

## Youth Educators

Susan Herbert

I recently read a book by Neil Postman and C. Weingartner, which was written in 1969 in the USA, but which addresses issues that are still very relevant to schooling, education, and society today. In the chapter on meaning making, the teacher is said to have asked during the course of a science lesson: “How many legs does a grasshopper have?” A male student responded: “I sure wish I had your problems.” To this boy, and I think that we can agree that to many students today, school content sometimes seems to focus exclusively on matters that they believe are insignificant.

But what are some of the big issues about which they might be concerned? On November 19<sup>th</sup>, I attended the secondary school film festival in which the students spoke about issues that were important to them through the medium of film. The short films of the five finalists, each 5 minutes long and written, directed, produced, etc., by the students, were as follows: St. Augustine Girls’ High: “Nah Leavin;” Baratara Secondary Comprehensive: “The Cycle;” Tableland High School: “Just a Matter of Time;” St. Mary’s College: “My Scarlet Letter;” and Queen’s Royal College: “Identity.” These five-minute films addressed very complex social issues such as migration, substance abuse, domestic violence, bullying and gangs, murder, and suicide. Significantly, the students’ productions ended with a message of hope—they presented options that could lead to a reduction of violence in its many forms.

I must admit that I was totally unaware of this short film competition among schools until I saw the advertisement for the festival in the *Express* of November 15th. Therefore, I do not know the criteria for production—if specific themes were presented or if students were allowed to select issues that they deemed important. However, through the productions, these students showed their ability to analyse issues that impact on their lives, create a script that depicts their ideas, direct, produce, act, select accompanying music and other effects, and to edit. Notably, their choice of accompanying music was always indigenous. In addition, there were two guest-features—Obsession and The Blessing of Charlie Sand. These films are potentially a valuable resource for discussions among students and teachers, and the activity of film-making is potentially one that facilitates critical and creative thinking. Heartiest congratulations to all involved and to MovieTowne for showing these short films at an entrance fee of only \$5.00 per person. It is therefore a pity that the attendance at the 10.00 a.m. showing on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> was so poor, and that the youth’s voice was virtually silenced.

Dennis Lawrence’s positive message on behalf of the “Soca Warriors” was however heard by a much wider and, hopefully, very receptive audience. He spoke on behalf of a committed team, which through the sport of football as a vehicle showed how commitment, determination, teamwork (along with the necessary supports and systems), critical and creative thinking can lead to success even against seemingly insurmountable odds. They were determined to achieve their goal and in so doing helped to fulfil a country’s dream. A very articulate young man, he too expressed his concern about the violence in society. Furthermore, in his address, as did the film-makers, he too created

what Peter McLaren describes as “a space of hope...in the interest of human life, collective dignity...and the right to live in peace and harmony.” It is a good sign that the youth are among the critical educators. Congratulations to the (Soca) Warriors!!!  
P.S. Congratulations to Brian Lara, Dwayne Bravo, and Dinesh Ramdin!!!

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