

Contributions towards Strengthening Guyanese Sociological Imaginations:
Action Research, and Dialogic and Inclusive Pedagogy at the University of Guyana

by

Angelina Autar

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Gustavo Fischman, Chair
Nicole Thompson
Jewel Thomas

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ABSTRACT

To create possibilities for the development of sociological imaginations, a type of critical thinking specific to sociology, an action research study was conducted in the Department of Sociology at the University of Guyana (UG). Initial cycles of action research highlighted that student engagement and expression were limited by the traditional teacher-centered pedagogical approaches used within the study context. Thus, an action research intervention was designed to integrate dialogic and inclusive pedagogies within the teaching of sociology in a final year Caribbean sociology course. Individual reflections were used to activate student voice and include student narratives centrally in teaching and learning processes while student-led discussions were used for power-sharing and the further transformation of student perspectives through dialogic talk. Qualitative analysis of written and verbal student reflections and end of course qualitative research interviews suggested that, in contrast to students' frustration with current traditional pedagogical approaches, dialogic and inclusive approaches offer possibilities for enhancing and decolonizing education within the situated context of the study. The findings of this study suggest that (a) mutually respectful relationships of trust between teachers and students create room for students' funds of knowledge to be centrally included in teaching and learning processes; (b) connecting content with experiences leading to a personalization of learning, empowering students to question and articulate sociologically informed original arguments; and (c) classroom dialogue further deepens students' initial understandings and allows for an openness to learn from a multiplicity of perspectives. This study suggests avenues for exploring the powerful potential of

reflection and dialogue in creating possibilities for the development of distinct sociological imaginations and critical thinking. It also outlines how dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches can be leveraged towards decolonizing education and positions action research as a viable option for educational improvement.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, for their steadfast support and encouragement through all my educational journeys. Without you, this achievement would not have been possible. To Nikita, thank you for your understanding, support, and care through these last three years of my dissertation journey. Denise, thank you for always being a true friend. To my students, past and present, thank you for continuing to motivate me to become a better educator.

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**Contributions towards Strengthening Guyanese Sociological Imaginations:
Action Research, and Dialogic and Inclusive Pedagogy at the University of Guyana**

*The correct analogy for the mind is not a vessel that needs filling,
but wood that needs igniting.*

— Plutarch, *Moralia*

After more than a decade of teaching sociology at the University of Guyana (UG), my memory of the faces and names of students is beginning to fade. What remains though are moments characterized by the triumphant feeling of having succeeded as an educator by creating moments of excitement, amusement, frustration, and even sadness as students connected course content with their own knowledge and experiences. In their sometimes-loud improvisations, students riffed off each other's contributions to offer similar or contrary experiences that pointed to the emergence of distinct sociological imaginations, that is, “the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world” (Mills, 1959, p. 4). Yet, despite the powerful potential of those emotional interactions, they generated a troublesome fear that I had erred by shifting from the traditional educational approaches used within my higher education context. More powerful though was the feeling of shame that came as I effectively muted those emotionally charged moments by redirecting our focus back to course content. I had managed to glimpse authentic moments of learning that I longed to recreate but first, I would need to go on my own educational journey to develop the confidence and competence to truly embrace and take pride in exploring and experimenting with such alternative approaches to teaching sociology.

The more I reflect on it, the more it seems that being an educator has been my calling all along. Both my parents were teachers, having met while teaching at the same school and connecting over the coincidence of sharing the same birthday. Being at the head of my class throughout my education in Guyana, I was often a de facto teacher to my classmates; always willing to help them figure things out for themselves rather than allow them a peek at my papers. After graduating from high school, I even taught English Literature for a few months at a local high school before leaving Guyana on a presidential scholarship for my undergraduate studies in sociology in the USA. There, I was haunted by my own valedictory exhortation to my classmates, that regardless of where we may roam, we had a responsibility to return and to give back to our homeland. After completing graduate studies in sociology, I returned and took up teaching at the University of Guyana, but, although my studies had reinforced my belief that the point wasn't to simply study the world, but to change it (Marx, 1932/2006), for the longest time, I simply couldn't figure out how.

Despite my wish to recreate those moments where I thought my teaching at UG made a difference, it was only through the unexpected opportunity to pursue a doctorate in education at Arizona State University (ASU) that I would learn how to use action research to study my practice and to develop approaches with the potential to recreate similarly impactful learning experiences. This opportunity also came with an important responsibility. Like other UG scholars in my cohort pursuing education doctorates at ASU in leadership and innovation, I was charged with taking up the challenge of leading change at our national university, the University of Guyana. Whether circumstance,

destiny, or the culmination of a myriad of seemingly inconsequential events, the opportunity to use educational research to contribute meaningfully to change seemingly presented itself.

Although I fancied myself a sociologist, I gradually transformed into a novice educational researcher as I studied the instructional dynamic, that is, the “interactions among teachers, students, and content, in the various environments of schools” (Ball & Forzani, 2007, p. 531) and what these authors characterize as the subject matter of educational research. Further, the action research approach of addressing a problem of practice, that is, “a complex and sizeable, yet still actionable, problem which exists within a professional’s sphere of work” (Henriksen et al., 2017) imbued my generalized wishful optimism with the focus and specificity it needed to become reality.

In attempting to recreate what I had considered to be authentic moments of learning, in this dissertation study, I used action research to explore how a shift from the traditions of my educational context to dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches involving reflection and dialogue could help students create the beginnings of sociological imaginations. This has not been a journey without challenge. Rather than walking a tightrope between feelings of empowerment and tempered pragmatism, I struggled with the fear of rebelling against established customs and practices as well as the fear of my own complicity in reproducing the very patterns I was trying to change. With perspectives developed from my personal experiences and education outside of Guyana, I worried that, like Stewart (2016) encountered in implementing a critical and inclusive pedagogy (CIP) framework within her Jamaican higher education context, my

experiment might be somewhat “foreign-minded”, that is, based on Eurocentric ideals and expectations. However, as Fischman and Haas (2013) advise “recognizing the problems, understanding the risks, while also avoiding despair, is required to respond creatively to the conflicts happening in our classroom” (p. 65). The more I used action research to study my context, the more the risk of conflicting with traditional approaches by embracing dialogic and inclusive pedagogical practices seem justified. And, while it had lingered in the recesses of my mind, it was only towards the end of my dissertation writing that I would connect dialogic and inclusive approaches with Guyanese intellectual heritage.

Rather than being foreign-minded, my project’s emphasis on dialogue and inclusivity aligned with the practice of “groundings” used by Walter Rodney (1969), perhaps the best-known Guyanese academic. His willingness to engage in dialogue with anyone, anywhere has been characterized as a decolonizing qualitative methodology and an authentic Caribbean style of creating collective wisdom and consciousness with the masses (Stewart, 2019). In blurring the distinction between those who claim to know and those who would know, that is, teachers and students, “groundings” welcomes all to participate in knowledge creation and equally values their contributions. While the influence of Freire’s (1970/2005) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is much more evident throughout this dissertation, both Rodney and Freire embrace the democratizing and decolonizing potential of education. A similar appeal for centering the perspectives and experiences of Caribbean peoples in decolonizing work can also be found in the lyrics of Caribbean and international reggae icon Bob Marley (1980) who

sang “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds”. Just as I argue in this dissertation for the inclusion of students’ funds of knowledge centrally in teaching and learning, I include this snippet of Caribbean popular culture to suggest that inclusive education has the potential to bridge the disjuncture between the knowledge of the masses and the ivory towers of formal education. Thus, in suggesting alternatives to traditional teaching/learning approaches that include rather than exclude students and their contributions to teaching and learning processes, this dissertation research project is less a foreign imposition and more of a decolonizing project that connects with ways of knowing and thinking about the world that are endemic to the Caribbean.

Although the immediate impact of my action research project was limited to my local campus (Berbice) within the larger University of Guyana community, there are deeper implications for the wider Guyanese society. Marginson (2011) argued that, given the role of higher education in social transformation, the extent to which a university provides space for criticism and challenge is indicative of its function as a public sphere, that is, as “a semi-independent site for criticism and renewal of the state” (p. 419). But, when traditional approaches to teaching and learning restrict even the democratic participation of students in classrooms, how can the University of Guyana fulfill its potential as a national university in Guyana’s social transformation? And, when education is limited to teachers merely depositing knowledge into students (Freire, 1970/2005), what does each new generation learn but passivity and acceptance? Rather than continuing to reproduce traditional educational approaches, I suggest that

progressive, futures thinking and decolonizing education at UG and beyond can begin with small shifts such as those explored in this dissertation.

Dissertation Structure

Across space and time, small changes enacted through action research may seem insignificant. But Lemke (2000) states that “each of us leaves some imprint on the world, if only in the bodies and memories of those we interact with, and those imprints, as semiotic mediating artifacts, provide informational input to the development of others of our kind” (p. 284). To put it simplistically, the contributions we make to the world by acting in the present matter to the future. Even as I remain aware of my humble contributions through this dissertation project, I also recognize its importance to the collective body of knowledge and its potential to affect educational change within my local educational setting and within my discipline. This dissertation, as a tangible artifact that documents my action research project, is also designed around a structure intended to maximize its impact upon the University of Guyana, the larger field of education and the scholarship of teaching and learning sociology. Thus, the second and third chapters of this dissertation are written with two specific audiences in mind.

Chapter two of this dissertation, a monograph, was written with the specific purpose of engaging my colleagues at the University of Guyana. In it, I share my action research story as one example of how action research can be used to enact educational change starting within my department but with implications for the wider UG community. That narrative mapped out my journey of discovery, one that required me, as a practitioner-researcher, to engage honestly and reflectively in responding to my

discoveries in each cycle of research. My emphasis in the monograph is on the general usefulness of dialogic and inclusive pedagogies as alternatives to counter student frustration and dissatisfaction with our current traditional approaches. In addition to the importance of positive faculty-student relationships, I also emphasize how valuing students' funds of knowledge leads to them taking ownership of learning and sharing the responsibility for teaching and learning.

Chapter three is written for the wider audience of sociology instructors and centers on the potential of dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches in the development of sociological imaginations. In it, I emphasize how action research can generate context-specific approaches to the teaching of sociology that encourage students to deeply engage with course content in personalized ways that create possibilities for the development of differentiated sociological imaginations. Through dialogue, these personalized connections can also be transformed to affect collective student learning.

In embracing dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches, I suggest that even the point of view that analogizes education as igniting fires assumes that teachers are the agents of change and overlooks the potential for students to also be agentic in sharing the responsibility for teaching and learning. I offer an alternative analogy that speaks to the potential of collectivity; in the right conditions, wildfires begin with a single spark.

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Action Research for Educational Change: A Dialogic and Inclusive Experiment

Action research is the systematic inquiry of individuals in educational settings to gather information on the teaching/learning process and environment for the purpose of making improvements (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Mertler, 2019). But why try to change things if they appear to be working well enough? And how does one even begin? My story is one version of how action research can be used to explore the whys and hows of educational change at the University of Guyana (UG). It emanates from my desire to improve a complex, yet actionable problem of practice specific to my setting, students, and scope of work (Henriksen et al., 2017; Mertler, 2018). While this narrative may resonate more strongly with those who share my interests in the teaching and learning of sociology, given the shared teaching/learning context of the University of Guyana, the implications of this study extend beyond sociology to the wider UG community. I offer my story as an example that, I hope, inspires others to consider action research as a viable option for improving our work as educators.

Problematizing my Practice

From the time I accepted the position of lecturer at the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC) in 2011, my sphere of influence was mostly confined to the classroom. In my work as an educational leader in the classroom, I aimed at cultivating a safe space for growth and learning to take place while influencing my students to achieve a common goal (Northouse & Lee, 2019). That common goal of helping students to develop sociological imaginations or, in other words, to become critical thinkers, was my

starting point for conceptualizing the problem of practice that I would then use action research to address.

In sociological literature, discussions of critical thinking are grounded in Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination (Grauerholz & Bouma-Holtrop, 2003; Kane & Otto, 2018; Massengill, 2011; Rickles et al., 2013). Mills' (1959) original explanation of sociological imaginations was as "the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (p. 4). However, despite its continued importance and centrality to the discipline of sociology, it remains an ambiguous concept (Palmer, 2023). Sociological imaginations are not only intertwined with critical thinking but also with another concept, critical sociological thinking (Grauerholz & Bouma-Holtrop (2003), which is itself entangled with yet another concept, higher-level thinking (Kane & Otto, 2018). Thus, in the early days of my research project, I searched for clarification in the literature on the teaching and learning of sociology about what it was I was trying to improve in the first place. However, while I sought that clarity, my perspective on my problem of practice changed.

My initial assumption in this project was that students in the courses I taught at UGBC weren't thinking critically because I didn't see evidence that they were. Whether in written assignments or classroom discussions, they did well in repeating the words and perspectives of others but struggled with sharing their own thoughts and opinions. At least, that was the way it looked from my vantage point. I shared similarities with some of my students being an Indo-Guyanese female from a working-class and rural background who completed my primary and secondary education in Guyana. But my

university years were spent in the USA and those years outside of Guyana had influenced my perception of how university students ought to behave. As a first-year international student studying sociology at St. John's University in New York, I had been challenged to openly reflect, to ask questions, and even to challenge professors in class. So, when I began to teach at the University of Guyana, my expectations about students' forms of engagement were somewhat influenced by what I had experienced outside of Guyana. However, I came to realize that while my expectations for active engagement, questioning and critique at UGBC fell short, this did not necessarily mean that my students were not thinking critically. Rather they were trying to be good students in a different way. This shift in my thinking was influenced by a surprising finding early in the reconnaissance cycle of my project.

From sociological literature, I had noticed an acknowledgement that reflective writing was essential for developing critical thinking and sociological imaginations (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Foster, 2015; Grauerholz et al., 2013; Rusche & Jason, 2011). So, in my reconnaissance cycle, I interviewed three sociology students and three of my fellow sociology lecturers to inquire about their perspectives on the utility of reflective writing as a potential solution for developing critical thinking/sociological imaginations. However, those interviews with students and lecturers in my department instead became inquiries about how learning environments could influence student engagement and expression. Students and faculty alike were confident that critical thinking was happening in our classrooms but thought that more opportunities needed to be created for student engagement and expression. And, while students expressed

hesitance about questioning or challenging some lecturers, the faculty members I interviewed longed for students to engage in precisely those ways to practice and develop sociological imaginations.

Instead of focusing on pedagogical strategies for developing sociological imaginations/critical thinking in the abstract, or what was turning out for me to be the analysis paralysis of clarifying their conceptual differences, these findings signaled that I instead needed to pay more attention to the dynamics of my specific context. Whether developing sociological imaginations or critical thinking, understanding those dynamics seemed promising for providing greater insights into the UG teaching/learning environment not only for my purposes but also for my colleagues with interests in developing critical thinking skills in their various disciplines. Thus, in the remainder of this story, I use the terms sociological imaginations and critical thinking interchangeably and my intervention (more forthcoming) also borrows from strategies used to develop both. This turning point in my action research story, although unexpected, was a necessary segue to answer the question of whether, within my context, there was something systemic that affected the potential for the development of critical thinking and related skills.

