

## **Philosophy and Educational Policies**

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Education systems tend to be as effective as the policies that characterise them. However, without a sound philosophical base they cannot realise expected outcomes.

It can be argued that a nation's philosophy is shaped by its history and environment. Our education system has emerged from a long tradition of colonial and church domination in a period of relative stability. While during early colonial days the world existed in a relatively stable environment, the same cannot be said of the modern world, which is characterised by an increasingly turbulent environment, driven by rapid change.

For centuries, idealism has been viewed as a philosophical perspective that supports stability. Where before the 1960s, idealism was able to successfully serve as a platform for educational policy, a more relevant philosophy has become necessary to cope with the relentless march of technology and social upheaval of contemporary times.

Since the early 1960s, Marxism, realism, and pragmatism have emerged as the engines to accelerate discussion on educational reform worldwide. Indeed, many societies have resorted to realism and pragmatism. Those nations that failed to recognise and adopt this trend are now paying expensively for their mistake. A case in point is Trinidad and Tobago. Many believe that our education system is in crisis for this reason.

Before the education thrust of new sector schools in the 1970s, idealism was the dominant articulated philosophy for policy makers. After this period, realism and social reconstruction came into vogue in the form of our Junior and Senior Secondary schools.

It should be noted, however, that while policy makers from the 1970s on were motivated by realism and social reconstruction, the dominant practice of education, as made manifest by technocrats in the Ministry of Education and our teachers, remained essentially immersed in idealism. Rote learning, conditioning, and centralised programming by the Ministry of Education remain the order of the day.

A look at the 1959 Maurice Report, the 1964–1968 Draft Second Five Year Plan, the 1968–1983 Draft Plan for Educational Development in Trinidad and Tobago, and the 1975 Prime Minister's Proposals confirms that our education system has consistently been influenced by idealism. Perhaps Eric Williams' vision for Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive schools was conceived through his empathy for realism and pragmatism, but because of his classical socialisation, he could not break out of the idealism mould for education. Indeed, once the perspective of the political directorate and principal policy makers was influenced by idealism so too would the education system.

An examination of our education system vis-à-vis the documented vision of our planners would reveal an interesting gap. While projections are based on an eclectic platform of realism, pragmatism, and social reconstruction, the system continues to feed on eighteenth-century idealism. Our curriculum methods, systems of administration,

methods of assessment, systems of discipline, the large failure rates emerging from our schools, and the social maladjustment manifested by many of our young people all reflect a philosophy of education inappropriate to the times.

It is frequently stated that our nation is a nation of “talkers” rather than “doers.” Taking into consideration, therefore, what I have already argued above, it seems that we have a manifest philosophy, which is articulated and used to impress our citizens and such international bodies as UNESCO and the World Bank, and a latent philosophy, which unwittingly informs our practices. Therefore, unless our nation engages in educational practices congruent with a manifest philosophy and manifest educational policies, our education system will continue to be entrenched in crisis.

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