

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EFFECTS OF EXPANSION OF
THE SECONDARY SECTOR OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S
EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR TEACHER EDUCATION : DEFINING
THE PROBLEM*

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Introduction

Many emergent nations are currently embroiled in the dynamics of what may well be termed 'the dilemma of independence'. Cutting loose from the colonial umbilical cord has forced a confrontation with the complications and exigencies of nation-building. Economic growth and the firm establishment of these new societies are the beacons towards which national courses are being charted. In this connection, Harbison's thesis, which highlights the role of education in national development, argues that human resources are the 'wealth of nations', because true development means development of the people, not merely the development of the economy, implying education and the quality of it as the main link. (Harbison, 1973).

There are those who argue however, that faith in education as the life-raft or the means to economic and social change may not be as well-founded as the believers have come to accept, at least in the short-run. Thompson (1977), for example, describes as paradoxical the situation in which many developing countries find themselves when, in order to establish self-sustaining economies and appropriate educational structures, they are forced to avail themselves of foreign aid and costly investments. Expenditure on education consumes a large portion of many national budgets, and in many instances the costs are far larger than the anticipated returns to the economy. The granting of foreign aid is usually contingent upon the receiver country's acceptance of 'aid packages', the effects of which may not be entirely consonant with stated goals. Therein lies the dilemma.

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Whichever way we view this dilemma it cannot escape notice that what is clearly a difficult matter has been further complicated by the practical implementation of the perceived need in some, if not most, developing countries, to change their school systems in one way or the other. Usually, these changes have taken the form of different combinations of reforms and expansions. These reforms and expansions have tended to bring new problems in their wake and have brought old ones to the fore.

Trinidad and Tobago, as an emerging nation, inevitably fell prey to the dilemma of independence in terms of some of what this entails for education. The commitment to education is expressed in the following statement from the Draft Plan for Educational Development in Trinidad and Tobago, 1968: 1973.

The government supports the idea that education is a fundamental contributor to human resource and economic development, to discipline and economic progress in individuals, families and nations for there seems to be more than accidental force at work linking high rates of national growth with educational development.

(p 6)

Indeed, this professed commitment to education was reflected in the increasing budget allocations to the education sector over the past decades. The sources of funding were mainly increased oil revenues and two world bank loans. The provision of 'equal educational opportunity' through universal secondary education, which had been the policy of the government at that time had been extremely costly, since the secondary sector traditionally, and up until 1973, catered for no more than 20% of the school age population. Massive expansion, therefore, had to be undertaken to provide secondary school places for every one leaving primary school. In September 1986 some 85% of those leaving primary school entered secondary school, marking to that date, a net increase of approximately 65% in the provision of secondary school places. This expansion, which has been accompanied by variations in the secondary school system, meant more, bigger, and different secondary schools; a great demand for teachers and other personnel, and, for the teachers in particular, added responsibilities, and expanded roles and expectations.

Purpose

The underlying argument here is that the rapid expansion in and the reform of the secondary school education system in Trinidad and Tobago appear to suggest that new demands and expectations are being imposed on teachers which the contents of teacher education programmes may not be addressing adequately. The purpose of this endeavour therefore, is to examine the effects of changes at the secondary school level of the Trinidad and Tobago education system, on what may be emerging as new or additional requirements and expectations in the contents of teacher education programmes.

We continue in the section which immediately follows this introduction with a necessarily brief description of the existing secondary level system by identifying two parallel and independent sub-systems: the 'new' two tier system of junior secondary and senior secondary/comprehensive/composite schools on one hand, and the traditional five or seven year schools on the other. The few private schools, that is, those schools that are privately owned and run are not considered in this discussion. In the next section we focus on the 'new' system and utilize evaluation reports to identify the operating effects of the new schools in terms of some problems and issues. Here we rely heavily on Harvey (1981), the most comprehensive research report on the subject. The final two sections discuss the implications of these problems for teacher education and propose some inputs as additions to the critical content of programmes of teacher education for the secondary level, in the light of some of the identified problems. While discussion is confined to delineating the content that would resolve some of the problems it must be stressed that it is not intended that this should constitute an entire or a wholesome programme for teacher education. The concern is that the general emphases in teacher education programmes could be expanded to accommodate the suggested inputs without prejudice to their integrity.