What I was learning about my context implicated something familiar. Spoon-feeding, the situation of students waiting for, and simply accepting whatever they are taught so that they can later regurgitate this information, sometimes verbatim, on examinations, seemed to be responsible for the passivity I had observed. Reading Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provided new language and concepts to help me

understand the teaching and learning dynamics of my context. What we call spoon-feeding, Freire (1970/2005) termed the "banking" concept of education (p. 72), situations where education is reduced to an act of depositing knowledge into students who should patiently receive, memorize, and repeat that knowledge. Like Freire, I came to see banking education as insufficient for developing critical thinking. Further, since banking approaches to education ignore the diversity of students' lived experiences, this also prevented the emergence of their distinct sociological imaginations (Castillo-Montoya, 2018; Hoop, 2009).

But I had learnt from the examples of other Caribbean educational leaders (Spencer, 2019; Stewart, 2016) who subtly and tactically infused alternatives to banking education within their own localized contexts that I needed a somewhat tempered approach. Whatever changes I made to the teaching and learning of sociology through my action research intervention had to be done incrementally. Thus, my intervention involved making small changes to my teaching and learning context based on dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches. By dialogic, I mean that my approach embraced Paulo Freire's (2005/1970) standpoint that true dialogue is founded upon love, humility and faith which leads to mutual trust between participants. The changes I made were also intended to be inclusive in valuing the education of the whole student, recognizing them as personal, political, and intellectual beings, and including the complexity of their lives and experiences in the learning process (Tuitt, 2003).

My experiment with dialogic and inclusive pedagogy as a counter to banking education took the form of a seven-week intervention in a final year Caribbean sociology

course I taught online through UG's Moodle platform for 16 students at the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC). The intervention itself started about midway through the semester and continued through to the end. I only made minimal changes to update course content, but I changed the way students and I engaged with that content, and each other, to reflect a more dialogic and inclusive approach. First were student reflections where students engaged with course materials individually and composed reflections using their own words and modes of expression. Second, in self-selected groups of four, students led the class in discussion of the weekly topic, that is, they took the place of the lecturer. Throughout this time, we continued to engage in whole class discussions of course content and I also continued my usual practice of checking in on students at the beginning of online Zoom meetings and by email about their well-being and progress in the course. Interviewing students at the end of the course allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how they experienced these small but significant changes to banking education.

Larger and Local Context

Understanding the situated context of Guyanese educational systems and the dominance of the banking system of education involves consideration of the cultural and historical context of the Caribbean. As seminal Caribbean writer George Beckford (1971/2001) has stated, "modern Caribbean society displays structural forms that are a direct legacy of the slave plantation system" (p. 139). Following this assertion, other Caribbean scholars argue that Caribbean education systems were inherited from the colonial past where inequalities of power manifested through master/slave,

dominant/submissive, active/passive colonial relationships were purposely embedded in the social systems of the Caribbean, including, but not limited to, education (Bacchus, 2001; Brissett, 2018; Bristol, 2012; Stewart, 2016; Turner, 2001).

Initially, education was restricted for all but the elites in colonial Caribbean societies (Bacchus, 2001; Brissett, 2018) based on the belief that education could be liberating and thus dangerous to plantation societies that depended on the oppression of slaves. But education also has the contradictory potential to be oppressive. As the impending emancipation of the enslaved became inevitable, the emphasis shifted to using education as a means of social control. In the then British Guiana, rote learning (the repetition and memorization of facts) and unquestioning acceptance of what was taught were intentionally used as they “increased the tendency of the masses to act without contemplation when ordered to do so” (Bacchus, 2001, p. 662).

There have been changes since then. Like new nation-states across the Caribbean which expanded access to education upon independence (Jules, 2008), with Guyana’s independence came increased access to education as a means of social and economic advancement (Jennings, 1999). But, despite decades of educational change, Caribbean educational systems continue to include colonial structures (Bristol, 2012; Jules, 2008; Stewart, 2016) with Bristol comparing teacher-centered pedagogy in contemporary learning spaces in the Caribbean to the master-slave relationships of the plantation system. Other shifts like the rigid racial stratification of the colonial period being replaced by inequality based on skin shade, social class, and economic status (Brissett, 2018) were paralleled by “facelift” changes in Guyana’s education system (Cuffy, 2019,

p. 91). Thus, formal independence for a formerly colonized country like Guyana should not be taken as evidence that decolonizing processes, especially in education, are complete. Rather, as Stewart (2019) argues, decolonizing work in education must be recognized and treated as ongoing processes. What does this mean for our work as educators at the University of Guyana? Does decolonizing education mean that we completely change what we currently do?

Learning about the local and larger context to my problem of practice has problematized how I think about my role in this work. At times, embracing alternative approaches to learning and learning has felt alienating given that, like other higher education institutions in the Caribbean (Spencer, 2019; Stewart, 2016), UG utilizes the tradition of the lecture style of teaching (Livingstone, 2019). However, initial efforts at UG towards more student-centered approaches have led to increasing pedagogical discourse with the shift to blended and online teaching initially necessitated by the limitations of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Further, UG's aspirational goal to become a world leader in specific knowledge techniques and technologies (University of Guyana, 2023) formalizes support for attempts like mine and others at UG to improve pedagogy and signals an openness towards educational improvement.

There is no unique form of how to be a good teacher at UG, yet I assert that we do need to be aware and self-reflective of *why* we do what we do. Here I echo Livingstone's (2019) recommendation that improving teaching and learning at the University of Guyana requires lecturers to engage in reflective practice and research that allows them to improve pedagogy. Thus, instead of only traditional didactic teacher-centered

practices, we should embrace more learner-centered practices, or, as I will later argue, we should consider viewing teaching and learning as reciprocal processes along a continuum from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

Alternatives to traditional approaches to teaching and learning for higher education students in Guyana can work. O'Connor and Carr's (2012) problem-based learning experiment in medical education demonstrated that introducing an active and self-directed pedagogy to traditionally educated students in Guyana resulted in them adapting and thriving. Persaud and Persaud's (2019) study at UG on the use of a think-pair-share method also successfully increased student interactivity. These successes show that Guyanese higher education students are receptive to teaching and learning approaches that deviate from the traditional lecture, and further that educators can use research for educational change. However, action research to achieve educational change does not mean haphazard action. Rather, action research projects are thoughtful and intentional. They begin with planning; the topic is defined and limited, and related information and research literature are gathered and reviewed so that a research plan can be developed (Mertler, 2019). After all, even great thinkers stand on the shoulders of giants.

Choosing Dialogic and Inclusive Pedagogy

Arriving at an intervention designed around dialogic and inclusive pedagogy was by no means straightforward. Neither was it accidental. While my action research project can be situated within the broad framework of critical pedagogy, a “theoretically informed, action-driven critical approach to education” (Pradhan & Singh, 2016, p. 263),

it is more directly influenced by Paulo Freire's seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In addition to the parallels between Freire's (2005/1970) banking concept of education and the spoon-feeding within my local context, embracing Freire was also influenced by my own higher education at the hands of self-described Marxist and feminist professors. However, while that education outside of Guyana had at times felt divorced from my Guyanese experience and worldview, Freire's application of insights of a multidisciplinary collection of intellectuals to Latin American society, and to Brazil and its educational systems resonated with me. Here was an intellectual who, just across the border, had developed approaches to teaching and learning that responded to the social realities of his context, a context that was not that different from mine.

The similarities between Freire's educational content and Guyana's are not coincidental. In fact, anthropologist Charles Wagley (1960) uses the term "plantation America" (p. 5) to describe a culture sphere that extends up the coast of Brazil and including the Guianas, the Caribbean coast, and the Caribbean. His argument was that the centrality of the plantation system and slavery in these areas led to the emergence of a similar type of society which he called plantation America. In addition to similar contemporary cultural traits, societies within this plantation America culture sphere also share similar problems. Given this point of view, it is unsurprising that the insights I gained into my own context came from reading Freire's text.

Reading Freire reinforced the importance of why decolonizing work in education was so important. The issue is not simply that colonial-era education or banking education is different from other approaches but rather that banking education is a tool of

oppression (Freire, 2005/1970). Viewing educational systems as complicit in maintaining economic, social, and political domination and paternalism, producing ignorance and a culture of silence among the poor, Freire called for new dynamics of power among teachers and students. His vision was for all involved in education to be both teachers and students at the same time. Thus, education would be an instrument of liberation rather than oppression.

For Freire, disrupting banking education requires problem-posing education where dialogue is used, not as mere conversation, but rather as processes of knowing and learning. He stated “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire, 1970/2005, pp. 92 – 93). Thus, I was challenged to reframe my thinking not only about what education meant but to see classroom dialogue not as performance but rather as a pedagogic strategy for enabling and assessing learning (Simpson, 2016). Instead of “correct” student responses to teacher-initiated questions, I began to consider classroom dialogue as an act of thinking together, interactions in an unending search for truth (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2020).

But dialogic pedagogy didn’t seem sufficient. I felt that although it focused on the actors in dialogic encounters, it did not sufficiently address how to create “learning communities in the classroom where everyone’s voice can be heard” (hooks, 1994, p. 185). Further, what I was learning in Cycle 1 of my research (more forthcoming) suggested that approaches like hooks’ engaged pedagogical approach could be beneficial in creating the kind of learning environments that were dialogic and provided room for

students to develop critical thinking through engaging with each other. Thus, I searched for approaches used in the Caribbean context that had a similar emphasis.

Stewart's (2016) integration of a critical and inclusive pedagogical framework in Jamaica subsequently pointed me to Frank Tuitt's (2003) work on inclusive pedagogy. Tuitt advocates for inclusive pedagogy on the basis that it creates a welcoming and open learning environment that improves student learning experiences and encourages participation, interaction, and the building of meaningful interpersonal relationships. The five tenets he shares as common features of inclusive pedagogical models are drawn from a range of approaches including engaging pedagogy, equity pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, critical pedagogy, border pedagogy, critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Faculty–Student Interaction

Tuitt (2003) identifies positive faculty-student interactions as creating trusting relationships and an open and welcoming learning environment where students are comfortable enough to seek help. Positive interactions are more common when faculty are knowledgeable, caring, enthusiastic and available to students in and out of the classroom. Stewart (2016) further highlights that trust must be earned and reciprocated, and that constant and consistent communication are key to positive faculty-student interactions.

Sharing Power

Rather than the traditional notion that only the professor possesses power in the classroom, inclusive pedagogy emphasizes both professors and students sharing

responsibility for the construction of knowledge. In addition to co-teaching and peer reviews of each other's work, Stewart (2016) had students take the role of the professor by developing activities to teach specific topics.

Dialogical Professor–Student Interaction

While dialogical interactions between students and professors require more time, effort, trust and risk-taking, they can create “respectful, challenging, and collaborative learning environments... [where] there is mutual professor-student participation” (Tuitt, 2003, p. 248). In Stewart's (2016) application of this tenet, she encouraged students to use literature to propose counterarguments that challenged her views and even the course content.

Activation of Student Voice

Encouraging student voices brings a variety of experiences and social contexts as well as diverse means of student expression to the dialogical processes that take place in the classroom Tuitt (2003). While Stewart's (2016) use of this tenet in Jamaica was challenged by students' prior socialization into silence through primary and secondary schooling, she found some success in using social blog assignments and self-reflexive journaling to encourage students to voice their opinions.

Utilization of Personal Narratives

As Tuitt (2003) explains, inclusive pedagogical models encourage the personalization of course content by connecting it with students' life experiences. Personal narratives allow for connections to be made between ideas discussed in class

and students' experiential knowledge, and reflexivity can be achieved through written responses to readings and course materials.

Together with strategies in the sociological literature for developing critical thinking/sociological imaginations, these five tenets also influenced my intervention design. But, while inclusive pedagogical approaches create opportunities to add something else to teaching and learning processes, it was only through my cycles of action research that I would put a name to what had been missing.

Previous Cycles of Action Research

Thus far, my action research narrative has been non chronological, moving backwards and forwards between observations, reflections, and actions. This is typical of action research. Mertler (2019) states that “all models of action research share a non-linear structure that emphasizes a recursive research process” (p. 17) with cycles that can be conceptualized as spirals of looking, thinking and acting where processes and procedures are repeated and revised over time (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For this project, I conducted Cycle 0 (reconnaissance) and Cycle 1 to inform Cycle 2, my dissertation cycle of research. I’ve already described how my reconnaissance cycle led to a refocusing on my teaching/learning context. In the following paragraphs, I briefly describe how my learnings from Cycle 1 further influenced my study. More details on the specific research approaches I used in these two cycles can be found in Appendix A.

Taking into consideration the findings of Cycle 0, in Cycle 1 I focused on how to transform the learning environment for greater student engagement and expression.

Although reflective writing may lead to individual insights, I investigated how I could

provide space for students to share those insights with each other in a dialogic way, that is, where classroom talk was collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2004). Thus, I explored the usefulness of a reading/writing/discussion intervention. Thinking that it would facilitate classroom talk, I asked students to read course material on education in the Caribbean, individually answer questions I had created based on the material and to then share that knowledge with each other in a class discussion. From the survey and interviews I subsequently conducted, I learnt that, in general, students had positive feelings about the discussion, thought it was dialogic and considered my approach useful to their learning. Choosing interesting content and giving students adequate preparation time prior also seemed to have encouraged their participation.

However, one of my interview subjects pointed out that because I had created all the questions myself, they had not been given space to ask their own questions. And, while having participation points in the discussion activity encouraged some students, their eagerness to suddenly participate seemed contrived, even forced. I wondered whether rewarding them for participation reminded them about the power dynamics between lecturer and students. I also worried that my approach had replicated some of the same power dynamics that I had been working towards changing. Further, although participation points had been awarded to all students who participated in the class discussion, I came to see my approach as just another version of banking education, steering students towards producing “correct” answers to questions about course content.

Thus, despite my intentions to facilitate dialogic discussions in Cycle 1, I realized that by not allowing room for students' knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through everyday life experiences, that is, their funds of knowledge (Castillo-Montoya, 2018), I had failed to create a truly inclusive learning experience. Thus, my dissertation cycle, Cycle 2, combined inclusive pedagogy's tenets of faculty–student interaction, sharing power, dialogical professor–student interaction, activation of student voice, and utilization of personal narratives (Tuitt, 2003) with a dialogic approach to make space, recognize, and incorporate students' lived experiences into the teaching of sociology. This, I thought, would be an approach that created conditions for developing critical thinking and related skills.

