

## CHAPTER 5

### EPILOGUE:

#### CASCARA, THE AVES, MY STUDY – A FINAL REFLECTION

A ‘common-sense’ approach to reflection suggests that it lies somewhere around the notion of learning. We reflect on something in order to consider it in more detail. ... Usually we reflect because we have a purpose for reflecting – a goal to reach. ... Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. ... Reflection is not just an ‘add-on-extra’ to academic learning, but it is an essential component of good quality learning and the representation of that learning (Moon, 2005: 2 – 3).

In reflecting on the process that I undertook, I realise how privileged I was to have had the opportunity to work, live and complete my fieldwork on the island of Cascara. I have learnt many lessons and gained many professional and personal insights and memories from my time on Cascara. I am a richer person for the experience. In this epilogue, I reflect on my study, Cascara, the AVES and the AVES Curriculum. I also reflect on the theoretical framework; the methodological approach; the main research aims; and policy and practical significance of my study. Thereafter, I reflect on the people of Cascara and I conclude with some personal reflections.

#### Reflections on the Literature

This study has presented an exploration into the challenges associated with the sustainable delivery of an adult and vocational education curriculum in the Cascarian context. In attempting to understand this, I embarked on a review of the literature and reflected on the concept of curriculum, the notion of adult and vocational learning, including several theories of adult learning – and I explored approaches to the teaching of adults. While investigating these issues, I delved into the historic and current provision of adult and vocational learning on the island. The data highlighted that adult learners have a need for their learning to be relevant and practical. This accords with Zemke’s (2001) contention that adults need learning programmes to acknowledge their life experiences. Zemke (*ibid*) further contends that adults need to see the benefit of the learning in their

everyday lives. The data also highlighted the need adult learners have to recognise the link between the learning programme and how this would advance them in the world of work.

This review of the literature then led me to consider the economy and the symbiotic relationship it has with the provision of learning. In doing this, I explored numerous curriculum development theories: essentialism, encyclopaedism, polytechnicalism, pragmatism and Slattery's (1998) reconceptualisation of curriculum. The data demonstrated that the AVES Curriculum incorporates different aspects of each of these. The data also showed an eclectic use of the various approaches to curriculum: transmission, product, process and praxis. It was evident that a reflective curricular process of "planning, acting and evaluating" (Grundy, 1987: 115) was in place at the AVES. The data therefore demonstrates that the AVES Curriculum is grounded in Slattery's (1998) reconceptualised model of curriculum. The ultimate aim of the AVES training programmes is rooted in economic empowerment and emancipation.

Following on from this, I extended my debate to consider economic development and the form that this has taken on Cascara Island thus far. The data showed that the biggest constraint to economic development on Cascara is the lack of human resource, given the declining population of the island. This further highlights the need for partnership arrangements and collaborative working in the planning and delivery of adult learning initiatives. Willerup (2006) notes that effective partnerships will aid in establishing a co-ordinated approach to training and delivery. Further to this, it would be prudent for the island to look for cost saving avenues as it moves away from financial dependency towards self-sufficiency.

Extending my research debate, I considered human capital theory and capacity building and investigated how these could be incorporated into the learning programmes on offer to sustainably serve the Cascarian economy. The data showed that one of the main challenges in the isolated Cascarian context is insufficient human resource and therefore a lack of local people skilled in all areas necessary for the functioning of the island. While Maoz & Maov (1999)

argue that human capital investment in the context of education and learning requires a shift away from the notion of education and training, towards the ideal of improved jobs – the data demonstrated that this is problematic given the human resource shortages on Cascara. The lack of locally available human resource impacts on funding as expatriate officers often need to be employed at higher wages than their Cascarian counterparts. The human resource debate also included a consideration of the roles and responsibilities of island employers in assisting this process. The data showed that while the AVES aims to prepare Cascarians for air access related economic activities, there is local acknowledgement that the timescale for upskilling Cascarians with high level technical skills is very limited. To this end, the data suggests that in the short-term, the AVES can play a vital role in providing many Cascarians with lower level technical skills so that they can participate in air access opportunities. The broad agenda behind the introduction of the AVES is neither emancipatory or praxis; instead it is serving a very real and practical need and therefore all components of the curriculum do not support educating for education and knowledge alone. This supports Sultana's (1997) contention that post-colonial states require less skilled workers who can support developments at a lower level.