The Problem

The purpose of this piece is rather modest. It is only suggestive. It is very important therefore, that the limited and selective focus should be situated in the context of its set of related problems as a way of defining the identified problem. Further, the limited concern should not be made to appear to be attempting to do more than it claims to do: namely, to suggest, specifically, the need for new dimensions to teacher education programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, in order to meet, among other things, the need to reduce cumulative deficits brought about by the reformed and expanded secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Many evident problems are referred to without any pretence whatsoever to their full treatment. These problems themselves may imply other well-known problems which are outside the scope of this brief effort.

For instance, most multivariate studies on secondary education achievement/performance, (for example, Howe, 1964; Torrance & Parent 1966: cited in Rosenshine, 1971), divest teacher characteristics, formed in part by teacher education programmes, from the responsibility of poor student performance. The bulk of the blame is placed on student character-

istics and other socio-environmental factors such as the contradiction between the educational system itself and the type of expectations that are set to define performance. In some cases even ethnic compositions of societies and schools are held for blame. And still yet in some instances, social and economic changes are considered the main sources of poor student performance.

All this, and more, may be true in different and specific cases, but can we claim that, in all instances, teacher competence/attitude is the least to blame for poor student performance? Do we then rule out any possibility of teacher responsibility for, among other things, cumulative deficits in the basic skills¹ and their reduction, in most, if not all, instances? If the answer is even only probably not, then the question becomes whether it can even vaguely be said that the problem may exist in the specific instance of Trinidad and Tobago that, as a result of the disjunctions between:

(i) the primary and secondary sectors of the education system; and (ii) the junior secondary and senior secondary school system, deficits are acquired at the lower levels (primary and junior secondary) which, if not noticed and remedied, can only become cumulative at the senior level.

To the extent that a proposition can be defined as a statement which is more or less true for the purpose of addressing pressing issues, it is being proposed here that, based largely on the Harvey research, such a problem exists in the Trinidad and Tobago comprehensive secondary school system. With this said, the only relevant questions are if the suggested new additions to the contents of teacher education programmes are adequate to meet this challenge and whether the additional contents, or variants of them, are considered worthy of implementation or are being already implemented? In this connection, the proposition is that the problem, as defined above, is a new problem which is only now beginning to loom in terms of its seriousness. For this reason, it is believed that the issue deserves vigorous debate both scholarly and public.

¹The basic skills referred to here are the process skills of reading, writing and mathematics and critical thinking skills.

Some misconceptions can easily attach to the focal concern of this article, we shall refer to two of them. First, there is the erroneous belief that Trinidad and Tobago is one of the few countries in the English Speaking Caribbean that has achieved an almost fully trained teaching force, at both the primary and the secondary levels. It will therefore come as an unpleasant surprise, if not as a shock to some sensibilities, to suggest, as is being done here, that the contents of teacher education programmes can admit some additions in the light of some yet to be fully appreciated and emerging problems. The reasons for this ought to be clear enough for, even if it were true that the teaching force in Trinidad and Tobago is almost fully trained, it is equally true that to be fully trained does not, and cannot, nor should it be allowed to mean, perfectly trained to meet all emerging and yet to be fully understood problems.

Second, the misconception can easily occur that the assumption here is that poor attitudes and incompetence on the part of teachers is a major contributor to the poor performance of students in the specific context of Trinidad and Tobago's secondary school system. No such assumption is being made in this present case. The two propositions discussed above should make this crystal clear.

The background purpose then is to advance concern from the need for equality of educational opportunity, a situation which is rapidly materializing in Trinidad and Tobago, to concern for equality of the quality of educational opportunity or educational equity.