Cycle 2's Dialogic and Inclusive Intervention

The intervention I implemented in the dissertation cycle of my action research project built upon my learning from my previous cycles of research. It involved changes to the teaching/learning activities in a final year Caribbean sociology course taken by 16 social work students at UGBC. The course, taught online using UG's Moodle platform, was aimed at developing an understanding of Caribbean Sociology by exposing students to literature that connects sociological concepts to the experiences and historical transformation of Caribbean societies. Thus, the course content included mostly readings about the Caribbean social structure. At the beginning of the course, I explained to students that while the first six weeks of the course would consist of interactive lecture sessions/discussions, the remaining seven weeks would include the new activities that comprised the intervention. There were three major elements; student reflections, student-

led discussions and whole class discussions, for which brief explanations are provided below:

Student Reflections

To help activate students' voices in a way that leads to the utilization of personal narratives, two of the tenets of Tuitt's (2003) inclusive pedagogical framework, I asked students to complete and submit reflections on their choice of any five weekly topics within a seven-week period (see Appendix B for specific topics). I used Rusche and Jason's (2011) approach to critical reflections where I asked students to summarize the main ideas or concepts in the material, to explain why they chose it, and to describe their reaction to it and how it connects to other materials/ideas. To encourage them to connect their funds of knowledge to course content, I also asked students to discuss how that content was relevant or meaningful to their own lives (see Appendix C for complete guidelines).

While designing my intervention, I had considered having these reflections be informal writing pieces given the benefit of reflective writing for the development of the sociological imagination (Bidwell, 1995; Foster, 2015; Malcolm, 2006) and because informal writing enhances critical thinking and future formal writing (Hudd et al., 2011). However, to create room for a diverse means of student expression (Tuitt, 2003), in my final intervention design, I asked students to submit either text, audio, or video reflections through the course Moodle platform or WhatsApp. Half of the class submitted written reflections on Moodle but the others used WhatsApp text, voice messages and even email, which had not been offered as an option. I had asked for student reflections to be

submitted the day before they are scheduled to be discussed in class so that students would engage with course material individually. Most submissions were made on time, several arrived hours or minutes before our class meeting time and just a few were received late. Regardless, all submissions were accepted. Based on how encouraging participation points had been in Cycle 1, I awarded five marks for submission of each reflection for a total of 25 marks. Further, given Dymment and O'Connell's (2011) concerns about support given to students, clarity of instructions, and feedback, I provided written instructions (see Appendix C), a verbal explanation and Q&A session, and feedback to all students within one week using the same format they had used.

Student-led Discussions

To activate the power-sharing element of Tuitt's (2003) inclusive pedagogical approach where students share the responsibility for teaching and learning. I asked students to work in self-selected groups of four to lead the class in an online Zoom discussion of their selection of one of the weekly topics. Like the reflections, each group was asked to summarize the material and discuss their reactions, connections made, relevance and questions raised (see Appendix C). Thus, there was the potential to collaboratively integrate their individual reflections into a dialogical group discussion. Each group was awarded ten marks for this activity. Most groups used Zoom audio while screen sharing snippets of the content, or slideshows in taking the role of the teacher in leading the class to learn about the weekly topic. They were generally successful in connecting their own Guyanese perspectives to the course content. However, their

attempts to include the perspectives of other classmates by asking questions was mostly met by silence.

Whole Class Discussions

With a class size of 16 students, student-led discussions only took place over four of the seven weeks of the intervention. For the other weeks, I led an interactive lecture session on Zoom with the intention of encouraging classroom talk to be dialogic, that is, collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2004). Since students were doing their reflections during this time, I invited them to share their reactions, questions, and connections made between course content and their funds of knowledge, that is, their emergent and distinct sociological imaginations (Castillo-Montoya, 2018; Hoop, 2009). Thus, as Castillo-Montoya advocates, I tried to draw out students' funds of knowledge, recognize and make them visible for everyone, and value and incorporate them as central to subject-matter learning. In this activity, I noticed that while students who usually participated in class discussions were more eager to share their learning and new perspectives, especially if they had read and done that week's reflections, not everyone shared in the whole class discussion. This activity was ungraded, and I suspect the lack of incentive did nothing to encourage those who usually avoid speaking in class.

Research Participants

All sixteen students enrolled in the course were involved in the intervention activities. At the end of the course, I used email and informed consent letters to invite them all to participate in end of course research interviews and to give their permission

for their student reflections to be used as data.¹ Eight students agreed to both. The final group of eight interview subjects comprised all females between the ages of 20 and 45. Most identified as Afro/African Guyanese, one as mixed and one Indo/Indian Guyanese. Three were unemployed and the others worked in the teaching and social services professions. About half of them were the first in their families to attend university. The demographics of this group of eight was representative of the entire class except that none of the three male students enrolled in the course consented to participate in research interviews.

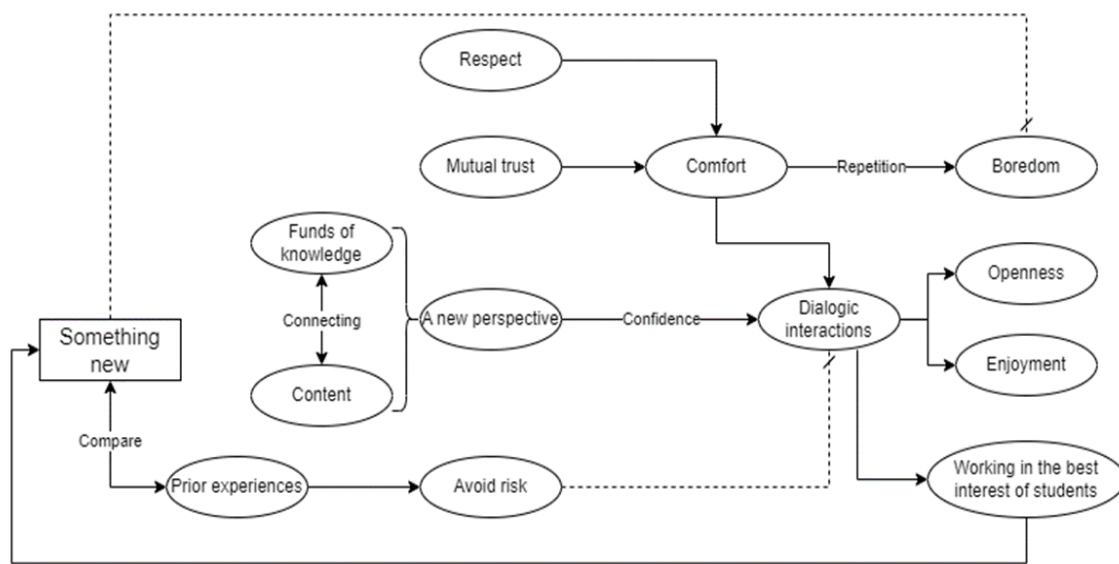
Data Collection and Analysis

To understand students' points of view and the meanings they assigned to their experiences, that is, their lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), I conducted semi-structured qualitative research interviews on Zoom and recorded them with students' permission (see Appendix D for the interview schedule). On average, these interviews were 30 minutes long and ranged between 24 and 51 minutes. Using Zoom transcripts as a starting point, I carefully listened to each recording multiple times and personally transcribed them into individual MS Word documents. I read all the transcripts several times, for accuracy and to explore the data using holistic coding to grasp basic themes (Dey, 1993). My more detailed analysis was done using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software HyperRESEARCH (HR). To remain as open as possible to students' perspectives of their learning experience, I created my codebook as I read through each transcript and constructed codes to label meaningful segments. I used an eclectic mix of initial, in vivo, process and descriptive codes (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña,

2021) for my first cycle of coding, and the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to avoid duplicating codes. Then, I used the grouping function in HR to group my codes into conceptual categories. Operational model diagramming, codeweaving and pattern coding, were transitional and second cycle coding approaches (Saldaña, 2021) that helped me to make sense of the data. Figure 1 below demonstrates how I used operational model diagramming to visually map some of the early connections I was seeing in the student interview data.

Figure 1

Operational Model Diagram Refined After Codeweaving



Note. This diagram was created and continuously refined during the data analysis process.

Learning from the Perspectives of Students

The aim of this action research project was to develop a deeper understanding of students' experience of an intervention based on dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches. In this section, I present what I've learnt about students' perspectives of that experience based on qualitative research interviews. None of the names in this narrative are students' real names. Rather, to maintain confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms. My research interviews, although focused on understanding how students experienced the change brought about through my intervention, elicited student expressions of frustration with traditional and banking approaches to education and colonial-style inequalities of power between teachers and students. Although these negative experiences took place beyond the scope of my action research intervention, remaining honest to my project means treating these experiences with the importance accorded to them by my research subjects. Thus, I make room for those experiences in this narrative to, in part, demonstrate the limitations of such approaches.

Inflexible, unapproachable lecturers, and a lack of communication and mutual respect left some students feeling short changed and even forced to rely on themselves or fellow classmates at UG for help. Andrea, a single mother in her late 30s who works long shifts as a healthcare worker complained about the pressure she experienced in other UG courses from her classmates:

I have students in my class that only yesterday was [*sic*] hitting me up like "I do not understand anything, can you please help me?" and here I am barely

researching whatever because nobody wants to fail, you already pay for these courses.

So, rather than their lecturer, Andrea's classmates sought *her* out for help. But why couldn't Andrea or her classmates approach their lecturers for help? Another student, Pamela, who is in her early twenties and was, at the time unemployed, explained what happens when she asks for help:

If I need help and if I'm trying to reach out to the lecturer, most of the time, lecturers do not reach out to you back. In most cases they don't read their emails, they don't respond to your messages, and it's very, very difficult and it can become very frustrating on the students.

So, it is not the case that students are not engaging in help-seeking behavior. However, over time, experiences such as these influence students' expectations about what happens in our teaching and learning context and, in turn, their behavior. Amanda, another twenty-year-old unemployed student, shared the following perspective about UG lecturers:

They does get this aura where you come to teach but you get this aura where it says "Stay away. I don't want nothing to do with you. I am just here to just be in class and talk some stuff and then come out and collect my paycheck" ... the lecturer is there but it's like they're not there.

Student criticisms of the way we do things now signal the urgency for educational change at UG, that is, the whys of change. But, beyond criticism, the work involved in this project demonstrates that our students are also an invaluable resource for improving

teaching and learning practices at UG by suggesting directions for us to pursue, that is, the hows of change. As I will subsequently demonstrate, what I've learnt about students' experiences and responses to my experiment with dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches suggests a few directions for improving teaching and learning processes within our situated context.

Reciprocating Respect and Building Trust

Students reciprocate how we interact with them. This might seem a statement about the obvious but, the more I reflected on my interview with Julie, a 21-year-old school social worker, the more important reciprocity in teaching and learning processes at UG seemed. Initially, I had been troubled that our conversation had been sort of superficial but, as I listened to Julie's interview recording, transcribed and read it, the more I came to understand that she was giving me insight into something much deeper. She said:

When the teacher be [*sic*] nice, she's not being too harsh, she's not being too rude, she's not threatening so that works for me because I feel that my lecturer, she's being so nice and I should not be disobedient or send in my assignment late or I should always text her or him whenever I may have a problem.

Along with Julie's definition of a nice lecturer being one who is not harsh, rude or threatening, is the implication that efforts to improve student engagement must take into account its reciprocal relationship with teachers' performance. Further, my continued reflection on Julie's insights and other students' perspectives extended reciprocity in teaching and learning beyond the functional performance of the roles of teacher and

student. Trisha, who describes herself as being from the early years of the Gen Z group, said “It’s about the respect; it should be reciprocated, not because the person is the teacher, they should take advantage of the students and not be flexible.” But mutual respect is not only about balancing those inequalities of power, it is vital to building trust which in turn allows students to feel comfortable in the classroom.

Amanda said of my approach “you ask questions in a way that it’s easy to follow and it’s open ended where everybody could have a chance to contribute and feel comfortable while doing so” and, more important, “it makes people trust you more and people would want to actually contribute”. Using mutual respect to build trust not only helps students to engage but also creates opportunities for lecturers to improve teaching practices. Consider what Amanda says about the relationship between trust and comfort:

If we can’t trust you that means we’re not comfortable with you, that means we can’t contribute in discussions, we won’t be able to give feedback or anything and it’s like the lecturer won’t know where to improve.

So, students need to be able to trust us before they will feel comfortable enough to share in dialogic ways that lead to greater learning, but they also need to trust us before they feel comfortable enough to tell us if and how they are learning. Rather than feeling free to express themselves, students learn to censor and silence themselves based on how we respond. Lisa, a 20-year-old first generation student and the only mixed Guyanese in the group, explained her reasoning:

If I feel that the space is not safe enough to make mistakes, even if I have an idea of what I want to say, I will not answer. And there are some teachers that would make you feel bad about not getting something right.

Thus, anticipating the risk of embarrassment effectively shuts down communication.

Natalie, a 25-year-old social worker and first-generation university student explained her apprehension about open engagement in class discussions:

If your lecturer isn't open and isn't a good communicator, then you wouldn't want to be open in the class discussion, because in your head is like I don't even know what to answer, I don't even know how miss is going to react, or what may be the outcome of my answer.

Classroom performance and pedagogic strategies that demonstrate lecturers' openness to multiple perspectives can encourage students to engage in the risks and vulnerability of sharing perspectives that are unique to their lived realities, and which may sometimes differ from mainstream perspectives. This in turn can create room for centering students' funds of knowledge in teaching and learning and lead to them taking ownership of their own learning. However, mutually respectful relationships of trust are needed to facilitate reciprocal engagements and to shift away from teacher-centered approaches.

Valuing Students' Funds of Knowledge

Traditional banking approaches that exclude students' funds of knowledge are sort of pointless. Natalie explained this by comparing traditional approaches with approaches that allowed her to share her funds of knowledge:

Some days you'd be like I don't even know if I want to attend today because it's going to be stressful; I'll just sit there and hear the lecturer talk all the time. But then when you know that there's going to be a discussion, you're going to be involved, you're going to be communicating with your colleagues, sharing your thoughts, it gives you the excitement of wanting to join the class. [...] Sometimes if you read before, then you have all these ideas that oh maybe this could be like this, or it could go the other way around, and you want to share it and then, if the lecturer doesn't give you the opportunity to do such then when the class finishes, why I joined the class, I didn't get the opportunity to share what I want.

Along with such disappointment at time wasted are missed opportunities for generating further excitement. Could others in the class have been influenced or inspired by their classmate's enthusiasm? Could it have led to deep learning through dialogic talk? Unless we provide opportunities to generate excitement and capitalize on such potentials, we would remain unaware about how much students can contribute to the teaching and learning process, that is, the value of their funds of knowledge. Natalie's explanation invites us to include students in dialogue, instead of relegating them to a zone of silence.

Transforming our classrooms and our practices to be more open and welcoming to students' funds of knowledge can begin with selecting content with which students can relate. Like Lisa said of her experience reading a book chapter on gender and education, "It related with my own experience in high school. I relate to it, I live this. It was definitely a change in pace to see me on a paper." While selecting content in which students can see themselves is perhaps easier to accomplish in a Caribbean sociology

course than in other courses or programs of study, it nevertheless seems to be an important consideration.²

Together with relevant content, approaches that engage students by emphasizing their funds of knowledge can also be the starting point for deepening curiosity, self-directed learning, and critical thinking. Natalie described the openness for more knowledge that arose from her experience of my dialogic and inclusive intervention:

It would have helped me to think critically. There are a lot of questions as to how and why, and, to answer those questions it means that I have to read further. So, it's an openness for the gaining of other knowledge.

Here, another potential, that of encouraging students to become lifelong learners can be wasted without approaches that engage students and include their funds of knowledge in teaching and learning processes.