Against this backdrop, I investigated the notion of change and how this impacted on sustainability. To support this, I reviewed literature on social movements and curriculum change and also read widely on educational change, while continuously applying these to the Cascarian context. The concept of sustainability emerged through my data as critical to the success of the AVES with need for strong sustainable measures (Venetoulis, 2001). This, the data suggested, required secure budgeting provision that would support long-term planning; access to appropriately skilled and experienced staff; and the availability of the physical resources needed to support the learning process.

As my fieldwork began, I realised that I also needed to explore other sustainability issues that impacted on the provision of learning under the AVES. To this effect, I explored the following issues and how they related to the Cascarian context: colonialism, control, dependency, financial aid, power and leadership. Following on from this, I investigated five island case studies with

features comparable to those of Cascara. What emerged through the data was that Cascara is at a very exciting stage in its history and the AVES is a powerful vehicle that can shift Cascarians to a place of new and exciting opportunities as they redefine who and what they are. Bourdieu (2010; 1998: 20) recognises cultural capital as “an object of unquestioning reverence” and calls for a new concept of culture that presents as a “set of lived experiences and social practices developed within asymmetrical relations of power” (*ibid*). This notion of cultural capital, coupled with the data that emerged from my study, calls for a challenge to traditional views within colonised contexts such as Cascara. Giroux (2010; 1992: 104) further describes these processes of critical pedagogy as beginning with the colonised being able to reclaim “their own histories, voices and visions”. To this end, Spivak (2008: 58) cautions against moving towards ‘neo-colonisation’ where the locus of power shifts from the centre to the margin, with the margin merely reproducing the colonial model. This highlights the need for the AVES to continue to respond to the needs of the island in a sensitive and supportive manner. As a fledgling training service to the island of Cascara, the data suggests that the AVES had made a good start.

### **Reflections on the Methodological Process**

In respect of research methodology, the unique context of Cascara Island, gave my research new and exciting possibilities. My qualitative case study approach helped elicit the data needed to answer my research questions. I documented the issues around my positioning as both researcher and AVES Manager; I provided details of the data elicitation techniques and research instruments that I employed; I explained how I handled the issues associated with confidentiality and anonymity in the amplified and isolated Cascarian context; and I reflected on the process I undertook to analyse and validate my data.

My hope is that the challenges and success that I faced in conducting my study, might be of use to other researchers working in similar contexts or adapting similar methodological approaches to their enquiries. I now reflect on my research findings.

## Reflections on the Research Findings

The Adult and Vocational Education Service, its supporting Strategy and the AVES Curriculum were launched in June 2006. The Service was established to centralise the provision of adult and vocational training on the island with a bias towards learning areas that would support the economic activities associated with the air access project. The AVES started more or less from scratch and much of its efforts since then have moved into establishing an infrastructure for the new Service.

The comprehensive vision for the AVES Strategy as supporting the economic and social development of Cascara was and remains relevant. However, given the uncertainty around the air access decision, it would be prudent for the AVES to reconsider its curricular focus areas on a regular basis.

When mapped against the three agreed Objectively Verifiable Indicators<sup>40</sup> agreed with the AID, the AVES has had some reasonable initial impact but statistics show that the numbers of 16 – 18 year olds on vocational courses have not yet returned to the peak reached in 2005; and the majority of 16 – 18 year olds on the island are on A Level or Youth Training Programmes that pre-existed AVES. The second indicator – full employment – might be considered as partially achieved but it is not evident that AVES can take credit for this as statistics are also skewed by outmigration. In respect of the third Objectively Verifiable Indicator – during 2008/09 financial year the AVES attracted some 350 post-16 year olds to take accredited courses mainly of a directly or indirectly vocational nature. This represents the equivalent of over 15% of the working age population and a further 25% (or over 600 adults) were enrolled on unaccredited courses in 2008/09. These are high levels of participation by international standards but it is not clear however that they will translate into numbers who gain accredited qualifications. It is this consideration of accredited learning which appears to be the established indicator of success on Cascara Island.

