

Teacher Education and Regional Hegemony

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In spite of the vehement protests of many educators of the day, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the official certifying organization for secondary school leavers, became reality in 1979. Today, the debate has shifted to the suitability or need for the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). This raises the question of whether Caribbean unity can be sustained in the absence of strong flexible and organic institutions. Can we as a region continue to ignore the need for regional political, economic, social, and technological institutions? Why are we so worried and excited about the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and not about consolidating our regional strength?

Recently, the British Council, in collaboration with the School of Education of The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, hosted an international symposium on teacher education. Final deliberations identified the need for a regional umbrella body, similar to CXC, for certifying all Caribbean teachers. This clearly would be a move in the right direction. History, unfortunately, has constantly reminded us that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Consequently, we cannot allow the euphoria of this recent conference to immobilise us. There must be immediate follow-up to the recommendations of the symposium.

Perhaps one of the best ways to start moving towards our objective is to reflect on what we want to achieve as a regional people. We should already be aware of the trends in regionalism throughout the world; nations worldwide are recognising that they cannot achieve regional and global hegemony on their own. Indeed, now the cry everywhere is, "unity is strength." So clearly, we have to reinforce the foundations of regional integration. Insulation, isolation, and petty rivalry must now be set aside for collective salvation.

Another question must also be addressed. How can we create a strong regional teacher certification body, if in our individual societies chaos, confusion, and apathy continue to prevail? Surely, individual islands must now indulge in policy evaluation, system needs analysis, and strategic planning before they come together to determine the feasibility of the proposed teacher education initiative.

In addition, our vision must be with creating a particular kind of Caribbean man who has been nurtured by a particular system operated by a special kind of individual. Indeed, teacher education in the Caribbean must be tied to regional development and nation building; it must be concerned with regional hegemony. We cannot overlook that such processes as globalisation, trade liberalisation, and cultural imperialism cannot be in our favour. We need a lever to help us to level the playing field, and what could be better than a human resource thrust characterised by a dynamic and purposeful ideology? Therefore, if we are determined to go ahead with the mandate of the St. Augustine symposium, we must establish an institution that is not simply and only concerned with producing so many teachers per year. It must see teacher certification as a focal issue in

human, political, economic, and technological development in the Caribbean. As educators and true patriots, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that we should reinvent the wheel. We must see the wisdom of reviewing what others have done and are pursuing.

So far, the literature has identified several obstacles in the way of teacher education initiatives. One of overwhelming importance for me is the finding that research data on teaching have not found their way into school systems and, by extension, classrooms. Similarly, research has shown that the knowledge about how best to work with teachers and other personnel in education systems toward positive change has not been widely accepted. Sarason, a well-respected researcher, endorses this view in *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*, with the conclusion that “the more things change, the more they remain the same.” In this book, he laments how difficult it is to influence teachers and their teaching.

We should take note and understand that any initiative to change our teachers and system will, by nature, be complex and time consuming. After all, it will be cultures we will be attempting to change. Even CXC has not been able to change the modus operandi of our teachers, who have simply devised strategies for fitting CXC examinations into the existing school culture. To a great extent, this has helped to create a kind of elitism in our education system, favouring the talented in the cognitive domain and ignoring the giants in the affective and psychomotor domains.

Writers in the literature of change have cautioned that any attempts to change teachers must take into consideration two critical factors: 1) teachers’ desire with respect to the need for change, and 2) the existential phenomena of schools, which must be manipulated in order for change to be seen as necessary and desirable from the perspective of teachers. The evidence so far encountered insists that pursuing regional teacher education and changing the focus of teacher education in the Caribbean cannot be an easy matter. While possible, many variables will have to be taken on board.

First of all, there must be an understanding of how to ensure that all graduates of teaching programmes internalise and perform their tasks. For example, what do we expect of teachers? What types of commitment and involvement with respect to the school, student learning, and professional development should they demonstrate? What balance between subject content and pedagogical expertise should they establish?

With respect to teaching institutions, what programmes should they pursue? What, in general, should be the nature of their curricula and teaching strategies? Who will staff them? What will be the nature of their assessment?

Governments too will have their part to play. Initiatives cannot be sustained without the required structures and resources. Governments therefore will have to make available the necessary legal framework and resources to make the initiative a reality and ensure its success.

Of great importance, too, will be the understanding that strategic partnerships among such stakeholders as teachers' unions, principals' associations, professional teacher bodies, parent teachers' associations, UWI, and Ministries of Education will be critical and inevitable. We also need to consider the role to be played by other universities with a presence in the region.

The St. Augustine mandate for promoting regional teacher education is not only timely and necessary, but also of paramount and urgent importance, if the Caribbean is to play a meaningful role in the expanding world order.

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