

## **Survival, Planning, and Education in the Caribbean**

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Increasingly, educators worldwide are beginning to recognise that schooling and education are not simply about passing on facts for regurgitation or examinations. Global consensus holds that schooling must now help to prepare people to cope with the imperatives of living in a modern and globalised world. A former prime minister of Israel, commenting on the issue, observed that in this age of science and technology educators have to move away from shaping the memory of students to preparing their imagination.

World history of education is characterised by attempts to shape and condition the memory of students through classical curricula, indoctrination, drilling, coaching, and other interventions immersed in a continuum of philosophies. Creativity, innovation, discovery, and critical thinking were not always encouraged.

In today's world, however, drums of change are being heard. According to futuristic experts, Heidi and Alvin Toffler, this is due to the rising flood of the Third Wave—a flood that has brought in its wake the information and communication revolution. As a result, modern societies are now presented with new ways of solving problems. We too in Trinidad and Tobago are affected by this tidal wave. From all quarters we are bombarded by cries about the effects of globalisation and trade liberalisation, the horror of terrorism, and the scourge of computer viruses. There seems to be no escape. Everywhere, nation states are struggling to establish unions or economic blocs. Integration and regionalism are both inevitable and desirable.

However, for us Caribbean people, these processes can be meaningful only if we know and understand one another in the region. This in turn means an appreciation for the languages and cultures in our region. Clearly this strengthens the case for the inclusion of our history and social studies, as well as conversational Spanish and French, in our primary and secondary curricula. It also means teaching the history and geography of our islands in a more meaningful way. Unless we do this, we are doomed to continue to see ourselves and our brothers and sisters in the region—particularly Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Cuba—through distorted lenses.

Economic statistics and press reports indicate that chronic unemployment is one of the main problems plaguing the Caribbean. Our islands in general and our leaders in particular have been grappling with this problem for a long time. The time has come for us as a region—educators, scientists, professionals, cultural activists, writers, and so on—to come together to brainstorm on an ongoing basis about how we will assert ourselves in a rapidly changing world, characterised by what is now known as the knowledge economy. As individual states, we have to decide how we will respond to the global mandates for change. Also, we must be clear about our tasks. Survival demands that we decide on what educational programmes are necessary for taking us out of the morass in which we have found ourselves. Our educators must decide what curricula in our schools will promote this new approach to living.

While sociologists remind us of the power and importance of socialisation, educators insist that modern society cannot socialise effectively without the school, which they see as the main agent of socialisation. Socialisation, however, in the era of the Third Wave calls for radical changes in our approach to teacher development, human resource development, and human resource allocation.

Teacher development, according to American educator, Adrian Underhill, is the process of becoming the best teacher one can be. It reflects the best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership. Therefore, if as a society we intend to be serious about addressing our political, economic, technological, and social problems, then there must be a shift in our traditional approach to teacher development. Whatever initiative we undertake must:

- enable teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, use of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards;
- promote continuous inquiry and improvement in the daily life of schools;
- be ultimately evaluated by its impact on enhancing teacher effectiveness and on stimulating teachers' response to the imperatives for curriculum innovation and development in the turbulent global environment.

From time to time I have found myself wondering to what extent many of us see our jobs as means for survival rather than as contributions to national development. Unless we are able to impress our teachers with the understanding that their performance and their roles are critical to national development, attempts to reform teacher development programmes will be futile. Our regional societies need, more than anything else, an all-embracing ideology that can (a) ensure a love for country and region among our people, (b) allow a work ethic to flourish that will impact positively on societies and economies, and (c) make pride and concern for fellow citizens a prime motivating force among citizens. Indeed, such an ideology would never see looting as an option. The question is how can we use education and our schools to promote such an ideology? Part of the answer I will try to provide, the rest is open to debate. We need to imbue our people with a sense of hope. Our citizens must be able to identify with their country, island, or region. They need to know in what ways their individual societies and the region can help them. How can they benefit from development in their society? All this must be debated and considered by our regional think-tanks. We need to do this now rather than later.

For too long education, economics, politics, and religion have been about defining turf in our Caribbean societies. No longer can we afford to operate as crabs in a barrel. Global forces are now calling for meaningful alliances and more powerful forces in education. This is the direction we must follow. Our educators cannot abdicate their responsibility to lead, to blaze new trails. Neither can they afford to be insular. We have a regional imperative before us. Already *Ivan* has spoken. Grenada, Tobago, Cuba, and the Cayman

Islands can all attest to how one can feel when one's neighbours demonstrate support and acceptance in the hour of need.

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