

The Last Bastion?

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“Collecting ghosts” is the process of racking up murders; the more people one kills the more ghosts one possesses. Keith Smith, writing in the *Express* of 12th November, 2008, speaks of the weight of “toting ghosts” on one’s soul; a phenomenon that is really the end product of a career of collecting ghosts in an effort to gain personal, and I suppose in some lines of work, professional respect. This, of course, is symptomatic of a rising sub-culture of lawlessness and reckless evil that is fast becoming the mainstream tradition.

In our country, school was used as the primary vehicle for social and economic advancement at the legal end of historic periods of bondage. For many of our present-day communities, school seems to have little worth or relevance to everyday life—few neighbours, friends, or family members are exemplars to whom school was a saviour; to whose success or “bling” schooling has been contributory. In attempts to argue the relevancy of school, I once told my students that, finally, all the gun culture would bring to them is death. “You’ll be dead by 35,” I told them. “So?” they responded. “Who wants to get old? Dis life too hard. My mother, she working long and hard all this time and she still ketching she tail.” Rapper, Ice-T, suggests that it is such a lack of hope which seems to have left our youth’s esteem, psyche, and consequent capability to empathise ravaged, worn, and numb.

While concern for the reprisal of the hard hand of the law may initially save us in the short-term from the present carnage of wanton death, it will not liberate our society from the perpetuation of zombies seeking souls and esteem through hedonistic and narcissistic activities that are disrespectful of the life and liberty of others. There may be more usefulness in the creation and entrenchment of intrinsic societal values which understand that, fundamentally, “one man’s freedom ends at the end of another man’s nose”.

As the only institution where attendance is mandated by law for all of our citizens of school age, the school may be our last bastion and the most useful place to begin the infusion of hope through a programme of values education. Also, because our community’s children are mandated to attend, the school’s reach extends beyond the classroom to parents, businesses and, by extension, the wider society. It may be in such a programme of values education that the re-branding of schooling as an individually and communally relevant and useful undertaking might begin.

Louis Rath’s suggestion of the *non-judgmental process* of values clarification teaches students the *method* through which they become personally aware of the value system that guides their behaviour. Values clarification utilises strategies that encourage students to make more choices and to make them freely. These strategies also help students to discover alternatives when faced with options, and to thoughtfully weigh and reflect on the consequences of each. Such activities also give students opportunities to consider what they cherish and to affirm their choices. Values clarification aims not only to encourage students to act in accordance with their decisions but to be aware of repeated behaviours in their lives.

As a non-judgemental process, critics warn that values clarification does not provide worthwhile instruction in what is right or wrong. In defence of his model, Rath suggests that “because life is different through time and space we cannot be certain what experiences any one person will have. We cannot therefore be certain what values, what style of life, would be most suitable for any person. We do, however, have some ideas about what processes might be most effective for obtaining values.” As a worthwhile modification, values clarification processes that support moral and ethical programmes of affective education can begin to help students commit to patterns of behaviour that support human development and social justice’s belief in the inherent worth and dignity of the human being.

The reality is, as my father says, “that we are building a country,” and maybe if each of us keeps that at the forefront of our mind we could help build our society by focusing on what we do have the power to change. A realisation that while maybe none of us can change the world, that in front of me right here, right now, is some good that I can do. Maybe these can be some useful values within our newly defined bastions which can teach our children that a ghost is a pretty heavy load to tote.

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