

# Philosophy and the End of Education

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## Part 1

At this time when so many are daily denied the opportunity to speak, such that our national conversations are impoverished by the absence of their voices; when those who are charged with speaking on our behalf abrogate the responsibilities of their offices and their publics by their silences; when so few are able to listen and fewer yet are willing; when so many difficult but necessary conversations are muted in the name of protection of interests and the status quo, it has indeed been a privilege and an honour to have been afforded this opportunity to speak to the national community via this space. In this final 4-part piece, I want to discuss some ideas and questions that I have begun to share with a few friends and colleagues regarding the future of education, teaching, learning, and schooling; the terms being related, but not interchangeable.

I have, perhaps, come late to the realisation that I am more a philosopher than anything else. In this way I take a lead from Patricia Alexander, former President of the American Psychological Association (APA) who has written, "...our renewed interest in educational practice...is mirrored in a renewed interest in philosophy...we must come home to philosophy if we are to make advances in the next generation. But coming home to philosophy must be much more than a flight of nostalgia. It should be a pilgrimage earnestly undertaken to seek wisdom from past excursions into educational territory.... In the future, I see studies of epistemology joined by systemic explorations of ontology, ethics, and aesthetics and their role in teaching and learning...."

In settling into this identity as philosopher, I do feel like I am coming home at last, that my pilgrimage is just beginning. Indeed, all of my work/performances thus far have been oriented around a question of, "how do I engage myself as a (mathematics) teacher educator and others in forming (and performing) lifelong *ethical* relationships with and between different and diverse peoples, places, things, and thoughts within proliferating, putrefying, and petrifying carrion structures, cultures, and societies where *wuk* seeks to consume space, time, energy, and even desire for Work?" This is a question for philosophy.

The definition and purpose of philosophy that resonate most with me is that of French theorist Gilles Deleuze, who describes philosophy as "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts." For me, creating concepts, playing with language, provides the space/means to think difference itself. Space that is often forbidden once language has become an ossified, dead, and inert *thing* becomes accessible to thinking once again. The task of philosophy, for Deleuze, is to create concepts that palpate difference, that is, concepts that allow difference to speak before identity is fully known. As a philosopher, I see my task in a similar vein; to create concepts that address difference, that palpate those as yet un(der)articulated differences that lie beneath the stable identities we profess, project, inhabit, and experience in education, but which are now in desperate need of vocalisation if we are to slow, halt, and hope to reverse our monotonic descent into an irrecoverable carrion culture.

The idea of carrion culture, for example, is one concept. The metaphor came to me one day as I was driving to work and I saw one of our carrion feeders, a corbeaux, feeding on a carcass on the

highway. Getting into the office, I pulled up the online version of the day's newspapers with more bloodied headlines. I closed them, locked my office, and began to write. A "carrion culture" for me is a culture that is at the point or in the process of consuming itself rather than (re)producing itself. It feeds on what is dead and produces no new life, only more death to feed on. The metaphor is apt I think for what we are currently experiencing as "development" here in Trinidad and Tobago in many spheres of public life—from education, to health, governance, and entertainment. The double entendre is an important dimension of the concept, since for a carrion culture to continue, the members of the culture must be involved in "carrying on" with business as usual.

I have also been plagued by what Lloyd Best refers to as the *Moses Conundrum* and the question of "how can a culture escape itself?" I see this as ultimately a teleological question about Education and National Development, that is, to what end(s)/purpose(s) are education, national development, and, by extension, culture oriented? In the next part I will begin to articulate a response.

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