Taking Ownership of Learning

My intervention, and especially the reflection component, involved a shift in the type of academic work that students were asked to produce. Amanda explains that with a report “you got to research and it's not basically your views. [It's] mostly what was written by other authors compared to a reflection where you know it's from yourself”. This statement reminded me of something one of my colleagues had shared in the reconnaissance stage of my research. She had said that “students tend to want an authority and you have to work against that constantly” but now I think that within her observation about authoritative voice was an implicit critique about the type of academic work we have been asking students to produce, and what we've been excluding in the

process. In other words, if only the work of academic others is given legitimacy, then why would students ever want to use their own voices? Positioning students' funds of knowledge as central to teaching and learning processes changes those dynamics.

Student reflections, as I've described in this monograph, is one option for empowering students to voice their own narratives and include their funds of knowledge in teaching and learning processes. Trisha said the reflections "actually helped me to explore more, just not stick to what the reading was saying, but try to see how my life experiences related". In a way, student reflections seem to provide students with permission and certainly opportunities to explore beyond what they read to connect content with their knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through everyday life experiences, that is, their funds of knowledge (Castillo-Montoya, 2018). By exploring, connecting, and expressing their own perspectives, students create academic work that is uniquely theirs and not cobbled together from what others have produced. Amanda put it this way:

It might sound odd but is like you really, could show or prove in a way that you know, you do follow, and you do understand the material that was taught right?

And I felt that the reflection is a way in which we could actually understand because remember, you're doing it in your own perspective.

This "doing it in your own perspective" seems to be a step in the direction of sociological imaginations or, more broadly, towards independent critical thinking in a way that is enjoyable for students. But rather than remaining at the level of academic discourse, reflections and dialogue in their own perspective, that is, centered on their unique funds

of knowledge, includes an element of authenticity that helps to extend learning beyond the classroom. Pamela explained:

It allowed not only me but you would hear other students commenting and say that okay, it was good. And even afterwards, after the discussions and participation, students will have their own group chat and they will even have further discussions, and say, oh, well, this person's perspective was really good or I didn't see this in such a way, you know.

Similarly, Trisha, remembering having answered a question to which someone else gave a different perspective said "it helped me to see the question from others' views". While the reflections had their own role to play, as Lisa put it, "a really good way of getting me to do the material and really connect with it on my own", the discussions were what brought those connections into a more dialogic space.

In this study, positioning reflections as a starting point for meaningful ongoing dialogic exchanges among students, and between students and their lecturers, had been an intentional design choice. However, one of my interactions raises even further possibilities for authentic dialogic engagements. Upon receiving one of Amanda's reflections, I had responded with a comment and a question, intending for it to provoke more thinking but not really anticipating a response. To my surprise, she responded to my question about breaking the generational influences of the plantation system with the following WhatsApp text:

One of the main ways I think that we can break the generational influences that the plantation system holds over our society is for the current and future

generations to have an awareness about the plantation system and how it contributed into building Guyana's identity from colonialism to present. One way to start is by asking the older generation.

The assignment had not been to sustain a conversation about a reflection on WhatsApp. However, what if it had been? Can social media platforms be harnessed towards facilitating authentic and meaningful academic discourse where students are engaged, not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active contributors? Does using WhatsApp bridge the disconnect between everyday conversations and academic interactions? While these questions are beyond the scope of this study, they point to future possibilities for academic engagements using dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches.

Balancing Comfort with Challenge

The options and scaffolding built into my intervention were intended to provide students with choices that accommodated their personal preferences and the challenges of their lived realities. I found that, as expected, students chose the options that were most comfortable for them. Whether it was faster, more expressive, or convenient, they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses and had chosen accordingly when doing their reflections. However, while Natalie's shyness had led to her choosing to write her reflections, she stated that had she only been given the option of doing a video, she would have "built the courage" to do it. This was a surprising finding that implies that balancing comfort with challenge may be important for helping students to grow.

Amanda explained the paradox of getting too comfortable:

I mean you get comfortable with it but at the same time it's too repetitive. You're not like “ooh”, like you can't wait to try this out or do it in such a way that you could get your own, splash of flavor, is just that, you know, you collect your test, you do it, you collect your presentation [...] but it's not really any challenging in a way.

Given the status quo, trying something new, like my dialogic and inclusive approach can disrupt the boredom of repetition and bring freshness and excitement. Although I had taught this group of students several courses over their four years at UG, throughout our interviews, they all characterized my intervention as having a newness that challenged them to engage with course material and the related activities in a fun way (see Appendix E for a few examples of their perspectives). However, the challenge of that newness was balanced by giving them room to make comfortable choices.

Amanda viewed this “wide room for breathing” as less stressful than usual while Lisa summarized the guidelines for the intervention activities as being about doing it “in any way that makes you feel comfortable”. For Lisa, this meant choosing the WhatsApp voice note options which allowed her to better communicate, expressing herself through *creolese* and her tone of voice. Trisha had a similar perspective about the ease of expression stating that “usually we have to give references so not having to do that made it really easy to give our thoughts and for other colleagues to share their views”.

Having grades associated with the reflection and student-led discussion components of my intervention allowed me to leverage this familiar approach of positive reinforcement towards motivating students to read. There was no grade for reading, but

reading was necessary before composing one's reflection. Pamela was frank about being motivated to read so she could do the reflection that would earn her marks. She said, "You know there's a reward so of course you would commit to doing what you have to do in order to secure your marks". But marks weren't the only reward in my design that led students to feel like they were "getting something from it". Roxanne, a mother of three and a first-generation student who was the oldest in the group, saw multiple benefits from connecting the reflections to the student-led discussions:

It gave me a chance to be able to explain or to read research and bring information to the group and, I don't like speaking so it give me practice as well for me to get out there ... being able to do that kind of boost my confidence.

Julie also shared a similar feeling, comparing not being very confident when she started university with learning through experience "that discussing and putting yourself out there is going to make you feel more confident". Regardless of their risk-avoidance, taking up the challenge of engaging in dialogic talk can lead students to retrospective realizations of how taking up those challenges encourages growth. Natalie explains how the challenge of the student-led discussion enabled her to reevaluate her perspective and see the advantages in taking the role of the lecturer:

At first, I was a bit shy but then in the field that I am practicing in presently [social services] I thought that this is petty stuff man, it's your colleagues and it's just a discussion so it was good, I think, after talking myself out of the shyness and the little fear that I had. [...] It was fun overall, it creates a room for, apart from just having the lecturer always there jumpstarting things and talking, it

allows us to then to be the responsible one or develop a sense of braveness to an extent.

Natalie's use of positive self-talk to overcome her initial fears demonstrates her willingness to challenge herself to grow. Further, research interviews about my intervention were what allowed Roxanne, Julie, and Natalie to articulate how they were "getting something from it". Perhaps creating more opportunities for students to reflect on their learning can encourage them to recognize the benefits of challenging activities and engage in them more. Further, perhaps it can also help to shift perception and practice of teaching and learning processes in a direction where shared responsibility for teaching and learning between students and lecturers is not the exception but the norm.

Implications for Teaching Practices at UG

My action research project started out to find solutions to a problem of practice unique to my discipline. However, the evolution of this project into experimentation with a dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approach has led to findings about the UG teaching/learning context that are relevant for others within this and similar contexts who seek to improve approaches to teaching and learning. While my findings are specific to the experiences of the students included in this study, they suggest promising directions for educational change at UG. Student frustrations and disengagement from our teaching/learning processes signal the imperative for a shift to something different. My findings suggest that approaches like dialogic and inclusive pedagogy have the potential to make teaching and learning meaningful, engaging, and exciting while enhancing

learning. Specifically, it suggests that our current approaches to pedagogy can benefit from more emphasis in the following areas:

- Creating and maintaining positive lecturer-student relationships based on mutual respect to build trust and a comfortable learning environment where:
 - students feel comfortable enough to ask for, and receive help when it is needed, and
 - students feel safe to make mistakes without the risk of embarrassment.
- Valuing students' funds of knowledge centrally in teaching and learning processes to engage students, generate curiosity and excitement, and develop critical thinking through the personalization of students' educational experiences.
- Designing challenging teaching and learning activities within a comfortable learning environment that:
 - use relatable content to help students to connect their funds of knowledge to course content,
 - emphasize the activation of student voice and the utilization of personal narratives,
 - provide opportunities for students to articulate the benefits of teaching and learning activities beyond the reward of grades.

Further, while I've discussed the theme of reciprocity around concepts of respect and trust, reciprocity is also a key concept for helping to shift banking approaches to approaches that are more dialogic and inclusive. Shifting from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches does not mean that students are left to fend for

themselves. Recall Andrea's complaint of having to seek information on her own as well as the pressure of being relied upon by other students in the course she was taking at UG. The student perspectives in this monograph suggest that absent teachers, or those who are disengaged from teaching and learning processes, do not encourage student independence but rather discourage and limit student potential. Rather, approaches that treat the relationship between teachers and students as partnerships built on reciprocity can help share the responsibility for teaching and learning between lecturers and students and, along the way, alleviate the burdens that we as educators sometimes take on to our own detriment. Rather than assuming students will proactively engage in sharing the responsibility for teaching and learning, we need to create opportunities that allow them to experience the empowerment that comes from taking ownership over their own learning.

The suggestions I've made in this narrative emanate from the insight of my students based on their unique UG experiences. While surveys at the beginning of courses, short one-on-one meetings, town-hall meetings, or my approach of just chatting or *gyaffing* at the beginning of class or, pre-COVID, in the cafeteria, can give us insights into what works or doesn't work for students, without more systematic approaches like action research, the anecdotal can be misleading. Recall my emphasis on comfort that overlooked how students also crave challenges. Thus, while trust is important for creating safe and comfortable teaching and learning environments, this project has taught me that trust is also essential for conducting action research. For some of my student subjects, their agreement to participate in this research project, and to encourage their friends to

participate, was influenced by the relationship we had built over their four years at UG. Enhancing teaching and learning is reason enough for emphasizing positive faculty-student relationships. However, these relationships of trust are also crucial for providing insights and knowledge that will help guide future approaches to educational change and improvement at the University of Guyana.

Thus far my suggestions about the usefulness and potential impact of action research and dialogic and inclusive pedagogy at UG have been directed at my fellow educators. However, such changes need to also be considered within the context of UG's organization structure. Of relevance to this study is the process by which the course outlines that document the content and approaches used in teaching and learning are changed. UG's regulations require lecturers to teach using approved course outlines (University of Guyana, 2022a). Approval begins at the level of the relevant Department followed by the Faculty Board, after which it is sent to the Academic Policy and Planning (AP&P) Committee for final approval by UG's Academic Board (University of Guyana, 2013). This process of approval takes, at minimum, months given the various UG authorities involved. While my action research project involved subtle shifts to teaching and learning in one course, scaling up similar decolonizing approaches to teaching and learning at UG will require the support of the university community at all levels to be successful. Increasing organizational maneuverability may also be necessary for encouraging action research towards educational improvement. But regardless of the discomfort, fear of change only leaves us stuck in the past. After 60 years as a university,

while we still strive to change the world, we must also remember to turn our gaze inward to our own potential for continued improvement.

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Notes

¹ In this monograph, I emphasize students' experiences of the intervention. For more discussion of how students connect their lived experiences to the course content and developed sociological imaginations, please see chapter three of my full dissertation.

² This can also be an area for future inclusivity and power sharing where students can help to select course content that interests them and helps them learn. Also see Birbal and Hewitt-Bradshaw's (2019) argument for incorporating student voice in curriculum.

Lessons from an Action Research Approach Towards Developing Sociological Imaginations in a Caribbean Higher Education Context

Although the notion of “sociological imaginations” has become increasingly important, appearing in almost half of all articles published in *Teaching Sociology* between 2010 and 2020, this interest in sociological imaginations has not paralleled by an increase in the number of articles around its development (Palmer, 2023). The main goals of this study are twofold. First, in seeking to understand how Caribbean students perceive, experience, and respond to the integration of dialogic and inclusive pedagogies in a sociology course at the University of Guyana (UG), this study suggests a few promising directions towards developing sociological imaginations. Second, this study explores the possibilities of contributing to developing a decolonial Caribbean sociological imagination through action research.

This project's starting points are (a) rather than universal approaches to developing sociological imaginations, what is needed are pedagogical approaches that respond to the situated contexts; and (b) the development of decolonial sociological imaginations cannot happen without centrally incorporating students’ lived experiences in the teaching of sociology (Castillo-Montoya, 2018; Hoop, 2009). The current study used an action research intervention that centrally incorporated students’ lived experiences in reflections and dialogue, creating opportunities for students to make connections, question, and form original, sociologically informed arguments. It is informed by the literature on dialogic and inclusive pedagogy as well as literature on sociological imaginations.

Defining and Developing Sociological Imaginations

In *Teaching Sociology*, the lack of clarity around critical thinking in sociology and the consequent need to examine it and its development analytically and empirically was called for early in sociological discourse on the topic (Baker, 1981). However, it remains elusive, intertwined with C. Wright Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination (Grauerholz & Bouma-Holtrop, 2003; Kane & Otto, 2018; Massengill, 2011; Rickles et al., 2013). Such ambiguity between the two concepts is displayed in Bidwell's (1995) paper on developing sociological imaginations through writing which, while appealing to sociology instructors to design writing assignments that allow students to think critically, includes no separate definition of the concept critical thinking. From its original definition as "the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (Mills, 1959, p. 4), sociological imaginations have become an increasingly important yet still ambiguous concept within the sociological scholarship of teaching and learning (Palmer, 2003). Closely related to Mills' definition of sociological imaginations is Grauerholz and Bouma-Holtrop's (2003) concept of critical sociological thinking which is "the ability to evaluate, reason, and question ideas and information while demonstrating awareness of broader social and cultural contexts" (p. 491-493). These authors explain their preference for this concept over other closely related concepts because of its emphasis on sociological knowledge and the sociological imagination and developed an empirical measure for its assessment.

However, critical sociological thinking is not without its own ambiguity. As Kane and Otto (2018) argue, in addition to being intertwined with the sociological imagination,

critical sociological thinking has also been intertwined with higher-level thinking, which they define as “critical thinking that focuses on the cognitive tasks related to abstraction that lead to original, theoretically informed arguments” (p. 114). For them, this conflation of critical sociological thinking with higher-level thinking occurs both in scholarly literature and in classroom application by sociology instructors where there is misalignment between the guidance given to students and instructors’ critical thinking learning goals. For instance, in contrast to the claim made by Rickles et al. (2013) that their experimental design of writing assignments and classroom discussions increased students’ critical thinking skills over the course of just one semester, Kane and Otto (2018) argue that that measurement conflated two understandings of critical thinking in sociology. Specifically, they point out that while Rickles et al. conceptualized critical thinking through the lens of critical sociological thinking, they measured it using a taxonomy more in line with higher-level thinking.