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<sup>40</sup> 1. a 50% increase in the proportion of the qualified workforce;  
2. a reduction in unemployment; and  
3. an increasing trend in post-16 education (*ibid*)

The mix of qualifications developed and currently on offer under the AVES Curriculum have been driven and determined by the funding arrangements for the Strategy. These funding streams are determined by the AID, the Cascarian Government and Education Department Senior Managers. The data showed a need for the decision-making in this regard to shift away from the AID, as the island made its first moves towards political and subsequent economic emancipation. Shujaa's (1996) warned that dependency retards the development of a free and autonomous national identity and my research identified that self-governance and its associated freedoms (social, political and economic) will present Cascarians with new and exciting opportunities – particularly as the island prepares for the change that will be brought about by air access.

To date, much energy has been focussed on developing NVQs which are awarded through an awarding body in the metropole. The impetus for this in the circumstances of Cascara is well justified; but the practical difficulty in establishing this NVQ structure has impacted on each of the specific outputs funded by the AID through its Aid Project. It has also diverted resources from other goals to sustain the delivery of NVQs on offer. This would seem a warranted move as Cascarians aspire to gaining overseas recognised and accredited qualifications and the impact of these in the economy appear to be evident. The data showed that AVES learners have a will to gain overseas accredited learning qualifications – not only for the benefit of the island and its economy, but also for their own advantage as these qualifications are recognised abroad.

It is also important to acknowledge the positive impact of locally offered unaccredited courses on offer under the AVES. These fill a very important function in respect of the training and retraining of members of both the public and private sectors and therefore contribute to the economic base of the island. What is important now is that the quality systems are put in place so that the credibility of these courses is raised and monitored. Kenway (2008) suggests that the main factor of production in today's economy is knowledge. Given the exciting possibilities facing the people of Cascara, Kenway's contention highlights the central and important role of the AVES. It also highlights the

importance of locally offered courses in contributing to the knowledge base that results in skills acquisition to support personal and economic growth

It would seem that there is no prospect of regularly offering, on even a minimally cost-effective basis, any specialist vocational courses through a group taught mode on Cascara Island. Group sizes are, for the most part, too small and teaching resources scarce. The data suggests that the approach adopted under AVES would appear to be appropriate in so much that an accessible Training Centre in the main town on the island has been set up for generic training provision. Cascara Community High School (CCHS) is also used as the core place at which VRQs and the underpinning taught element of the NVQs are delivered. In addition to this links are also established for learners involved with training opportunities in the work-place – but this is a fledgling area that needs to be developed. There is also scope for the development of capacity in distance and e-learning. Thus, the data identified the need for the collaboration of all stakeholders as well as the necessity for the integration of available resources emerged over and over again. Collaboration across sectors (both public and private) is a practical means whereby sharing resources reduces costs and aids in improving and increasing the quality of learning provision. Fullan (2005) noted that building capacity is reliant on collaborative working, but my data highlighted that consultative collaboration is not adequate only at the commencement of an initiative – it needs to be constant, recurrent and reflective.

