

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT

THE EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN THE JAMAICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. **What is the role of the teacher?** Facilitator of learning, nurse, mentor, counselor, role model and substitute parent (for some authorities) are some of the roles you will play.
2. **What are the responsibilities?** To control, organize and facilitate learning in your classroom is so obvious that it can be overlooked. You also have to motivate, evaluate and enhance the child's self-concept as a good learner. You are also there to protect the child from emotional and physical harm --- bullies beware!!! You are there to be an agent of change and to try to make life better for the children. It is your responsibility to behave in a decent way both inside and outside of the school and to socialize the children in the Jamaican way of life.
3. **The rights of the teacher.** You have the right of academic freedom -- -- the politicians cannot tell you to indoctrinate the children or force you to teach unacceptable ideas e.g. teaching creationism as science in the science class or not allowing you to teach evolution in the science class. You also have the right to a safe teaching environment. You may also read about your roles, rights and responsibilities in the Code of Regulations.

WHAT IS A PROFESSION?

The vexing question of whether or not *Teaching is a profession* continues to plague us. The word professionally tends to be far too loosely used to mean that someone has performed a job competently. Although this list is not complete, here are some thoughts about what constitutes a profession.

1. A job that serves other people.
2. A job that requires training at a tertiary level in an esoteric body of knowledge before being allowed to practice the profession.
3. A Code of Ethics.

4. A professional association that can prevent a member in breach of the ethics from practicing.
5. Professional freedom --- this means that people outside of the profession cannot interfere in how the professional does his/her work.

You can decide for yourself whether teaching is a *profession*. Nevertheless, we do often talk about professionalism and professional behavior, so you can decide what that means to you --- competence at work, abiding by the Code of Ethics, going the extra mile or caring for the children. You decide.

THE TEACHER AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

We are often told that we should be agents of social change. The big problems of the society e.g. *racism, sexism, classism, teenage pregnancy, violence* in all its manifestations, *drug abuse, bullying and anything else* that crops up in the society, are all going to be fixed by competent teachers doing their jobs properly. We are told that we are the gatekeepers of social mobility. We hold the power to swing open the gate of education and let the children of the poor through to a middle class life style. How true is this?

THE TEACHER AS AN AGENT OF SOCIALIZATION

Socialization in this context means the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. We are agents of socialization in many ways e.g. teaching history and insisting on good manners. Does this mean we are agents of conformity?

THE TEACHER AS A POTENTIAL AGENT OF INDOCTRINATION

Indoctrination means manipulating and/or forcing someone to accept a belief system by showing only one side of the issue and discouraging critical thinking skills. Authoritarian regimes have used teachers in this way and we need constant vigilance to guard against this.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WORK OF THE TEACHER

Here are some factors that impact on the teacher's ability to do the job.

THE SCHOOL CULTURE

Just as societies create cultures that guide the members with regard to beliefs and ways of behaving that are totally unique, so too do schools impose values, beliefs and behavior patterns on the children who enter their gates. No two schools have precisely the same culture and a school culture can change over time for better or worse. Before you take a job at a school you should check that the school culture can blight a good teacher. On the other hand a positive school culture can bring out the best in a mediocre teacher. Ethos, (the spirit

of the community) is a useful concept to have when coming to grips with the culture of the school.

What influences the culture of the school?

1. School type e.g. public, private, single sex, co-ed, social class of children, urban rural, religious, secular.
2. The principal and staff
3. Relationships between staff, board, parents, children
4. The atmosphere in the school --- competitive, academic, sports oriented, instills social conscience, motivated, caring about the holistic development of the children, disciplined, orderly, clean and caring of the environment.
5. Prevailing educational philosophy
6. Children's subcultures of gangs and violence
7. School's traditions, routines and rituals
8. Alumni association

Although all factors are important, the principal's leadership abilities and personality, together with his/her educational philosophy, is probably the most important factor in defining and creating the school culture. You need to check out the principal carefully before you bestow your valuable skill and time upon a school!!!

SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

If the community "owns" the school, it makes life easier for the principal and children. When the community is against the school, life can be difficult with break-ins and generalized resentment focused on the school. To change a bad relationship the principal would have to:

1. Listen to and discuss things with the academic staff
2. Get all of the other staff on board
3. Get the Board on board
4. Find out why the community is against the school
5. Consult, talk and listen to the PTA
6. Take the children into his/her confidence
7. Walk about in the community and talk and listen to the people
8. Talk to and as much as possible use the services of the local community
9. Offer adult classes to the community

10. Offer to allow the community to use the school within reason for activities
11. Visit the churches and the police station
12. Be a community leader and solve community problems

SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS

Does the society expect too much of teachers? It certainly seems that way sometimes. We are supposed to clean up all of society's messes, whilst being given few tools with which to do it. We are supposed to have far higher standards than everyone else with regard to commitment, competence and morality, and on top of that we often seemed to be accused of causing the problem in the first place. If lazy teachers were doing their jobs we would have no illiteracy, crime wave or high teenage pregnancy!!!!

MEMBERSHIP OF JTA

JTA has a number of important functions that impact on the teachers' ability to function effectively.

1. Salary negotiations
2. Working conditions
3. Protection of benefits such as leaves and tax concessions
4. Protection of teachers' rights in cases of wrongful dismissal for example
5. Access to credit union and building society
6. Discounts

MEMBERSHIP OF OTHER GROUPS

Teachers do have a life outside of school and they need to join organizations that will fulfill other aspects of their lives. *Kiwanis, Rotary, Human Rights groups, women's groups, churches, alumni associations* can not only address personal development needs, but also the networking needs that are so essential to help get things done for you school and yourself. It's not what you know but who you know is still true.

THE PERSONAL/RELIGIOUS/POLITICAL VIEWS OF THE TEACHER

These are important and may be a source of inspiration to you and your teaching, but please remember the ethical dangers of indoctrination.