Notwithstanding disagreements about definitions and measurement, among the various approaches that sociologists claim can develop critical thinking and sociological imaginations is reflective writing (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Foster, 2015; Grauerholz et al., 2013; Rusche & Jason, 2011). As Foster (2015) argues, reflective writing assignments enable students to connect their individual experiences to what is happening in broader society and thus enable them to develop critical thinking and the sociological imagination. In a similar vein, Rusche and Jason (2011) also stressed the development of critical self-reflection in providing space for students to examine their own experiences within the wider social structure. For them, a critical reflection summarizes the argument

and examines the student's reaction to the argument and/or connections to other course material.

Another commonly held view is that, because the sociological imagination cannot be simply taught, students must engage in the practice and application of their own sociological imaginations as a means of developing it (Bidwell, 1995; Malcom, 2006; Massengill, 2011). In her research on how writing assignments can be used to cultivate the sociological imagination, Massengill engaged students in practicing their sociological imaginations by asking them to use sources to construct an original claim based on their own analysis. She claimed that students learnt to develop their own authority as scholars and that extracts from student reflections demonstrated success in their development of sociological imaginations. Malcolm's news-analysis project that asked students to identify a point of divergence also claimed to help students develop sociological imaginations through critical self-awareness and considering perspectives other than their own.

The foregoing discourse in *Teaching Sociology* suggests that reflective writing can be used as a means of developing sociological imaginations. However, the reconnaissance cycle of this action research study suggested otherwise; that developing sociological imaginations in the situated context of the study was more complicated than had been suggested by the literature. Rather than confirming the utility of reflective writing or suggesting useful strategies for developing critical thinking or sociological imaginations, research interviews with three sociology students and three sociology lecturers at the University of Guyana uncovered a commonly held belief, that critical

thinking was happening within the local context but that the teaching/learning environment did not provide sufficient space for critical engagement and expression. The perceptions of students and faculty were also at odds. While faculty members claimed that they welcomed opportunities to be questioned and challenged as signs of students practicing and developing sociological imaginations, the students interviewed expressed reluctance to question or challenge their lecturers. Why this disjuncture? Examining the dynamics of the local context provided more insight and suggested pedagogical approaches with potential to transform the learning environment.

Context of the Study

The University of Guyana is the only public university in a country of under 800,000 people and, since its inception in 1963 has graduated more than 50,000 students (University of Guyana, 2022b). While geographically located in South America, Guyana shares historical and cultural similarities with Caribbean countries and was one of the four founding members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) whose secretariat is in Georgetown, Guyana. Like other Caribbean countries, Guyana's education systems were inherited from the colonial past and have embedded within them the inequalities of power that characterized master/slave, dominant/submissive, active/passive colonial relationships (Bacchus, 2001; Brissett, 2018; Bristol, 2012; Stewart, 2016; Turner, 2001). However, despite decades of superficial educational change, Caribbean educational systems continue to resemble colonial relationships such that Bristol (2012) compared the teacher-centered pedagogy of contemporary learning spaces in the Caribbean to the master-slave relationships of the plantation system. Further, changes in the Caribbean

like the dismantling of colonial race-based education inequality resulted in new manifestations of inequality based on skin shade, social class, and economic status (Brissett, 2018) as was the case in Guyana's education system which only experienced "facelift" changes (Cuffy, 2019, p. 91).

The University of Guyana (UG) currently has a student population over 10,000 students. Its mission is to "discover, generate, disseminate and apply knowledge of the highest standard for the service of the community, the nation and of all mankind within an atmosphere of academic freedom that allows for free and critical enquiry" (University of Guyana, 2023). While UG's main campus is located at Turkeyen, just outside Guyana's capital city of Georgetown, the current study involved the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC) located within one of the more agricultural and rural regions of Guyana and about two hours east of the main campus. Academic departments of the University of Guyana include faculty members from both campuses. Faculty sometimes teach the same course at both campuses and there is an established practice of lecturers from the Turkeyen Campus commuting to the Berbice Campus to deliver programs of study (Livingstone, 2015; Murray, 2013).

Like other higher education institutions in the Caribbean (Spencer, 2019; Stewart, 2016), the University of Guyana utilizes the tradition of the lecture style of teaching (Livingstone, 2019). Like "banking" education, situations where education is reduced to an act of depositing knowledge into students who are expected to patiently receive, memorize, and repeat that knowledge (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72), lecture style teaching is unidirectional, with teachers as the subjects who transmit knowledge to the objects, that

is, students (Stewart, 2016). In his arguments for improving pedagogical leadership at the University of Guyana, Livingstone (2019) argues for a rejection of such traditional didactic teacher-centered practices in favor of more learner-centered practices. While the shift to online delivery of courses at UG that occurred in the wake of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 (University of Guyana, 2020) led to changes such as the suspension of heavily weighted final examinations in favor of continuous assessments, there has been no unified shift in pedagogical approaches away from the traditional. Regardless, a few local experiments with non-traditional pedagogical approaches have been framed by researchers as successes (O'Connor & Carr, 2012; Persaud & Persaud, 2019), demonstrating the receptiveness of Guyanese higher education students to pedagogical approaches that deviate from banking approaches. The current study extends the body of knowledge on the non-traditional approaches in the local Guyanese higher education context. However, mindful of the experiences of resistance to change in other Caribbean higher education settings (Spencer, 2019; Stewart, 2016), this study takes a tempered approach in subtly infusing a dialogic and pedagogical approach to change the local educational context.

Why Dialogic and Inclusive Pedagogy?

Considering banking education as a tool of oppression, Freire (2005/1970) advocated for new dynamics of power between teachers and students such that those involved in education will be both teachers and students at the same time. Thus, by removing the distinction between subjects and objects, education would be an instrument of liberation rather than oppression. For Freire, problem-posing education is needed to

disrupt banking education using dialogue as processes of knowing and learning. He stated “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire, 1970/2005, pp. 92 – 93). The subtle changes piloted in the current study were dialogic in embracing Paulo Freire’s (2005/1970) standpoint that true dialogue is founded upon love, humility and faith which leads to mutual trust between participants. Further, it reframed classroom dialogue from performative, to strategic in enabling and assessing learning (Simpson, 2016) such that classroom dialogue functions more like acts of thinking together, interactions in an unending search for truth (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2020).

Together with a dialogic approach, this study added inclusive pedagogy to create “learning communities in the classroom where everyone’s voice can be heard” (hooks, 1994, p. 185). Specifically, it included an inclusive pedagogical model that was adapted by Stewart (2016) in her Jamaican higher education context, and which was developed by Frank Tuitt (2003). Tuitt argues that inclusive pedagogy values the education of the whole student, recognizing them as personal, political, and intellectual beings and including the complexity of their lives and experiences in the learning process. He views inclusive pedagogy as creating a welcoming and open learning environment that improves student learning experiences and encourages participation, interaction, and the building of meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Drawing from a range of approaches including engaging pedagogy, equity pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, critical pedagogy, border pedagogy, critical race theory

and culturally relevant pedagogy Tuitt (2003) identifies five tenets that are common features of inclusive pedagogical models. These tenets are: (1) *positive faculty–student interactions* which create trusting relationships and an open and welcoming learning environment where students are comfortable enough to seek help, (2) *sharing power* where both professors and students share responsibility for the construction of knowledge, (3) *dialogical professor–student interaction* that create “respectful, challenging, and collaborative learning environments” (Tuitt 2003, p. 248), (4) *activation of student voice* which brings a variety of experiences, social contexts and diverse means of student expression to the dialogical processes that take place in the classroom, and (5) *utilization of personal narratives* which encourage students to personalize course content by connecting it with life experiences and experiential knowledge.

Although there has been some research in the Caribbean on educational inclusivity, Birbal and Hewitt-Bradshaw (2019) argue that inclusive education has been explored more from the perspectives of teachers and administrators than from students’ perspectives. In their paper on promoting inclusive curricular practices in the anglophone Caribbean through the integration of student voice, they characterize the challenge of educational change as being “especially formidable because pervasive traditional approaches do not readily embrace inclusive practices that redistribute power to learners” (Birbal & Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2019, p. 213). Regardless, they challenge Caribbean practitioners and educators to embrace inclusive approaches with the hope that inclusive education in the Caribbean can be created from the bottom up. The current study, as an

action research project, takes up this challenge towards inclusivity by making room for the development of sociological imaginations in an inclusive and dialogic way.

The Action Research Intervention Design

The intervention used in this action research study followed two cycles of initial investigations into the local context to develop an appropriate intervention. While the findings of the reconnaissance cycle (Cycle 0) refocused this study on the dynamics of the local context, Cycle 1's impact was on repositioning inclusive pedagogy as a central element in the intervention design. In Cycle 1, a reading/writing/discussion intervention was investigated for its potential to stimulate dialogic classroom talk. Students were asked to read course material, individually craft responses to several questions and to then share their learning in an online class discussion. However, a subsequent survey and student interviews revealed that despite students' positive feelings towards the activity, their contributions had been constrained by the questions asked, the construction of which had excluded them. Thus, in the final intervention design, the emphasis on inclusive pedagogy, and on the activation of student voice and use of their narratives sought to redress this shortcoming.

The final intervention design used in this study involved changes to the teaching/learning activities in a final year Caribbean sociology course. The course, taught online using UG's Moodle learning management system, was aimed at developing an understanding of Caribbean Sociology by exposing students to literature that connects sociological concepts to the experiences and historical transformation of Caribbean societies. The course content mostly comprised readings about the Caribbean social

structure. While the first six weeks of the course consisted of interactive lectures/discussions of course content, the remaining seven weeks added student reflections and student-led discussions.

Student Reflections

To activate students' voices in a way that leads to the utilization of personal narratives, two of the tenets of Tuitt's (2003) inclusive pedagogical framework, students were asked to complete and submit individual reflections on their choice of any five course topics within the seven-week period of the intervention. Rusche and Jason's (2011) approach to critical reflections was used where students were asked to summarize the main ideas or concepts in the material, to rationalize their choice of topic, to describe their reaction to the content and how it connects to other materials and ideas. To encourage students to further connect their funds of knowledge, that is, their knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through everyday life experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2018) to course content, they were asked to discuss how content was relevant or meaningful to their own lives. Instructions for this activity indicated that they were meant to be informal, that the local creole English or *creolese* was acceptable as were incomplete sentences. Students were asked to produce a few written paragraphs, or an audio or video reflection that was a few minutes long.

As noted in the introduction, while various authors cite the benefit of reflective writing for the development of the sociological imagination (Bidwell, 1995; Foster, 2015; Malcolm, 2006), to create room for a diverse means of student expression (Tuitt, 2003), the final intervention design allowed for reflection submissions by text, audio, or video

through Moodle or the messaging app WhatsApp. The WhatsApp platform was chosen for its popularity and common use in Guyana, not only by the masses but also local utility companies, service providers and even Guyana's Ministry of Human Services and Social Security (Kaieteur News, 2021). About half of the submissions were written reflections submitted through Moodle while the others were WhatsApp text and voice messages, and email. Given Dymont and O'Connell's (2011) concerns about support given for student reflections, clarity of instructions, and feedback, students were provided written instructions, a verbal explanation and opportunities to ask questions in an online meeting. Feedback was also provided to all students within one week.

Student-led Discussions

To activate the power-sharing element of Tuitt's (2003) inclusive pedagogical approach where students share the responsibility for teaching and learning, students were asked to work in self-selected groups of four to lead the class in an online Zoom discussion of their selection of one of the weekly topics. Like the reflections, each group was asked to summarize the material and discuss their reactions, connections made, relevance and questions raised. Thus, there was the potential to collaboratively integrate their individual reflections into a dialogical group discussion.

Research Participants

In this study, the action research intervention was used with a class of 16 social work students enrolled in the previously described undergraduate Caribbean sociology course at the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC). At the end of the course, email and informed consent letters were used to invite all enrolled students to participate

in end of course research interviews and to give their permission for their student reflections to be used as data. Eight students agreed to both and one student, an Afro Guyanese male in his early to mid-twenties employed in the teaching profession agreed to share his reflection data but declined to be interviewed. Table 1 below displays the demographics for the eight female students who were interviewed in this study.

Table 1

Demographic Descriptives for Interview Subjects

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Occupation	First Gen.	Family Background
Lisa	Mixed	Early 20s	Teacher	Yes	Female single parent household
Trisha	Afro-Guyanese	Early 20s	Unemployed		Female single parent household
Amanda	Afro-Guyanese	Early 20s	Unemployed		Female single parent household
Julie	Indo-Guyanese	Early 20s	School Counselor		
Natalie	Afro-Guyanese	Mid-20s	Social services	Yes	Female single parent household
Andrea	Afro-Guyanese	Late 30s	Social services	Yes	Single mother of one
Pamela	Afro-Guyanese	Early 20s	Unemployed		
Roxanne	Afro-Guyanese	Mid 40s	Teacher	Yes	

Data Collection and Analysis

In keeping with Tracy's (2010) assertion that gathering multiple types of data leads to crystallization and thus plays a role in the credibility of qualitative research, the current study included student reflections as data on how students connect their lived experiences to course content and developed sociological imaginations while end of course individual qualitative interviews provided deeper insight into students' experiences of the intervention. Table 2 shows the variety of student reflections that were analyzed.

Table 2

Student Reflections used as Data Sources

	Written		Audio	
Moodle	Email	WhatsApp message	WhatsApp voice message	
21	7	6	9	

To understand students' points of view and the meanings they assigned to their experiences, that is, their lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), semi-structured qualitative research interviews were conducted on Zoom and recorded them with students' permission. These were transcribed and then analyzed using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software HyperRESEARCH (HR). To remain as open as possible to students' perspectives of their learning experience, the codebook was created through multiple readings of each transcript as codes were constructed to label meaningful segments. An eclectic mix of initial, in vivo, process and descriptive codes

(Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2021) were used for the first cycle of coding and the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) employed to avoid duplicating codes. Then, the grouping function in HR was used to group codes into conceptual categories.

Operational model diagramming, codeweaving and pattern coding, were transitional and second cycle coding approaches (Saldaña, 2021) used to make sense of the data. A similar process was followed to analyze student reflections.

Shifting from Banking Education through Dialogue and Inclusivity

The current study explored sociology students' experiences of an action research intervention consisting of student reflections, student-led discussions and whole class discussions infused with a dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approach. End of course interviews with students demonstrated that the traditional banking approaches used in the higher education context within which this study was conducted had a major impact on how students engage and express themselves.

Risk Avoidance

Interviews with students revealed that, within the wider banking context within which this study was conducted, students avoided opportunities to share their funds of knowledge and to question what they were taught because of their own self-doubt and their fears of being ridiculed. The perspectives of three female students in their early 20s demonstrates how banking education norms limit their contributions to teaching and learning processes by emphasizing the production of “correct” responses to questions asked:

If I don't know anything in relation to whatever the lecturers are asking, I will stay quiet and wait on my colleagues and if they say something similar to what I know, I might join them or if they say something way different I'll stay quiet and say I agree with that person. (Julie, Indo Guyanese social worker)

It's like you're afraid to say certain things. It's limiting you to say, or to express yourself fully [...] everything needs to be very precise, and it's like you're afraid to make mistakes. You're thinking that your perspective is wrong. (Pamela, Afro-Guyanese)

If I feel that the space is not safe enough to make mistakes, even if I have an idea of what I want to say, I will not answer. And there are some teachers that would make you feel bad about not getting something right. (Lisa, mixed-Guyanese teacher)

Thus, the rigidity of banking education's emphasis on regurgitating previously deposited knowledge leaves little room for students to demonstrate personal connections with course content, to experiment, or to make mistakes.