The absence of a Council, guiding or an equivalent body has undoubtedly had an impact on the Service, in that the development of the AVES and its supporting Curriculum and Strategy have lacked a powerful voice to promote them at the highest possible levels within the government and private sector. This has been further compounded by the periods in 2008 when there was no Executive Education Officer of AVES Manager in post. The key need of the AVES has been a capacity to create the physical and staffing structure for the Service, as well as the network of relationships that support this. Given the small number of key staff concerned, and the continuing dependence on overseas expertise for appointments to key posts in government, the situation on Cascara remains fragile. It is important for the AVES to continue to foster positive working relationships with internal and external stakeholders. These for example include:

relationships with the private sector on Cascara; relationships with overseas awarding bodies on which the AVES depends; and relationships with AVES clients and stakeholders. It would seem that there is a consensus among key stakeholders that the situation in this regard is much better now and that although there is still some question over the credibility of learning on offer under the AVES, participation in AVES learning opportunities is still relatively high. The data highlighted the need for a team that would guide and direct the focus of the provision of learning offered by the AVES. This supports the contention of Berman & McLaughlin (1977) who highlight that during its implementation, a change project is at its biggest risk of failure. The data in this regard suggested that a task team comprising all sectors of the economy as well as relevant decision-makers, had the impetus to sustain and direct the change initiative during its implementation.

The AVES has made an excellent start in addressing the gap that exist on Cascara in respect of the provision of adult and vocational learning. To continue to do this, the AVES needs to ensure that it makes the best use of its valuable, available resources so that funding is used effectively and that capacity is built overtime. It is imperative that the AVES continues to develop and invest in the island's scarce human resource.

In attempting to do this, the AVES needs to continually adopt an approach that is flexible, personalised and innovative. My study indicated that Cascarians are committed to personal development and progress. It must be the task of the AVES to make sure that it is as easy as possible for Cascarians to access learning given their working and personal commitments. It is also imperative that the AVES continuously and timeously responds to the island's ever changing training and development needs.

In developing the Curriculum and taking the Strategy forward, the AVES needs to engage leadership and support from influential decision-makers across the spectrum of Cascara's community as this will aid in driving the Service forward. The engagement of such leadership will also assist in securing vital future funding.



Despite its various challenges, the AVES is making a positive contribution to the lives of Cascarians and to the Cascarian economy. Whether or not the island receives an airport now or in a few years time the possibilities for Cascarians are endless. For me, and although not a central theme in my study, the biggest challenge to overcome is the marginalised view that the Cascarians seem to have of themselves given their treatment by the metropole throughout history. As a vehicle steering Cascarians towards self-emancipation, the AVES has great potential. This leads me to reflect on the place at which Cascarians currently find themselves in relation to hooks' (1995: 341) view of marginality as being:

... much more than a site of deprivation ... it is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance ... . It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

This view of marginalisation highlights the hope and prosperity that the AVES and its supporting curriculum can bring to the people of the Cascara – as long as the learning on offer is relevant, sustainable, skills-based and supports economic growth – these all considered outside of the air access debate. The concept of emancipation is however a complex one as emancipation to Cascarians may well be viewed differently to that of the AID and the metropole.

## **Reflections on the Main Aims of the Study**

My study comprised three main areas: curriculum, economy and sustainability. The relationship between each of these perplexed me and in this section, I offer a short personal account of what stands out as most revealing to me in each of these areas:

### **Curriculum**

In executing my study and carrying out my duties as the AVES Manager, I learnt that the curriculum needs to constantly be revisited to service the ever-changing needs of the workplace and society in general. What I had not been prepared for was the 'politics' that exist in respect of curricular content. I was quite surprised at the extent of consultation in developing the original curriculum and how it seemed that the voices of some

stakeholders seemed to hold more weight than others. It was interesting for me too, working at a high position within government, to see how agencies such as the AVES are utilised to achieve the goals of government. What I found encouraging was that, the central focus of the AVES Curriculum under the AVES Strategy seemed well intentioned and seemed to provide a vehicle that facilitated a move towards the liberation of the people of the island. Something I unintentionally discovered was how the curriculum can be used to preserve and develop the community, civic society and the embodiment of these in local culture and the arts and crafts.

## **Economy**

The area of economy was the most revealing to me in undertaking this study. Embarking on this study was my first exposure to the literature on economics and economic theory. I was intrigued by the literature and I was interested in learning more about the link between education and the workplace. The extent to which skills training can support economic growth was of interest to me. The small and contained Cascarian context highlighted the significant relationship that exists between the needs of the market place and how education and training can service these in a meaningful and viable manner.