The Existing Secondary System

In 1959, the Maurice Committee, reporting in what was described as "the first official report on the educational system produced with a local or national definition of the system". (National Planning Commission, 1965, p 125), recommended a two-tier system for the secondary level. Junior secondary schools would cater for the 12-14 year age group; and the senior secondary schools would cater for the 15-16/18 year age group.

The period of rapid expansion began with the introduction of the two-tier system in 1972, with the first allocation of students to the new Junior Secondary Schools. The first allocation of students to Senior Secondary Schools occurred in 1975. In addition to the new Junior and Senior Secondary Schools, the traditional secondary schools were retained and were allowed to function in their established academic ways. Retention of the old system and the introduction of the new

system has resulted in the present system of secondary education consisting of two parallel and relatively independent sub-systems.

Sub-system one comprises of (i) the traditional, academically oriented and denominational secondary schools, which are referred to as the Assisted Secondary Schools and (2) the old Government Secondary Schools. Both of the two types of secondary schools accommodate students for the duration of their secondary level education experience i.e. for five years (to O'level) or for seven years (to A'level). These schools have an average student population of five hundred to six hundred and the numbers of their staff range between thirty and forty. They follow an academic type curriculum.

Sub-system two comprises of (1) the new Junior Secondary and (2) the new Senior Secondary Schools¹ and (3) the new Composite Schools. The first three years of secondary education are spent at the Junior Secondary level, while the Senior Secondary level caters for the final two years to 'O' level and/or a further two years to A'level. The Composite Schools are 5 year schools that incorporate the Junior and Senior levels. The majority of the students in this sub-system leave after O'level.

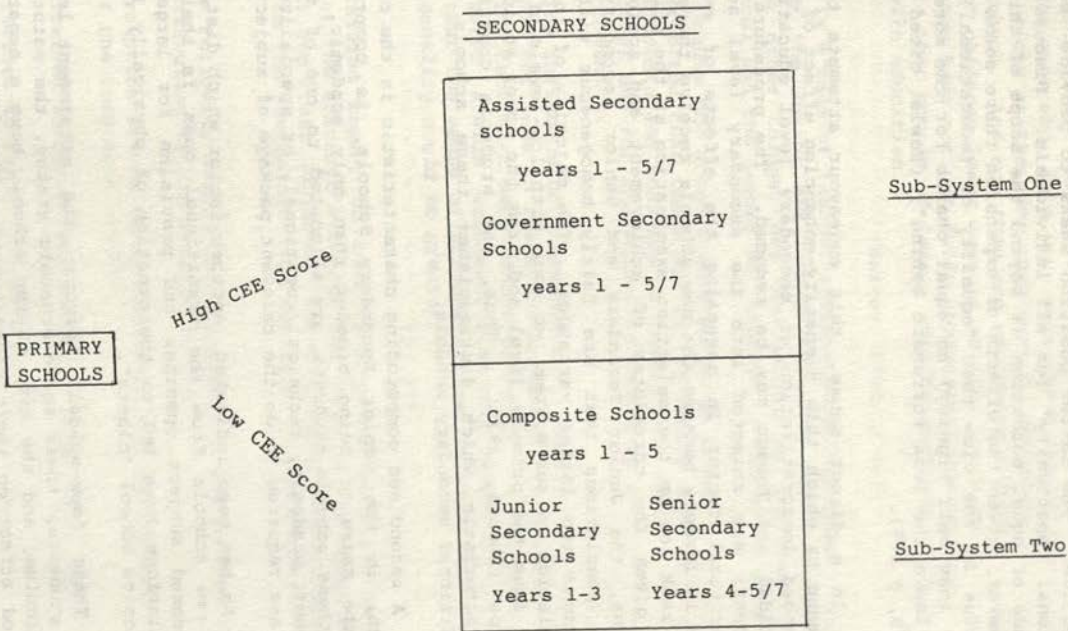
The Junior Secondary Schools operate on a double shift system catering on the average to 960 students per shift.² The senior secondary schools have a single shift with student populations that range from nine hundred to twelve hundred, and with staff numbers between eighty and one hundred plus. In addition there is a large staff of non-teaching personnel - maintenance, security and clerical. The schools in sub-system two have an expanded curriculum which, at the senior level is fairly comprehensive and includes subjects in the academic, technical/vocational and specialised craft areas.

