

Changing Role of the Teacher

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Increasingly, cries, complaints, and even accusations that our education system is in crisis have been emerging from the wider society. Few pause to consider or examine who or what constitutes our education system. Informed observers submit that the system includes such stakeholders as students, parents, teachers, administrators in the school and the Ministry of Education, as well as representatives of the different sectors of the national economy. Others see the system only in terms of students, principals, and teachers. The reality, however, is much more complex than our engagement in allocating blame and finding fault. The world is changing and our society is becoming more complex.

Traditionally, the family was the main arena for education. As societies developed, it became clear that families were no longer able to fulfil all aspects of the education function. Schools consequently emerged. It must be remembered that up to two hundred years ago, education did not help people become more productive in practical ways, but was a luxury that very few could afford. This situation changed dramatically with the industrialisation of Western society. Workers with specialised skills were required for industries, as were professionals and well-trained managers. Since then, educators have gone on to accept that among the main aims of education should be developing learners intellectually—as functioning citizens, as individuals in society, and as actual or potential creative and purposeful workers.

Reflection on the curriculum inevitably had to emerge. As a result, educators began to view, and continue to view, the curriculum as the vehicle schools use for helping our young people construct meaning in their lives. Today we know that the curriculum is the formal and informal content as well as the processes by which learners gain knowledge and understanding; develop skills; and alter attitudes, appreciations, and values under the auspices of the school. It is also accepted in the research literature that curriculum must be tied to development and changes in society. This in turn mandates that the teacher's horizon should never be fixed; that it should always expand.

Against this background, I would like to suggest that if our education system is in crisis, it is because the system has not understood that society—regionally and internationally—has been evolving. Alvin and Heidi Toffler in their book, *Creating a New Civilization*, argue that a new civilisation is emerging and brings with it new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new political conflicts, and, beyond all this, an altered consciousness.

Sociologists remind us that human beings do not automatically become human. They must be taught to be human or be socialised. We are also told that the institutions responsible for this are the home, school, church, media, and the arts. For effective socialisation, knowledgeable commentators insist that there must be strategic networking among these institutions. The simple fact is that schools alone can no longer educate our

young, and teachers can no longer isolate themselves from developments in the wider society.

My interaction with teachers over the past forty years has led me to conclude that we have three main categories of teachers in our society: transients, mercenaries, and missionaries. I have found that transients are so concerned with moving on that they have no time to reflect on their practice. Mercenaries, on the other hand, move from objective to objective or repeat the same strategies several times without sparing the time to develop themselves. Their main goal is money. Missionaries, more often than not, are individuals who see teaching as an important activity in their lives and national development. They spend considerable effort and time in acquiring expertise and knowledge so that they can train and develop their students to cope with the imperatives of a changing world.

If our education is in crisis, it may be that all teachers have not been subscribing to the credo of missionary teachers. As a result, the Ministry of Education, as well as principals, may have to ensure that teachers clearly understand their tasks. Induction and ongoing professional development programmes must be made the order of the day in the teaching sector. Teachers must be persuaded to see themselves as leaders, counsellors, tutors, human resource developers, and architects of national development.

If we accept the reality that society is evolving, then we should recognise the need to ensure that all teachers have the altered consciousness of which the Tofflers speak. In addition, our educational planners should put in place structures, policies, and resources for all teachers to be equipped with the following fundamental pedagogical skills:

1. the ability and willingness to communicate with students in a number of ways—discussion, debates, questioning—while utilizing the available technology;
2. the relevant skills and knowledge, and imaginative ideas;
3. the aptitude and desire to inspire students with enthusiasm and sincerity;
4. the ability to get children to understand that they live in a multicultural world and, consequently, the importance of them becoming partners in learning and nation building.

Teachers must also see the need to be team members. As members of staff, teachers should know that they have to engage in teamwork; learn from their colleagues; address problems together; and share the vision, mission, and goals of their respective schools.

Many of us believe that teachers must now be given greater control over curriculum matters and how schools are run. In addition, teachers should belong to a professional body that regulates itself, but this cannot be done effectively if teachers do not have access to quality career-long professional development. Above all, professional teachers must be allowed to practice teaching without unwarranted interference from non-teachers.

Finally, teachers must understand that they have a serious responsibility in a society in which standards and institutions are crumbling around them. The significant contribution that teachers have made to the development of the society through their nurturing of past, present, and future leaders in every sphere of activity cannot be denied. However, in order to continue to enjoy the respect traditionally accorded to teachers by the society, we need to pay close attention to the image we project through the lifestyle we adopt, for example, how we dress, how we behave, and so on.

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