As posed in my research questions, I was pleased to discover the degree to which the AVES Curriculum was supporting economic growth on Cascara. It was interesting for me to see how the economy was benefitting from skills training available under the AVES umbrella. On reflection, it was interesting to note the absence of much training and development opportunity in soft skills – particularly when tourism and customer service will be key skills needed if the air access project becomes a reality.

I was also intrigued to explore the idea that ‘capital’ exists in many different forms – the physical as in people, funding and materials; but also in the abstract as in social capital and community capital. What was most

revealing to me was the degree to which these abstract forms of capital can determine the sustainability of an intervention or project.

## **Sustainability**

When I commenced this study, I had given little attention to the interdependence of the curriculum and the economy. In carrying out this study, I discovered that the sustainability of the AVES Curriculum and the economy were interwoven and impacted on each other. Without the option and availability of employees learning new skills the economy (mostly public in nature in the Cascarian context) would be adversely affected. Similarly, an economy lacking in skills would place more financial pressure on the local government as labour would need to be sourced abroad at additional cost. It follows that reduced local budget could impact the structure and functions of the AVES as state-funded organisation. Thus, I realised that a relevant curriculum had more prospect of becoming a sustainable curriculum.

Not having previously worked at such a high level in government, I discovered the difficulties associated with sourcing and securing funding. It was enlightening to discover the processes associated with securing such funding and I benefitted from the experience that I gained in taking part in the bidding process for funding. I had never given much thought to the difficulties associated with short and longer-term planning when funding was not secure. I came to understand the difficulties of planning when funding was not secure.

## **Reflections on the Significance of the Study**

In reflecting on the significance of my study, it contributes theoretically to the literature in respect of education policy and practice in isolated and remote contexts. The research contributes to the body of literature in so much that it documents curricular change within the context of greater socio-economic and political change in an insulated and dependent colonial island context. The study also extends the theoretical debate into issues associated with neo-colonialism

as Cascara, an aid dependent island, has a unique relationship with its metropole. From a theoretical perspective, the data also contributes to the notion of andragogy and adult and vocational learning in a unique public sector dominated economy.

From a methodological perspective, the study is significant in so much that the fieldwork was conducted within the clearly defined limits of the island. Given my position of manager within the AVES as well as that of researcher, I had to carefully consider my potentially conflicting roles. As an expatriate employee and also as the possible driver of the change intervention under study, I had access and perspectives that would not in all likelihood, have been made available to anyone else undertaking the study. This further enhanced the originality of my study. My use of a qualitative case study is not a unique research method, but the small population and insular positioning of Cascara render the case more uniquely challenging and interesting. For reasons such as this, I had to employ creative measures relating to consent, anonymity and confidentiality with my research participants. The sensitive and innovative approaches in this regard, add to the originality of the study. To protect my research participants and also to ensure that the research findings were beneficial to the AVES and other island stakeholders, I wrote the recommendations chapter as a standalone recommendations report. This outlines the significance of the study in respect of policy and practical application.

The most significant contribution of the study is in how the findings might inform future policy so as to ensure that policies and applications translate into a practicable, relevant and sustainable curriculum. To this end, the research highlights the pressing priorities of the AVES: to stabilise NVQ provision; to develop alternative vocational paths; to expand the scope of key skills on offer; to centralise the development of the AVES; and emphasises the need for high level stakeholder support. The findings also highlight the need for lifelong learning on Cascara to be integrated, these require: a revision of the original AVES Strategy; the centralisation of government training on Cascara under the AVES; the need for tertiary funding streams to be placed with the AVES; an expansion in the provision of formal learning qualifications on offer; and the need to consolidate working relationships with Cascara Community High School. The

research also makes suggestions for a revised AVES Curriculum, with a particular focus on learning provision that will serve the island in the respect of air access-related developments. Of further significance is the practical recommendations made to the AVES in respect of: staffing; the quality of learning provision; the need for a leadership body such as an AVES Task Team; the centralisation of training budgets; the AVES Charging Policy; as well as the need for Information, Advice and Guidance to be offered by the AVES.