Mutual Respect and Trust

Students held strong perspectives on how the local educational context could be transformed to empower them to take advantage of opportunities to engage and express themselves in ways that lead to learning and the development of sociological imaginations. Mutual respect and trust were considered by students to be important for building positive faculty-student relationships and for sharing the responsibility for

teaching and learning. On respect and trust, Trisha and Amanda, two Afro-Guyanese females in their early twenties, had this to say:

T: I think it's about respect. You know, it should be reciprocated, so I think not because the person is the teacher, they should take advantage of the students and not be flexible.

A: If we can't trust you that means we're not comfortable with you, that means we can't contribute in discussions, we won't be able to give feedback or anything and it's like the lecturer won't know where to improve.

Natalie, a 25 year old Afro-Guyanese social worker shared the following perspectives on the importance of having a good faculty-student relationship and what happens when students are sent the message that their funds of knowledge do not matter:

If there isn't a good relationship you wouldn't be focused. I don't think that learning is going to take place. You wouldn't be that focused on what is the main idea of being there or meeting with the lecturer.

Most times we have the lecturers taking control and all the time we hear the lecturer talking. Rarely you hear students are given the opportunity - unless presentation. They just discuss and honestly sometimes persons are just logging in and just wouldn't be present like behind it, or phone. You just log in and go, because you know that you wouldn't be called [on] -they just go on and on and on.

Sometimes I log in and I left [*sic*] whatever devices on.

Thus, rather than viewing meetings between teachers and students as opportunities for dialogic learning, banking models relegate students to only being recipients of

knowledge, not as co-creators and contributors. The current study aimed at changing situations like these by adopting an inclusive pedagogical approach where relationships of trust built on mutual respect lead to shared responsibility for teaching and learning.

Personalizing Learning

In the current study, the use of an intervention based on a dialogic and inclusive pedagogic approach provided room for students to share their funds of knowledge and to express themselves in personalized ways. Lisa compared her experience of the intervention with her experience in other courses at UG stating:

I think this was the only course I had this semester that really valued my learning experience and how I interpreted the information, whereas the others were just a matter of “you have to memorize this” or “you have to specifically just know this, you have to remember this at all times” and this one really got me to engage with the information, use it in my world, take my perspective on, stuff like that.

Further, Lisa’s engagement with course content was facilitated by the opportunity to tailor the range of options for student expression, what Amanda termed a “wide room for breathing”, to her needs. Lisa explained:

I’ve been told many times that I have a way with words and if I start writing I’ll never stop, and I really don’t have time. So instead of doing all of that, I decided speaking would be best so I chose the format of sending it in the voice notes, since it was allowed and it better allowed me to communicate, because if I type then I’ll have to put everything in the proper English and question marks and

punctuation. I was given somewhat [of] a freedom when I just spoke as I was allowed to use my Creole. You could hear my tone of voice and stuff like that. Similarly, Pamela saw the intervention design as different in prioritizing her point of view:

The reflection, because that was the first time that was introduced in any course that I would have done, and also with the group discussions, it was different from the others that we would normally do. It didn't allow you to give too much citations or formal work but you know you got to give your own opinion and you had to be creative about what is it that you wanted to put over.

Shifting the emphasis from students reproducing the perspectives of others to instead providing opportunities for them to activate their voices and include their narratives allows for personalized experiences with course content that begin with students reading and reflecting on course content. Roxanne, a teacher in her 40s, demonstrated an awareness of how the reflection design encouraged reading and the benefits that students derived from such engagement:

For the reflections, the readings were interesting, and I think the motive is to get the reading done and yes, in the process we are learning. So, get the reading done, understand what the readings are saying, and get it out there, share your understanding [...] For the reflection, if that wasn't given, then the research, the literature would not probably have been read.

Amanda, viewing the reflection as useful in creating “something to talk about [so] you wouldn't just sit there aimlessly” also described how the reflection activity allowed her to feel competence through her engagement with course content.

When we had to do the reflections, it might sound odd but it's like you really could show or prove in a way that you do follow and you do understand the material that was taught right? And I felt that the reflections is a way in which we could actually understand because, remember you're doing it in your own perspective and it's basically what you read and what you understand is what you put.

The model used, of individual student reflections followed by dialogic discussions, about half of which were led by groups of students, provided opportunities for students to individually engage with course content using their funds of knowledge, to share their perspectives, and to learn from the perspectives of others. Pamela said:

The discussions allowed you to give your own perspective on a specific topic for me, and it also allowed me to embrace other people's perspective and see a topic in different ways and not just my own way.

Even as students formed their own understandings through the reflection activity, that understanding was subject to change as they engaged in dialogic ways with each other. In addition to enjoying the opportunity to “see the question from others' views”, Amanda said that with the class discussions:

You're learning from others, so it's a more interactive way in which everybody give their own perspectives, we learn from it. There is no, you know, "true answer" as we learned over a period of your course.

Thus, in the current study, opportunities to share their funds of knowledge with peers in an environment that validates their lived experiences can create an empowering effect where students move beyond reliance on authoritative perspectives to seeing the legitimacy of their own perspectives. Moving from the banking demand of producing "correct" answers to questions asked to a viewpoint that refuses to accept singular "truths" is significant. Further, as these statements from Natalie and Pamela demonstrate, there is a belief among some interview subjects that their experience with the intervention helped them to develop critical thinking:

N: It would have helped me to think critically. There are a lot of questions as to how and why, and, to answer those questions it means that I have to read further. So, it's an openness for the gaining of other knowledge.

P: I think I've become a much more critical thinker because I'm not just looking at a situation now as it is but you're getting down to the roots of the problem. This course would have helped me a lot with it because sometimes you see a situation and you just look at it as it is but there's much more to that situation or there's much more to that topic so you have to get down to the root as to why it is happening, how it came about and everything else and once you get down to that root, it will help you to see why is it affecting us today in our society.

Their definitions of how they have changed as critical thinkers involve developing an openness to investigating the social and historical origins of contemporary phenomena. But it is a personalized connection that developed from students' individual engagement with course content, each other, and their instructor. Andrea's narrative demonstrates how she personalized and internalized course content that she was then able to apply to a contemporary social problem:

My thinking has changed severely because the other day I was coming out of the supermarket and a news reporter approached me and she was asking me what do I think about the price of sugar, what do I think about what's going on, you know these high prices and, as I started to relate to her, she was like "this is such a good interview, you study this thing", but I only related back from what I would have learned from the class. I would have connected back to what's going on right now especially with the sugar price here in Guyana and the cost of living and then I reflect back to her the ties that the Caribbean countries had with the ABC countries. So, for the Caribbean country are we ever really an independent nation if we're going to export our sugar to another country because even when I look up on videos that Guyana sugar is all over in these ABC countries flooding the supermarket and we here in Guyana cannot have the clean, packaged sugar. We have to buy the pound sugar and at severely high prices. [...] And, if we look back - take a good look, it all [goes] back to slavery how these countries have never really severed ties with the international countries. We are always in debt and we always owe them some sort of obligation.

Andrea's comparison of the local price, quality and availability of sugar produced in Guyana with foreign markets hints at an awareness of how global inequalities emanate from historical colonial relationships of inequality that persisted beyond independence into the contemporary period. While her narrative does not capture all the nuances associated with the situation, it seems to point to a "quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (Mills, 1959, p. 4) because of its connection of past with present and individual experience with a wider social context. In other words, Andrea's narrative seems to indicate her development of a distinct sociological imagination.

Connections and Potential Expressions of Sociological Imaginations

The reflections produced by students provide evidence about the potential of the action research intervention implemented. Students had opportunities to connect course content with their personal experiences and knowledge of the local context in ways that emboldened them to express original opinions. Excerpts from student reflections demonstrate that, rather than engaging with course content in abstract and general ways, students were able to personalize course content by connecting it with their funds of knowledge. In two separate reflections, Trisha connected content about the plantation system and gender equity with the life chances associated with her race and gender. Reflecting on course content about the plantation system, she wrote:

I think the content of this article had me doing some deep thinking as to how opportunities and privileges would be afforded to me based on my race/ skin colour. [It] reminded me that there are people in society who are educated and

qualified and encounter challenges securing jobs because they belong to a particular group or ethnicity and if I, too, would be one of those persons.

After engaging with course content on gender equity in education, her personalization of course content in a subsequent reflection deepened to also include gender:

I can only imagine how difficult it would be to thrive in society with the intersectional ties I have since many (like myself) are discriminated against just for being classified as a specific race and a specific gender, black woman.

Unlike Trisha's musings about possible discrimination, Lisa's reflection on gender equity in education included her past personal experience with gender stereotyping in academic subject choice. In her WhatsApp voice note reflection, she said:

When I was in high school and they were beginning to stream us off, I was practically forced into the humanities stream rather than doing something technology-based, which was the original goal.

For Pamela, reading content about Caribbean colonial education systems also connected with her own experience as a student within a banking education context. She wrote:

Even though we are not going through the exact situation as slaves, history still affects us to this day because our minds are still being taken from us. This took me back to my school days. I was deeply affected because of how I questioned everything. We were not allowed to do so many things. It felt as if I was only supposed to be existing in the school and follow every instruction of a teacher just because they are older.

Likewise, in Jamaica the education system was merely for discipline not necessarily your own knowledge or creative ideas. When exams were done the answers should have been what the teachers give and not what you've researched and that is why I still feel that the history affects us tremendously and that is why effective growth cannot be or is somewhat stagnant. Since we are suppressing the students and not really allowing them to be expressing as soon as you share something within the classroom the teacher sometime tend to say shut up or you talk too much without listening to what you have to say.

In addition to connecting her previous experience with course content, Pamela was also able to link the dynamics of a banking education context with paternalism in the wider society. Like hers, other students' reflections demonstrated similar connections between course content and social phenomena. In her reflection on Caribbean political integration, Julie wrote:

This week's overall reading is interesting and additional information was added to what I knew of the Caribbean community. It raises my concern on the importance of political integration within each community. This made me go back to the previous election issue our country encountered and the Caribbean community had to intervene.

Here, Julie's reflection on the Caribbean region's integration into the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) demonstrated the importance of the concept of regional integration by using a recent local example where CARICOM leaders helped to bring finality to the contested results of Guyana's 2020 elections (Caribbean Community

Secretariat, 2020). This connection of the conceptual to the local context can also be seen in Natalie's reflection on gender equity which includes the following statement:

This is the year 2022 and there are still professions which are mainly male dominated and some which are female dominated. Down to the vacancy announcements at certain places which boldly ask for "Male Employees only" when questioned some responses like men can't get pregnant so there is no need for 3 months maternity leave where another temporary staff will be required or another famous response this is "not woman wuk".

Her reflection presented a local phenomenon as an example of continued gender stereotyping in the world of work. Regarding gender equity, Andrea similarly used a local example in demonstrating her understanding of the concept. In her WhatsApp voice note reflection she stated:

Women as a group continued to face lower employment. The pandemic proved that. During the pandemic a lot of women got laid off from their jobs and there was a lot of unemployment among women.

Pamela, on reflecting about development in the Caribbean contrasted the popular imagery of the region with the real challenges and contradictions of its development, writing:

Oftentimes, we find people from the Caribbean migrating and people in the international countries tend to ask why since they visit the Caribbean countries and are in awe with everything from the food to its music. Then a whole history class starts all over again because of the economy and how it still struggles.

People require a greater opportunity to live in better condition and basically try to

make a greater source of income. Many are being underpaid and people literally want better for themselves so they leave to find that. So a lot of problem keep occurring and reoccurring because of the economy and the people with qualifications helps to develop another country because of the poor systems and institutions that are in theirs.

Thus, she links Caribbean underdevelopment with the phenomenon of brain drain complicated by the individual achievement motivations of Caribbean peoples.

In addition to using reflections to create a variety of connections; personal, conceptual, social, historical; students also used it to question the assumptions in the content they were reading. On Caribbean decolonization, Trisha wrote:

This article has me thinking about what life in Guyana would have been like if we were still ruled by the British. Looking at the way things are now, in terms of the poverty rate, unemployment, cost of living, the political competition and other factors, I am wondering if decolonization was such a bad thing and if countries that are still under the rulership of the British are better off than us.

Reflecting on the same topic, Pamela wrote:

The effects of the past was so painful and hurtful and sniffles the growth of Caribbean countries that is why they wanted to be decolonized. Why is it that countries that are rich in resources and diversity cannot flourish like countries like the UK , USA etc? Our power was taken from us beforehand so as we try to develop our society, we always have to resort to the past and its impact on the present.

While she questions the unequal development between colonized and colonizer, Pamela also responds to her own question with an assertion about the continued impact of the past on the present. Thus, in addition to making connections and questioning what they are learning, these assertions in students' reflections demonstrate their use in articulating original and sociologically informed arguments about the social world. Consider the following statements from Trisha, Pamela and Richard, an Afro-Guyanese teacher:

T: From what I grasped, foolishness and ignorance of their master's language made it easy for the slaves to be controlled. So, if they were to learn the language of their enslavers, they would no longer be fools but try to fight for what they wanted. Like the enslaved people and their enslavers, I think our leaders sometimes use politics and promises to somewhat control us.

P: Overall, I believe that Jamaica and other countries still face oppression in our educational system because we are withheld many things like expression and our own creativity. Until we can review and address our approach to education then we will be able to see effective growth and critical thinkers which will change the country.

R: One would ask the question, was Guyana truly really free? I think not, because for as far as I could remember, we were always influence and dependent on other country until this day. Being so dependent is in my view one of the factors that has stalled and slowed down the progress we have been making as a country.

Contained in these reflections are insights about the relationships between ignorance and paternalism, education and oppression, and freedom and dependency.

Discussion and Implications for Teaching Sociology

The current study provides support for the potential of action research in crafting context-appropriate pedagogical approaches towards developing sociological imaginations in the Caribbean context. In this case, it responded to the limitations of traditional approaches at the University of Guyana with a dialogic and inclusive pedagogical intervention. The banking education assumption about education being about students providing correct responses to questions based on knowledge previously transmitted by their teachers leaves little room for students to add their own perspectives or question what they have been taught. Here, students are debarred from engaging and expressing themselves in ways that would enable them to use their diverse funds of knowledge to develop distinct sociological imaginations (Castillo-Montoya, 2018; Hoop, 2009).

In contrast to the traditional approach of students reproducing previously delivered content, this intervention included students' funds of knowledge centrally in teaching and learning processes so that students could develop understandings of content from their unique worldviews. While the continued reliance on colonial approaches to education within the situated context of this study presents challenges for the development of sociological imaginations, this study nevertheless demonstrates how those dynamics can be disrupted. Its findings may prove useful for sociology instructors who teach in settings that resemble this study's context, or with students who may have had formative educational experiences within such settings.

