

## Education for Citizenship

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After forty years of independence we have certainly found ourselves at a sorry pass. Through a combination of social and economic policies and the education system, we have produced certain networks of failure. But the real crisis in the whole experience is that those who have succeeded, either through schooling or entrepreneurial activity, are in a state of panic today. Both the successes and failures of the system seem equally desperate. The well-off, however, seem less free today than the have-nots. They have to live in gated communities and send their children to school accompanied by security guards, or ship them abroad to foreign schools. Children from the best schools are angry that their passes and degrees are not guaranteeing them immediate access to high-paying jobs, and parents worry about the future prospects for their bright children.

The prospect of another wave of resource-based wealth during the next ten to fifteen years provides an opportunity to rethink the past and to avoid the repetition of errors. We seem to know instinctively that education is at the heart of the matter. But the real issue is not technical schools and entrepreneurship development companies, though these have an important place.

The first step for a successful transformation of the society and economy is the acceptance by a large portion of the society, especially the wealthy and the well-schooled, that we are responsible for the current state of affairs, that it is our responsibility to fix it, and that it is a worthwhile struggle.

Put bluntly, the development of a civic capability is the first requirement for the development of a country and, consequently, should be the primary goal of education. That is the fundamental basis for the production of wealth and the creation of a just society. This fact is frequently overlooked by economic planners, who assume that such behaviours follow automatically when economic structures are put in place.

As citizens, we are not prepared to do the political work required for improving the quality of our lives. I think this is what Lloyd Best means by *unresponsibility* and *private activity for public purpose*. This is a result of a heritage of government without politics and the fact that economy preceded society in this part of the world.

Consequently, we have our own local medical school, and many of our national scholars have studied medicine, but the health system remains in a sorry state. We leave our beaches in an unsanitary state as if no one will need to use them after us. We have talented footballers but are unable to get the necessary support to produce a World Cup team. Some of the Seven Sisters around the Savannah are beginning to look like destitute children, and public spaces always go through a repetitive cycle of neglect and repair. It seems that whenever we have to deal with the needs of the collective, things fall apart and we are unable to manage our affairs.

The first challenge facing education, both in and out of school, is the ethnic factor. To the extent that people are schooled into tribal viewpoints without some philosophical framework for integrating and functioning within the whole, then commitment to the whole becomes problematic. Today, perverse developments in the use of radio talk shows as well as in party politics suggest that educational institutions have to deal with the ethnic issue more frontally. This is extremely important because while corruption thrives easily in a context of ethnic politics, ethnic politics thrives in a context lacking in strong civic traditions and makes the development of the latter difficult. The ethnic issue must be dealt with in such a way that people feel confident about making decisions based on more objective criteria, and feel a sense of commitment to the whole as well as a sense of inclusion.

This issue was broached by Lord Harris as far back as 1859 when he attempted to implement a system of Ward schools in Trinidad and Tobago. He was the Governor to whom is attributed the statement that a race had been freed but a society had not been formed. Harris attempted to have schools financed by taxes from their communities and the removal of Church involvement in the ownership of schools since he saw the influence of the churches as potentially divisive.

Present attempts at decentralisation can help in developing a civic capability. If the governance of schools is placed in the hands of communities in genuine and meaningful ways, then people will be exposed to the habits of self-management and the pursuit of self-interest through collective effort and responsibility.

Secondly, education has to promote cultural confidence. Without the ability to see aspects of our culture as meaningful, unique, and worthy of preservation and promotion to the rest of the world, then the basis for civic consciousness would be absent. This requires emphasis on the arts and humanities in school. All should be exposed to what is worthwhile in the society. But, alas, arts and humanities are dying in schools and business and science are the subjects with great prestige.

However, if properly structured, science and business can be used to introduce students to the needs and problems of the communities in which they live. Business should not only be about making profits but also about ensuring the community's long-term welfare and survival. Science, also, should not be divorced from the issues of relieving human pain and suffering and improving the condition of our lives. This approach to teaching and learning increases the likelihood of academic pursuits contributing to the improvement of society. Of course a subject like social studies, currently under revision in the school system of Trinidad and Tobago, is rich in potential for emphasizing citizenship.

Thirdly, schools must become increasingly participatory. As they move up the ladder in school, students can increasingly be made to participate in the decision-making processes. The availability of opportunities to join all those clubs and groups that make for a full school life is also important. These offer the first opportunity for children to learn to manage their own affairs.

Commitment to the collective, a feeling of belonging, and the ability to build institutions and participate in institutional life--these are the habits and attitudes that set the moral framework within which economic activity can develop. These habits and attitudes affect the motivation for entrepreneurship as well as the quality of that entrepreneurship. Ethnic and tribal loyalties will tend to inhibit the mobilization of human resources and creativity when organisations have to produce for the world and compete with the world.

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