Students are allocated to secondary schools on the basis of a common entrance examination (the 'eleven plus') at the end of primary schooling. It is now fairly well established procedure (Shangi, 1979) that the schools in sub-system one tend to receive the higher scorers in this examination; This implies that medium and low scorers on the common entrance examination find their way into the secondary schools in sub-system two. Figure 1 illustrates the present structure of the secondary school system.

² *There exists a distinction between the senior secondary school and the senior comprehensive school but for purposes of this paper the term "Senior Secondary" is used to refer to both types of senior secondary level schools*

³ *Except the most recently opened in 1985, El Dorado Junior Secondary School which is single-shift and all day.*

FIGURE 1: Structure of the Secondary School System in



The Effects of Expansion

The impetus to provide universal secondary education is based on the ideological shift from an elitist to a democratic perspective. The latter position seeks to provide "equal educational opportunity" for all individuals. Discussion of the issue of equal education is beyond the scope of this article. However, given the effects of expansion there seems to be some virtue in the view that "equality of (educational) opportunity (may well signify) an equal chance for the more fortunate to leave the less fortunate behind", (Rawls, cited in Greene, 1978, p 129).

In a direct sense, this endeavour attempts to suggest a means by which this disparity-enhancing effect of the well-intended democratization of secondary level education in Trinidad and Tobago may be reduced. The procedure by which students are selected into the secondary level schools is a critical factor in assessing the effects of expansion. This is largely because the new schools receive those students who rank low on the selection examination at the primary end; and given the correlates of achievement and socio-economic status, the Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools have populations that are fairly homogeneous with respect to these two latter variables. The majority of the student population in sub-system two come with low-levels of achievement from the primary level and from the lower socio-economic groups (Shangi, 1979). Thus, the students constitute one characteristic which distinguishes these schools from the traditional secondary schools.

A second and compounding characteristic is the curriculum which, in the Senior Secondary Schools, is comprehensive, in the sense of being broader than only academic. In most of these schools students are allocated to one of the three streams, academic, technical/vocational, or specialized craft, and are required to do the relevant package of subjects.

As has been indicated, another factor which distinguishes the new schools from the traditional ones is their size. Increased subject openings and provision for large student populations have led to the creation of physically large and extensive school "plants".

These "new-school" factors; the attainment levels of the students, their socio-economic status, the nature of the curriculum, and the size of the school, have a negative concerted effect on their constituents. The fact that students have experienced low levels of achievement, and, at the same time, come from low SES groups, among other things, ought to place an ever-pressing demand on the resourcefulness of teachers and administrators, in the sub-system two category of schools, both in terms of instructional processes and in

interpersonal relations. The following statement captures the essence of the issue.

Teachers are very privileged in that they were the ones who, in a way, were the elite of the society at the time they went to secondary school. And now they are educating a group of children lower down in ability level and they have not yet fully appreciated how it is that people of lesser ability can cope with education.

(Harvey, 1981, p 183)

The issue is a case of teacher-student social dissonance, which is felt by the Junior and Senior Secondary School students, who, among other things, are overwhelmed by the sheer size of the school and the number of "others". Harvey reports:

Because the schools were so large it was reported that there was little chance for students and teachers to really know each other and for the school to evolve as a community.

The influence of principal and teachers did not seem to reach all students The fact that each school tended to serve a wide catchment area also meant that the sense of strangeness and impersonality could be greater.

(p 186)

Another related issue, is that of a perceived split between teachers of the academic subjects and those of the technical/vocational and craft subjects. Relationships, Harvey reports, ranged from the recognized but controlled differences to open conflict.

