have more than one teacher?

For me was just one, the headmaster, in our class, before we went to the sixth form we had another interviewee teacher. So when I went to school was in normal, then sixth form, and in sixth form he was the teacher, the headmaster

So you didn't feel like anyone looked down on each other where you lived, looked down on people for being poor?

No no,

Did you feel like children that were richer, they got better jobs when they left school?

Yeah because when I was 14 headmaster said to me, write to your dad and let him give you 5 pound for books, so you can take your o levels, and I waited and he didn't send it you see, so I couldn't take my O levels, because I didn't have any books, but all the others took their O levels because they had the money to buy books.

What did you do when you left school?

I left at 15 for a year helping round house, then came to England at 16.

Did you feel like school effected what u did after school?

If id stayed there in Jamaica maybe I would have ended up been like a cleaner or something like that, because I didn't have the qualifications to get a decent job.

The people who did the O levels what did they do?

They went to a higher school, like a college, you call it college here they went to the higher school, learned short hand typing. If I was there I wouldn't have been able to go because I wouldn't have me o levels, needed them to go there. Was lucky to come to England.

Did you feel like more men went and got jobs than women did?

Well I didn't know what boys did, but girls went to the higher school. But with boys and girls even though we were in the same class, we didn't speak for some reason, everybody just quiet only one who spoke to us was headmaster. everyone seemed to ignore each other. was weird really.

Did you feel like you had less opportunities than boys did at school did they have extra classes?

No all had same class, and same subject. I don't know if they had extra, if they did I didn't know about it. When I was in school they had two things to do, girls do sewing and boys do gardening. Cos they had a school garden, so I said to them once a week they used to do that. So the teacher said I should go sewing, but I told him I wanted to go and do the gardening with the boys, and he said no. so I went into the school and hide because I didn't want to do sewing. And sent someone to come and get me, and they said if I didn't

come and do the sewing I would be expelled. So I had to go back in and do the sewing.

So did any one bully people?

Well no after school only twice I had name calling because I was flat chested, used to call me pigeon chest. And when I had mumps jaw was really bigmouth called me barrel jaw. But that wasn't in school that was out of school. When they saw me on the street. Was the same as was in my class at school; it was another school the next town away, another school next town away.

So were all the schools quite spaced out really?

Yeah.

Did you ever get hit by any of the teachers?

The head master, that was that day when I didn't do sewing he give me the cane, and tell me to go and do sewing on my hand, hit me twice with cane in my hand, and said now sit down and do sewing. Horrible man. I hated him after that.