Dr Evans (Institute of Education, UWT) has written an interesting book describing the activities and interactions of the various participants in schools across Jamaica. She describes the historical sequences which she suggests account for the current school culture, using established theoretical perspectives. The work is based on several studies carried out between 1988 and 1998, and the research is largely her own, but she also presents extracts from work by various students. She gives a brief history of student-teacher relationships in Jamaica, describes the reasoning behind the attrition from teaching of a number of university trained teachers, gives examples of effective and ineffective teaching in classrooms of ‘all age’ schools, discusses the effects of the curriculum, streaming, gender, socioeconomic status and the use of Jamaican Creole on children’s school experiences and outcomes.

The product is largely successful. The book is strongest in its presentation of the detailed examples of the classroom observations. The contrast between the effective lesson and ‘seatwork’ teaching were illuminating and should be required reading at teachers’ colleges. The descriptions of teachers’ progression from enthusiastic educators, through disillusionment to the all-too-common position of former-teachers will give those both within and outside the profession cause to reflect on our society’s emphasis on material gain and the lack of respect accorded education. The chapters on curriculum, streaming and gender give a useful introduction to these areas, and the findings in the Jamaican context provide valuable insights for anyone interested in schooling in Jamaica. For example, the gender generalisations from teachers such as, ‘Girls take their work more seriously’ and ‘The boys don’t pay attention’ certainly support the thinking in Jamaica today. However,
the children's quotes indicate a fairer perspective, such as, "The boys get beating every day, sometimes dem don't deserve it." The chapter on Language in the Classroom provides an excellent overview of the use of Jamaican Creole by students trying to operate in Standard English, including details of their most common written errors. The research here was one of the few intervention studies described: a project to develop and implement the learning strategies for teaching English to Creole speakers. This chapter explains the failure that has resulted from teaching English by the usual means, and provides a strong defence for the use of less traditional teaching methods including the acknowledgement of Creole.

There is a small section on corporal punishment which is described as a frequently used method to control or intimidate students, and includes a chilling quote from a teacher, 'You should not come to school if you don't want flogging'. I found the section to be justifying the use of corporal punishment ('a result of [teachers'] dissatisfaction and frustration...') rather than commenting on the likely negative effects on the students, in contrast with other more indirect negatives such as streaming, and gender biases which are discussed at length.

Another minor problem occurs where a number of omissions in the curriculum are presented as implicitly negative, though no justification is given as to why their inclusion would be desirable. For example, in the chapter on The Curriculum and Teaching, the 'little room on the school's timetable for topics that relate to student's self knowledge or self-development, self-empowerment or about citizenship and human relationships' is lamented, as is the exclusion of 'topics such as...You and the Law; Being a Good Consumer; Growing Up/ Adolescence...?'. However Evans does not convince us that these topics ought to be included.

In some cases, translation of the quoted Creole might have been useful. The powerful examples of teachers' insults to students are not clear to non-speakers: the girl saying that a teacher 'Talk bout man dem a gi we lunch', or a boy, 'She call we wanga gut...'. In other cases, the use of local terminology may also obscure the meaning for outsiders. For example, 'those who are brown-skinned' is a phrase understood by Jamaicans and probably other Caribbean readers to mean those of mixed race (usually African and caucasian) in contrast with the 'black-skinned'. On a small matter, the use of the present tense in some cases, and certain phrases (such as 'the new curriculum...' and '...with the downturn of the economy...') will tend to date the work.

While it is a pleasure to have the evidence of statements provided by the actual research findings in several cases, a number of statements were
pronounced without references. Thus the following, for example, could all be challenged: the ‘simplistic view of schools as instruments of the state or society’ attributed to conflict theories; the competitive description of testing ‘to determine who has learned most and least’ rather than to quantify how much each has learned; and students without required textbooks or other learning materials being ‘deprived of the opportunity to be engaged in any activity during the lesson’.

It is unfortunate that in justifying her methodology, the author found it necessary to disparage other methodologies. The qualitative (case study/ethnographic) methods chosen need not conflict with, but rather can complement quantitative methods. Similarly, the list of theoretical perspectives in chapter two has some presented in a completely negative light. It is not necessary to limit the perspectives informing the discussions: these are all tools and some are more appropriate for certain tasks than others.

In spite of these concerns, the book is a valuable contribution to the literature on schools in Jamaica and I would encourage all student teachers, teachers and school administrators to read it carefully.