The following are, inter alia, some of the factors listed as contributing to the conflicts:-

- (a) perception of the technical/vocational as subjects for the less able student;
- (b) perceived inappropriate classroom behaviours, and
- (c) attitudes to work. (Harvey, p 207)

This situation reveals the need for tolerance and understanding among practitioners, and for acceptance by teachers of differences among students in the area of abilities, since, as Harvey reports, students in the technical and craft streams are viewed to be "different" at best and in some cases as necessarily "worse off" than students in academic streams. (Harvey, p 207)

The peculiarities of the curriculum, and the two-tiered structure of sub-system two raise questions with respect to the continuity and the integration of the curriculum process and points to the need for collaboration among practitioners within levels across curriculum disciplines and across levels within curriculum disciplines. Harvey reports on the discontent among practitioners relating to the disjuncture between the curriculum of the Junior Secondary School and that of the Senior Secondary School.¹ The teachers were particularly disturbed at the fact that some subjects, for example, Principles of Business; were done for the first time at the senior secondary level. (Harvey, p 192)

The need for educational and social support services to be fully integrated into the education system is reflected in the issues inherent in the characteristics of the student populations. The ever-increasing demand on the teachers' resourcefulness has been mentioned earlier. The logic of the situation is this: since many of these students are at the lower end of the ability scale, as is indicated by their performance on the common entrance examination, they come to the Junior Secondary Schools with "cumulative deficits", i.e. gaps in basic academic competence, which if not compensated for, are compounded, so that by the time these students reach the senior secondary schools they are hardly likely to cope with the demands and the expectations of the external examinations. Senior Secondary teachers are therefore faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of preparing their students for examinations which they could "fail with distinction". One student expressed the situation in this way: "I sometimes feel it will surprise teachers and parents more if you pass than if you fail". (Harvey, p 196)

¹We note the current effort in revising the curriculum of the Junior Secondary level and the intention to standardize this curriculum across schools in sub-systems one and two. However, the possibility of disjuncture with the senior level still remains.

The situation described above is the basis for the feelings of inadequacy, futility and helplessness expressed among many teachers in sub-system two who confessed that they felt like they were "marching in quick-sand, ... with unrealistic expectations and no means of motivation", (Harvey p 211). It points to the pressing need for the development of instructional systems geared towards reducing those cumulative deficits in the basic academic areas within the ambit of normal classroom instruction in the subjects that make up the curriculum of the secondary schools.¹

Implications for Teacher Education

Given the issues outlined in the preceding section, the following question then arises: how can teacher education meet the needs created by the effects of expansion in the secondary sector?

If we conceive of the education sector as a system of interacting sub-systems, then it is clear that the teacher education sub-system is the mainline system, feeding into and reacting to changes in the other sub-systems. It is the responsibility then, of teacher education, to attempt to eliminate those effects of expansion that directly impinge upon the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Teacher education must respond by preparing teachers who will be competent to teach successfully in the Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary schools.

The problems outlined in the preceding sections define crucial areas that must be included in the content of programmes that prepare teachers for the secondary level in Trinidad and Tobago,² for Lindsey's tenet that "competency in the work of the teacher should be the criterion for determining curricula content and arrangements (of teacher education programmes)" (Lindsey, 1978, p 4), holds true in this context as much as it does in any other context.

¹ It should be noted that we are not recommending "remedial" instruction in the separatist sense as it has come to be known, since this may be psychologically more damaging to the self-concept of individuals in the age-group concerned than if no attempt was made to correct the situation.

² Strictly speaking there is currently no programme that prepares teachers for the secondary level. Still, the observation, has equal validity and relevance for in-service programmes. The need for a pre-service programme of preparation for teaching is, of course, underscored by this entire discussion.

The issue of social dissonance calls to mind these words of Martin Buber:

Only when the individual knows the other in all his otherness as himself, as man, and from these breaks through to the other, has he broken through his solitude in a strict and transforming meeting.

The task of teacher education in this regard is to help the teachers break through the solitude that comes from ignorance of the mores of those social and ethnic groups different from their own. Therefore, content related to the dynamics of the Trinidad and Tobago society - the norms, customs, value and belief systems of the various constituents - is critical to proper and effective secondary level teacher education programmes.