As stated in the preamble of this thesis, the research findings will not only benefit the government, businesses and the people of Cascara, but could also be used to inform other islands, small states and rural communities with typically limited human and financial resources in their provision of adult and vocational education. Sharing the Cascarian experience and the valuable lessons learnt in the process of curriculum implementation, could extend the scope of adult and vocational training on Cascara as well as in similar initiatives offered in other small and remote locations.

### **Reflections on the people of Cascara**

My time on Cascara taught me that the people of the island are warm, welcoming and hospitable. They are also a resilient people because given their volatile history with the metropole (particularly over the issue of citizenship), most are still loyal to the ideals and values of the metropole.

My view is that Cascarians find themselves in an interesting predicament. On the one hand, they aspire to be more autonomous, while on the other hand they are unable to fully achieve this because of the uncertainty around the extent of economic opportunity that might be available to them. Such opportunity will be dependent on the final air access decision. I think that many Cascarians are understandably frustrated about the delay in the air access decision and while some have expressed their anger on this topic – such anger is usually done in private forums or anonymously through the local press. For me, it seemed that Cascarians are caught somewhere between ‘voice’ and ‘voicelessness’ – they have the prospect of social and economic emancipation but it is not completely clear whether this will be realised as yet. To this end, many Cascarians might be

uncomfortable about voicing their opinions fully until true democracy is achieved. This suggestion might explain why I did not receive any phone calls on the radio show during my data collection process.

While on Cascara, I also learnt that Cascarians, for the most part, have strong family ties and a great sense of community. Due to the size and population of the island, most people know (or at least know of) all of most other families on the island. This familiarity establishes strong accountability and develops, supports and entrenches community values. For the most part, I found Cascarians committed to the social, economic and political aspects of the community.

### **Personal Reflections**

Having previously worked on the island of Cascara, it was a momentous family decision to return to the island. Returning for second time we had a clear idea of what we were going to and had firsthand experience of the challenges and privileges of living in such a remote place as the island of Cascara. Whilst on the island, we made many friends – Cascarians and other expatriates alike. All of these people contributed to our experiences and taught us something about the island and their respective home countries.

As an extravert, living on Cascara I found myself making adjustments to my personality. Despite the warm and open acceptance by Cascarians of me and my family, I felt like I was living in the public eye. As an expatriate to the island, you have a big responsibility in respect of meeting the objectives of your employment and whether real or not – you feel like you are under constant observation. So, without even consciously thinking about it – I felt myself becoming slightly restrained and more inhibited when in public. Towards the end of my contract, I found myself becoming more relaxed but am not sure whether this was because at a sub-conscious level I knew I was leaving or whether I was more confident in myself because I had made a positive difference in my appointment as the AVES Manager.

As a family, we felt welcomed into the community and we took part in most of the social gatherings and events such as carnivals, fairs, sports events, social

functions and recreational activities. My children were happy, accepted at school and made many friends. My wife (who is a primary school teacher) worked voluntarily at my children's school and this was, in many respects, the avenue through which she made friends and accessed local social circles.

The time on the island not only strengthened our bonds as family unit, but it also widened our circle of friends. Leaving the island was an emotional experience and whilst we have taken many happy memories away with us – we have left a little of ourselves there.

### **A Final Word**

The completion of this study has been an incredibly rewarding experience and it has been a privilege to live and work on the island of Cascara over an extended period of time. My family and I leave the island with many happy memories and with many new friends – and I know that I too leave with my understanding enriched from the experience that I have gained in undertaking this study. I hope that I will be able to share my experiences, findings and new knowledge with other independent and post/neo-colonial island and remote contexts where similar issues and challenges exist.

I wish the people of Cascara well as they move into new and uncharted water and/or air space!