This study demonstrates that mutually respectful and trusting faculty-student relationships that encourage students to engage with course content in deeply personalized ways create possibilities for the development of differentiated sociological imaginations. Whether through connecting past personal experiences, knowledge of social phenomena or concepts, the data collected in this study demonstrated how students were able to engage in reevaluation of the everyday through a sociological lens that led to questioning and the articulation of their own sociologically informed original arguments about the social world. Further, when combined with opportunities to share those perspectives through dialogic engagements with each other, this study demonstrates how students can build on their initial understandings to develop an appreciation for a multiplicity of perspectives and possible sociological imaginations in concert with each other. Thus, while this study does not claim to have developed a Caribbean sociological imagination per se, it suggests directions that can be pursued toward this end.

Even though the dialogic and inclusive approaches used in the current study emerged through the action research process, it shares similarities with the decolonizing qualitative methodologies of “groundings” used by one of Guyana’s most prolific academics. Walter Rodney’s (1969) practice of groundings, that is, engagement in dialogue with anyone, anywhere, has been characterized as an authentic Caribbean style of creating collective wisdom and consciousness with the masses (Stewart, 2019). Similarly, this study treats the work of developing sociological imaginations as one that involves dialogue and a shifting of power between teachers and learners. It places students, and their funds of knowledge, at the center of such efforts and positions

instructors in sociology as facilitators who create conditions that help students to develop their own versions of sociological imaginations by making connections between themselves and sociological content.

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Conclusion and Reflections

Emerging from historical periods of change; the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and Enlightenment, sociology has been centered on people trying to make sense of what is happening to them and the societies around them. In the first chapter of *The Sociological Imagination*, titled “The Promise”, C. Wright Mills (1959) offers sociological imaginations as a unique way of viewing the world, and, through that understanding, for the ordinary person to be able to participate in history making. This promise of being able to participate in history-making has always enticed my rebellious sensibilities. But educational change is not necessarily that dramatic.

Both Lemke (2000) and Dewey (1938) emphasized the connection between what we do now in the present and the futures that we can create. Dewey used the term maturity to describe people who have some idea of the connection between the present and the future and stressed that the future must be considered at every stage of the educational process. Thus, although educational planning is often heavily reliant on the past, the Deweyan perspective suggests that a different kind of thinking, futures thinking, is required in educational leadership. Changing the future requires acting in the present and, as the present becomes past, we also participate in history-making by continuing to act within the only timeframe we can, that is, the present.

But, what about tradition? Marx’s (1852/2006) statement that “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (p. 329) has always seemed to me an appropriate analogy for the limitations imposed upon the potentials of each generation by the traditions of bygone eras. In the situated context of this

dissertation study at the University of Guyana, the approaches of the colonial era were what produced that nightmarish and liminal sort of existence, caught between the traditions of the past and the futures we can create. I have previously described my own conflicted feelings of pride and hope, fear and shame at the disjuncture between what I thought education could be and the traditions of my situated context but, the stifled potential of students is also evident in the frustrations they have expressed in this research project about their educational experiences at UG.

Years removed from the colonial era, respect for tradition seems an insufficient reason for continuing to hold on to educational approaches that oppress Caribbean peoples. Why shouldn't we now embrace approaches to teaching and learning that reject the fundamental colonial assumptions about who possesses power in the classroom and the dichotomy of teacher-centered or student-centered, for viewing teaching and learning as reciprocal? Yes, these are possibilities, but change is difficult. Heath and Heath's (2010) description of Kotter and Cohen's See-Feel-Change sequence of change provides some insight. The Heath brothers argue that being presented with evidence that affects them at the emotional level is a necessary precondition for people *feeling* the need for change. While my need to reconcile the conflict between what I imagined education could be and the traditions of my context motivated much of my efforts towards fusion, as I approach the culmination of my doctoral journey, I also sense the magnitude of the work ahead.

As I have explained in my monograph, my dissertation journey did not begin with an intention to use approaches to teaching and learning that are fundamentally different

from what was common within my context. I had hoped that by focusing my project on sociology, I could create limited change in my courses, my department, and my campus. But rather than attributing the evolution of my project to serendipity, I recognize its emergence from my own desires to create room for the experiences and voices that have previously been marginalized. Experimenting with dialogic and inclusive pedagogy had been necessary for moving towards sociological imaginations. However, the findings of this project have wider implications for policy and practice at the University of Guyana and in teaching sociology.

Relationships of Trust

First, the importance of mutually respectful relationships of trust between teachers and students cannot be overstated. These relationships create a comfortable learning environment where students can seek and receive help and have the freedom to, in their academic work, engage their curiosities, experiment, and even make mistakes. Rather than the fear of producing incorrect answers, mutually respectful relationships of trust allow students to exert efforts towards learning unencumbered by the fear of failure. The paradox between comfort and challenge that I've described in my monograph suggests that both are necessary. Challenges are important for learning but comfortable learning environments that welcome the possibility of failure creates the conditions for students to see learning as a process that is less straightforward than the mere reproduction of correct answers to questions.

Relationships of trust are also important in creating room for vulnerability, and consequently, authenticity. In this dissertation project, this can be seen in two ways. First,

vulnerability is needed for the activation of student voice in teaching and learning processes and second, it is required for honest and authentic inclusion in action research projects. Personalizing learning, while meaningful, is challenging, and I would argue, next to impossible without relationships of trust. In this dissertation project, I asked students to connect course content with their funds of knowledge leading to them bringing elements from their lives to the classroom. Given the traditional approaches to education in Guyana and at UG, this could have been a disconcerting experience. And, given that only half of the students affected by my action research intervention shared their perspectives in the data collection phase of this project, I can only assume that my attempts to create relationships of trust were only partially successful.

Sharing the responsibility for teaching and learning also requires relationships of trust. In this project, my use of a student-led discussion activity pointed to the potential for similarly designed activities to empower students to feel competence and confidence about the validity of their own perspectives as they connect their funds of knowledge with academic materials. It also signals a shift in power around who is responsible for knowledge creation. In the student-led discussions, the questions that students asked to invite their colleagues to share their perspectives were most times met with silence. And, while that awkward silence continued until students answered their own questions or I did, in my role as “student for the day”, the discomfort of learning without dialogue and reciprocity was clear. Education should not be left up to students alone or teachers alone. It involves the entirety of the instructional dynamic; teachers, students and content in the environments designated for learning.

Reflection, Reciprocity and Dialogue in Times of Change

Over the past 60 years since the founding of the University of Guyana, technological change has led to the emergence of a deep contradiction about education. Even though access to information has evolved from physical books in libraries, to online multimedia repositories accessible by search engines and, more recently, to AI technologies that can search for and compile such information, the techniques and strategies used in education at the University of Guyana have remained much the same. That is, while there have been some efforts towards student-centered pedagogical approaches, there is a general reliance on the banking education approach of teachers depositing information into students. But, if information transmission is all that matters, then we have already developed the technologies that make educators irrelevant. Rather than maintaining the limited view of education as a tool for information transmission, this emerging conflict between human and AI challenges us to view education as being more about knowledge co-creation at the intersection of our human experiences with the body of knowledge produced by those who have come before.

In this dissertation study, positioning reflections as a starting point for meaningful dialogic exchanges among students, and between students and their lecturers was an intentional design choice. While the literature on developing sociological imaginations considers reflection important, my own experience with reflection in my doctoral journey has underscored to me the deep learning that comes from reading, thinking, and articulating new connections between content and experience. But this study also suggests that the insights obtained through individual reflections can be further

transformed by engagements with others. Dialogue offers that potential for democratizing knowledge creation and for creating openness to the multiplicity of perspectives.

However, it requires reciprocity to transcend mere knowledge transmission. While my action research intervention provided opportunities for students to extend their reflections through dialogue with each other in the classroom, it was through our research interview conversations that I saw glimpses of the untapped potential for conversations initiated by reflection. Thus, the personalized learning that happens in individual reflections can be leveraged towards context-specific knowledge creation using reciprocal classroom exchanges. Here, the model of education aimed at is one based on collaboration and shared responsibility.

However, while this research project suggests changing the dynamics of classroom interactions towards collaboration, it also has implications for how the institutional culture at the University of Guyana can be realigned in similar ways. Specifically, my suggestion that collective knowledge creation occurs through the fusion of experience and content and is enhanced by reciprocal dialogic exchanges also extends to UG educators. Even as we engage in moments of educational change in isolated spheres of influence, the potential exists for dialogue to transform those moments into movements across the university community. In doctoral studies with my cohort, being exposed to the concept of a community of practice did not lead to its organic creation. It also did not resolve the tension between competition and collaboration in our institutional culture. But failing at such collaboration is indicative of the transformative work remaining to be done.

Towards Inclusion and Decolonizing Education

Throughout my doctoral studies at ASU, I have felt a sense of belonging in an institution that values inclusion. While UG's recent creation of an Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity Policy (University of Guyana, 2021) formalizes the value of inclusive education at this higher education institution and articulates its embrace of student-centered pedagogies, it does so without specifically framing it using the language of decolonizing education. Beckford's (1971/2001) work on plantation as an institution includes the following statement "Caribbean economy and society can move forward to provide a just existence for its peoples only if the plantation foundations on which the contemporary society rests are completely destroyed" (pp. 148-149). This suggests that to ignore the plantation and colonial origins of teacher-centered and banking education approaches in the UG context risks overlooking the reasons for shifting from such approaches to inclusive education. To the uninformed, the choice between teacher-centered or student-centered may be seen as equivalent, and given the unequal power between students and teachers, one approach is more easily implemented than the other. Here, I imply that, without understanding the history and context behind why we do what we do, our engagement in inclusive education practices can slip into the familiar or traditional.

I do not make this claim as a hypothetical; I am already guilty of taking the easy way out. My action research intervention had changed the instructional dynamic in one of my courses but, even as I analyzed and wrote about findings that supported the transformative potential of dialogic and inclusive pedagogy, I reverted to previously used

approaches. Rather than reflections and dialogic discussions, I used online written discussion forums and interactive lectures. I did this for two reasons; first, I thought that it would be easier and would allow me to focus on my dissertation and, second, without the excuse of a dissertation study, I felt less empowered to change the instructional dynamic. The feeling of failure that came from this regression grew from the silence in my classes this semester into a paralyzing belief that, even though my dissertation studies had positioned me as an educational leader at UG, the little that I had changed could not be scaled up without future confrontations. But I was already invested, and my dissatisfaction at the old ways meant that I had no choice but to take up those confrontations where and when they happened. Feeling empowered again also came from reminding myself of the powerful potential of action research to contribute to decolonizing education at UG as educators engage in ongoing research and change. Thus, while I agree with Livingstone's (2019) recommendation that reflective practice is important for improving teaching and learning at the University of Guyana, I also add action research as important for empowering educators towards decolonizing education.

Decolonizing education requires reflectively acknowledging our own coloniality and the need to continue to engage in our own internal decolonial work. Stewart's (2019) admission as editor of a volume on decolonizing qualitative research in the Caribbean that, "none of the authors or myself are fully decolonized because we are all trained by the massa's hand within eyeshot of the colonizer's gaze" (p. 20) resonated with me. Turning my sociological imagination inward to recognize my own complicity underscored the importance of continuing to remind myself of my own philosophies and

reasons for teaching. My joy comes from helping students to actualize their potentials but without extending this project into collaborative action research and even participatory action research, this dissertation project will remain limited to one experiment in a UG course. So, yes, further research is needed. But this dissertation suggests that dialogic and inclusive education should not only centrally include students' funds of knowledge but that it should create space for students to express themselves in more authentic ways erasing the disjuncture between everyday interactions and academic discourse. Whether this involves WhatsApp, TikTok or something else is left up to our imaginations and our willingness to dare to rebel against tradition.

Although my experience with action research has convinced me of the usefulness of action research, and dialogic and inclusive pedagogical approaches for educational improvement at UG, it has taken years of study and action research to arrive at my conclusions. I do not anticipate that shifting away from traditional banking and teacher-centered approaches to teaching and learning at UG will happen easily. Changing the minds of UG educators and administrators, and its institutional structures and culture will require time and sustained effort. But, while change may be difficult, I remain convinced that it is not impossible.

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APPENDIX A
PREVIOUS CYCLES OF RESEARCH

Cycle 0

I collected background information and baseline data from a small group of key informants (three sociology faculty members and three sociology students) to gain a better understanding of my research problem. To learn about strategies for developing sociological imaginations, I interviewed informants about the utility of reflective writing to developing sociological imaginations using Zoom audio. Then, I listened repeatedly to the audio recordings of the interviews and made detailed notes to identify the key ideas or concepts discussed by these interview subjects.

Cycle 1

I asked a group of 17 students in a final year Caribbean sociology course I teach to read course learning material on education in the Caribbean, individually answer my questions on the material and then collectively discuss their learning in a Zoom audio meeting. After these activities, I collected survey data and conducted qualitative interviews with three students about their experiences. Following Ivankova's (2015) suggestions on analyzing mixed methods data, I analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data separately before combining them to produce meta-inferences. I analyzed the summary displays (graphs) first to determine the general trends in the statistical data then I read the interview transcripts and the open-ended survey questions several times before open coding, that is, assigning codes to meaningful segments of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Ivankova, 2015). I constantly compared codes to ensure that none were overlapping (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and used a spreadsheet to organize the initial codes, focused codes and themes produced from this process. Finally, I used a summary table to compare the qualitative and quantitative data side by side before making meta-inferences.

APPENDIX B

COURSE OUTLINE AND TOPICS USED IN CYCLE 2

**UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA
BERBICE CAMPUS
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

COURSE OUTLINE

**SOC 4200: CARIBBEAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE (4 CREDITS)
ACADEMIC YEAR 2021/2022 SEMESTER 2
MODIFIED FOR ONLINE DELIVERY**

LECTURER INFORMATION

Lecturer: MS. ANGELINA AUTAR
Email address: angelina.autar@uog.edu.gy
Office Phone: 662-5106
Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4 PM via Zoom

COURSE INFORMATION

Duration: 13 weeks
Lectures: 3 hours per week
Tutorials: 1 hour per week
Pre-requisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is aimed at developing an understanding of Caribbean Sociology. Students will therefore be exposed to literature with respect to the emergence and development of Caribbean societies beginning from what Charles Wagley described as a culture sphere – Plantation America to the contemporary independent states of the Caribbean.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this course is to relate some of the basic sociological concepts to the experiences (history) of Caribbean societies which include countries such as Guyana, West Indian Islands, Haiti, Cuba, Suriname etc. In pursuance of this objective, emphasis will be placed on the historical process of the transformation of the aforesaid societies within the world system.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Outline theoretical and historical perspectives on the social structure of the Caribbean including that of the Caribbean as the culture sphere called Plantation America.

2. Explain the concept of a “total institution” and its usefulness in the creation and maintenance of slavery and the Caribbean plantation society.
3. Identify the characteristics of plantation society and describe the relationships between different individuals and groups of individuals in plantation society.
4. Compare Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean family forms and the extent to which they have changed over time.
5. Analyse the paradox of education being both liberating and oppressing to Caribbean people in colonial and contemporary contexts.
6. Discuss the diversity of religions and belief systems in the Caribbean and demonstrate their influence on modern Caribbean social structure.
7. Evaluate the historical events that led to decolonialisation and the granting of independence in the Caribbean.
8. Assess the impact of globalisation on the Caribbean social structure and its implications for the future of the Caribbean.

COURSE CONTENT

Week	Topics
1-2	<p><u>Introduction</u> William Lynch – Let’s Make a Slave What is Social Structure Sociological definitions of Social Structure</p>
	<p><u>The Caribbean</u> Theoretical and historical perspectives Plantation America – the Culture Sphere</p>
3	<p><u>The Plantation Society</u> Slavery and Indentureship Social Organization & Social Structure in the Plantation Society</p>
4-5	<p><u>Social Stratification</u> Effects of Plantation Society on Relationships The Plural Society debate Social Stratification and Cultural Pluralism</p>
6	<p><u>Caribbean Family & Kinship Forms</u> The Afro-Caribbean Family Structure Matrifocality Changes over time in the East Indian Family Persistence and Change in Family Forms in the Caribbean</p>

Week	Topics
7	<u>Mid Semester Exam</u>
	<u>Education</u> Education in the pre-emancipation period
8-10	The socialization intent in Colonial Education between 1870 – 1914 Education and Equality of Opportunity The World of School and the World of Work
	<u>Religion and Belief Systems</u>
11	Voodoo Rastafarian and other beliefs Muslim and Hindu Religion
	<u>Political Development in the Caribbean</u>
12 - 13	Colonial Society and the Process of Decolonization The Role of Trade Unionism in politics during Colonialism The Granting of Independence to the former British territories CARICOM Globalization

METHOD OF TEACHING

This final year course requires students to be participants in interactive lectures and individual and group learning activities.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

Mid-Semester Exam	30%
Discussion Forum	5%
Student Reflections	25%
Student-led Group Discussion	10%
End of Semester Exam	<u>30%</u>
TOTAL	<u>100%</u>

GRADING SCHEME

A	- 75% to 100%
B	- 65% to 74%
C	- 55% to 64%
D	- 45% to 54%
F	- 0% to 45%

REQUIRED READINGS

- Abdullah, D. (2007, September 25). Caribbean movements then and now: A labor view. *North American Congress on Latin America*. <https://nacla.org/article/caribbean-movements-then-and-now-labor-view>
- Bacchus, M. K. (2001). Education in the pre-emancipation period (with special reference to the colonies which later became British Guiana). In C. Barrow & R. Reddock (Eds.), *Caribbean sociology: Introductory readings* (pp. 645–665). Ian Randle Publishers.
- Bailey, B. (2003). The search for gender equity and the empowerment of Caribbean women: The role of education. In T. Nain & B. Bailey (Eds.), *Gender Equality in the Caribbean: Reality or Illusion*, (pp. 108-145). Ian Randle Publishers.
- Barrow, C. (1996). Men, women, and family in the Caribbean. In C. Barrow & R. Reddock (Eds.), *Caribbean sociology: Introductory readings* (pp. 418-426). Ian Randle Publishers.
- Beckford, G. L. (2001). Plantation society: Toward a general theory of Caribbean society. In C. Barrow & R. Reddock (Eds.), *Caribbean Sociology – Introductory Readings* (pp. 139-150). Ian Randle Publishers. (Reprinted from *Savacou*, 5, 1971, (pp. 7-22)).
- Danns, G. (1997). Race and development in plural societies: The case of Guyana. *Caribbean Dialogue*, 3(2), 32-41.
- Fernández-Olmos, M. & Paravisini-Gebert, L. (2011). *Creole religions of the Caribbean: An introduction from vodou and santeria to obeah and espiritismo* (2nd ed.). NYU Press.
- Kachua, E. (2018). Creolization as model for tradition in plural societies: The Caribbean experience. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 2(4), 201-210. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2527172>
- Nevamdivsky, J. (1983). Changes over time and space in the East Indian family in Trinidad. In C. Barrow & R. Reddock (Eds.), *Caribbean sociology: Introductory readings* (pp. 449-470). Ian Randle Publishers

Reid, A. (2018, July 13). How Europe underdeveloped the Caribbean. *Jamaica Gleaner*.
<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/focus/20180715/ahmed-reid-how-europe-underdeveloped-caribbean>

The Saylor Foundation. *Decolonization in the British Empire*. Retrieved from
<https://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/HIST103-9.2.2-BritishEmpireDecolonization-FINAL.pdf>

Turner, T. A. (2001). The socialization intent in colonial Jamaican education 1867-1911. In C. Barrow & R. Reddock (Eds.), *Caribbean sociology: Introductory readings* (pp. 666–684). Ian Randle Publishers.

Wagley, C. (1960). Plantation-America: A culture sphere. In V. Rubin (Ed.), *Caribbean studies: a symposium* (2nd ed.). University of Washington Press.

Week of Intervention	Topics
1	Caribbean Family & Kinship Forms Changes over time and space in the East Indian Family
2	Education Education in the pre-emancipation period
3	Education The socialization intent in Colonial Education between 1870 – 1914
4	Education Gender Equity and Search for Empowerment of Caribbean Women
5	Religion and Belief Systems Creole Religions of the Caribbean Rastafarianism
6	Political Development in the Caribbean Colonial Society and the Process of Decolonization The Role of Trade Unionism in politics during Colonialism
7	Political Development in the Caribbean CARICOM Globalization

APPENDIX C

GUIDELINES FOR CYCLE 2 INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES

Name of Assignment: Student Reflection

Assignment weight: 5 marks for submission of each of 5 reflections = 25 marks = 25% of grade

Due Date: Reflections should be submitted before the topic is scheduled to be discussed in class.

Structure: These reflections are intended to allow you to think through the process of writing or composing to connect course content to your own knowledge and experience. They are meant to be informal and can include *creolese* and even broken or incomplete sentences. Either a few written paragraphs, or an audio or video reflection that is a few minutes long, would be appropriate.

Areas for reflection:

- Summary of main ideas or concepts discussed in the material
- Explanation of why you chose that material
- Description of your reaction to the material and its connections to other materials/ideas
- Discussion of the extent to which the content is relevant or meaningful to your own life
- Any questions that arose from the material
- Final thoughts about your interaction with the material

Submission

You should select 5 topics from the 7 topics scheduled to be discussed during the months of May and June 2022. You may submit written, audio, or video reflections using the assignment submission link for the respective week in the University of Guyana Moodle page. Alternately, you can send a WhatsApp message (typed, voice message, or video) with your submission to your course lecturer using telephone number (592) 662-5106. Please be sure to include your name when sending WhatsApp messages.

Feedback

Feedback on your reflection will be provided within one week of your submission using the same method you chose for your submission (Moodle or WhatsApp).

Name of Assignment: Student-led Discussion

Assignment Weight: 10 marks for participation = 10% of final grade

Due Date: Students will organize in groups of four or five and will select the week for which they are interested in leading the class discussion of the content. Selections will be allocated on a first-come basis so students should organize early and email their choice of week to the course lecturer as soon as possible.

Structure: After welcoming students to the class, the course lecturer will step aside for students to lead a discussion of the course learning material focusing on the following areas:

- Summary of main ideas or concepts discussed in the material chosen
- Description of group members' individual and collective reaction to the material and its connections to other materials/ideas
- Discussion of the extent to which the content is relevant or meaningful to the Guyanese experience
- Relevant questions that arise from the material

Helpful Hint

As the student-led discussions build on the individual reflection assignment, it will be helpful for all group members to engage in that activity first. The use of learning aids is encouraged and should be indicated to the course lecturer ahead of time.

APPENDIX D

END OF COURSE STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank the interview subject for agreeing to participate in the research interview. Mention that the interview will include specific questions about the course as well as a few general questions.

1. How would you describe your learning experience in the course that we did together?
2. In what ways would you say it is similar to other courses you have taken? How was it different?
3. Tell me what you enjoyed most about the course and why.
4. Tell me a bit about your reflections. Why did you choose to do it the way you did? What would you say was most useful about the reflection assignment? What was most challenging?
5. How about the student-led discussion? How would you describe the interactions? What was useful about that? What was challenging?
6. Over the semester, how would you describe the participation of your classmates in discussions? What about you? When did you feel most encouraged/discouraged to participate?
7. How useful did you find the different activities in helping you connect your personal experiences to the topic?
8. How would you say your thinking has changed over the semester, if in any way?
9. If there was anything you could change about the course, what would it be?
10. What do you think makes a good teacher?
11. What do you think makes a good student?

Thank the interview subject for their time and for sharing their perspectives. Remind them about confidentiality of responses.

APPENDIX E
STUDENT RESPONSES TO INTERVENTION

Enjoying new/fun/different activities

Lisa: The methods that we had this semester from you, they were fairly new and we haven't done anything like that, since we started the online class so they were definitely something that was appreciated by me.

Trisha: For me, it was kind of new being that you've taught us throughout the years. I really enjoyed the different activities that we had to do, because usually, we never had to do like a discussion or presentation for you so I really enjoyed the newness.

Amanda: It's a good system of what you have, you know. It's new in a way that people feel, you know, in a way, it's not repetitive and it ain't boring. It's actually quite different but in a good way because how you structured your um stuff for the course, like your teaching methods and the assessments and so forth, you know, it's quite in order, I would say. Things are done in a effective manner, so I would say yeah its different than what I'm used to but it's quite good.

Natalie: Apart from the whole learning experience, it was a fun one. Yeah, it's a combination of not just being academic work, work, work only or in a pressured way I should say. It was a fun one, a lovely learning experience.

Pamela: It was fun, something new and because it was something new, it's like "oh, my gosh, it's so interesting, like I want to do this".

“wide room for breathing”

Lisa: I've been told, many times that I have a way with words and if I start writing I'll never stop, and I really don't have time. So instead of doing all of that, I decided speaking would be best so I chose like the format of sending it in the voice notes, since it was allowed and it better allowed me to communicate, because if I type then I'll have to put everything in the proper English and question marks and punctuation and I was given somewhat a freedom, when I just spoke as I was allowed to use it was my Creole you could hear my tone of voice and stuff like that. So that really worked out well.

Amanda: For me to properly submit all my stuff, my reflections, the majority of the time I need to use a computer but the thing is, I leave it at home. So I would like to at least have this like, you know, 24/7 access with just my phone. I don't think - so the weird thing is with my phone is that when you try to submit stuff from email from my fault, it does not work, I don't know why. But, it, the Whatsapp option is like you know basically another option to submit stuff. I say you know what, this is nice, you know there's a wide room for breathing, and you know, you don't got to like stress when you go home, if you reach home after, you know, the submission date and dem thing. You don't got to worry about that. It's just your phone with you and you type based on what was read and what was understood and you just submit it.

And the thing is, too, is that I enjoy that we had a choice in choosing. That's the thing. It's not really set or, you know, compulsory where like, for example, you have four reflections and you got to do all four, you know. You could do, like what you gave, it was like seven reflections and we had to do five, right. So you pick and choose what you're most

comfortable with in terms of the topic, and then you basically read and understand, and you know, try to relate and put it into words or voice audio which was another choice, so you know that's one of the main things that I actually liked about the course.

Natalie: I think that I am a bit shy, as it relates to doing the whole video. I think the fact that there was options that you could have chosen, one either to record or write, I think that is part of what would have hinder it as well, so I'm a bit shy so that's why I chose that approach, the writing one, yes. But if I had had that one being the main option that I had to do the video, you know, I would have um built the courage and do it that way, but being a bit shy and having to put it on record um you know I chose to write right.

Andrea: I could have chose any other format, but my main thing was time. During that semester, time was a big problem like fitting in the time to - even though I'm doing the reading on whatever the shift I was on, the other courses we were under pressure. So my best way to like deal with the reflection, and if you could have recalled most of my reflection is done like minutes before the class that we had to finish the reflection for. So if class is starting at 4:30, I get home at 3. I probably wrap up some reading at work and then come home hurriedly rush the reflection and then to get to class on time so um it was great that we had more than one method to submit the reflection. So I think I took advantage of the voice note form, instead of writing, which I could have but I'm not gonna lie, time was an issue for me.

“doing it in your own perspective”

Lisa: I think this was the only course I had this semester that really valued my learning experience and how I interpreted the information, whereas the others were just a matter of “you have to memorize this” or you have to specifically just know this, you have to remember this at all times and this one really got me to engage with the information, use it in my world, take my perspective on, stuff like that.

Trisha: I actually enjoyed it, since we had to like discuss our own thoughts and not by the book, I actually enjoyed that aspect, and also the reflections. Usually we have to like give references so not having to do that made it really easy to give our thoughts and for other colleagues to share their views

Amanda: I think it was challenging because it actually came from myself. The thing is, is that it might sound easy that, you know, you got to reflect about what was read and you know it come from yourself, so you should be alright. But it's like you want to be truthful, you know, as to what you want to write, but then, at the same time, what you read and what you think is two different ah ideals right? So, like, for a piece of time, I was a bit in a dilemma because you feel like, you know, what was read you might not agree with it.

I could remember the in class discussion that we had to do and it was different um because you know, we had to read the material, we had to understand what we are speaking to our colleagues, and especially to you so it's not like it's a presentation where you know you got those points and then you speak a lil, lil, lil on each you know, and that's it. You could actually relate to what was being presented or read.

When we had to do the reflections, it might sound odd but is like you really, like, could show or prove in a way that you know, you do follow, and you do understand I should say in a better term you do understand the material that was taught right? And I felt that, um, the reflections or the requirement of actually doing the reflections is a way in which we could actually understand because remember you're doing it in your own perspective and it's basically what you read and what you understand is you put.

Andrea: Oh, my thinking has changed um severely because um the other day I was coming out of the supermarket and a news reporter approached me, right. And she was asking me what do I think about the price of sugar, what do I think about what's going on, you know this high prices and as I started to relate to her, she was like this is such a good interview, you study this thing, but I only related back from what I would have learned from the class I would have connected back to what's going on right now especially with the sugar price here in Guyana and the cost of living and then you know I reflect back to her, you know, the ties that the Caribbean country had with the ABC country. So, for the Caribbean country are we ever really an independent nation if we're going to export our sugar to other country because even when I look up on videos that Guyana sugar is all over in these ABC country flooding the supermarket and we here in Guyana cannot have the clean, packaged sugar. We have to buy the pound sugar and at severely high prices. Why are you going to suffer the citizens of your country to please these international country? And, and if we look back - take a good look, it all come from all the way back to slavery. How these countries have never really severed ties with the international countries. We are always in debt and we always owe them some sort of obligation.

APPENDIX F
IRB STUDY APPROVAL



EXEMPTION GRANTED

[Gustavo Fischman](#)
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)
480/965-5225
fischman@asu.edu

Dear [Gustavo Fischman](#):

On 4/25/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Integrating Dialogic and Inclusive Pedagogy within a Final Year Sociology Course at the University of Guyana
Investigator:	Gustavo Fischman
IRB ID:	STUDY00015803
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Angelina Autar IRB Social Behavioral Protocol 04-20-2022.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;• Angelina Autar recruitment_methods_email_04-20-2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Angelina Autar supporting documents 04-04-2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);• University of Guyana Site Permission Letter, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings, (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 4/25/2022.