The honest admission of the problems related to social dissonance, their proper understanding and their sincere appreciation are essential to the helping relationship that teaching is. They at once make possible the process of self-understanding of the teacher, and an understanding of patterns of behaviour different from his/her own. Such understandings are "important for the teacher who wishes to engage in dialogue with students, at least to the extent of arousing them to learn". (Greene, 1973, pp 79-80).

These understandings would also foster tolerance by teachers of the cultural and social differences among students and thus would enable them to transcend the labels which accompany students allocated to the new schools and search for ways to help them maximize their potentials. Teachers, hopefully, would come to view all students as potential learners. Again, as Greene states, "the aware teacher ought to be sufficiently aroused to note the failures resulting from teachers attitudes rather than from student incapacity." (Greene, 1973, p 150)

The second and equally critical area of content implicit in the problems deriving from expansion, is the area of instructional development. Given the "cumulative deficits" thesis, identification of deficits is critical to any attempt at helping students learn. Of equal significance is the provision of instruction aimed at reducing these deficits. The teacher education programme should therefore place heavy emphasis on developing those skills related to:

- (1) diagnosis of learning difficulties,
- (2) identification of levels of mastery of basic academic skills,
- (3) design and development of instruction, geared to increasing levels of mastery of basic skills, at the same time as it develops subject-matter competence,
- (4) development of instructional materials,
- (5) evaluation of commercial instructional materials,
- (6) effective use of technology.

These latter (4, 5 and 6) are essential to prescriptive teaching since very often commercial packages do not quite fit the gaps that are identified, and, in most cases, they are not locally produced. If teachers master these skills, they would be stimulated to make their own games, study guides, tapes, etc. to suit their particular instructional needs.

There is also a more fundamental significance underlying the critical nature of these skills. We know that, in most instances, "low achievers" share certain common characteristics, inter alia, short attention span, low motivation and interest levels, boredom, poor self-concept, etc. (Biehler and Snowman, 1982, p 573). It is the responsibility of the teacher education programme to develop in teachers those skill which would enable them to do what the knowndemands.

In this case, the known demands that the instructional process should be designed so that motivation and interest levels are raised and sustained, boredom vastly reduced or even eliminated altogether, and self-concepts boosted. The key to this lies in the effective and extensive use of the media of instruction.

Competence leads to confidence which in turn fosters the development of positive attitudes. Mastery of this package of skills will encourage teachers to be innovative, to search for new ways to help their students, to question the effects of their attempts, and hopefully, to share their ideas and experiences with other teachers.

A third area of content is implied in the issues related to collaboration and conflict. The teacher education programmes must introduce the teacher to the dynamics of the school as an organization so that roles and functions could, at least be recognized, and areas and strategies for collaboration

identified. Thus, teachers would come to expect and assume participation in the collaborative effort.

Concrete Recommendations

The preceding section identified three critical areas of content which a programme for preparing teachers for the present system of secondary level education in Trinidad and Tobago should address. These areas have been distilled from the concerns, feelings, perceptions and experiences of those frontliners who find themselves having to cope with the demands of expansion.

The issue of quality education must of necessity embrace the concern for educational equity. In order to achieve the goal of quality education and at the same time satisfy the need for educational equity, there must be envisaged a kind of levelling-off of the system in which all schools - whether sub-system one or sub-system two - provide the kind of educational experience that enhances the potentials of their clientele and enables them to achieve a level of proficiency that truly and realistically reflects their capabilities.

Teacher education must provide the opportunities for existing practitioners to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to fill the gaps in their experiences, and which belie the successful attainment of this goal. A continuing system of in-service professional activities such as periodic out-of-school workshops, short vacation courses, and in-house staff-development seminars and workshops, rigorously planned and carefully managed, offers itself as a potentially efficient means of fulfilling this need.

The initial phases of the expansion process focused exclusively on the provision of *more* school places and the recruitment of *more* teachers without much consideration of what *more* in this context would mean, that is, demands or entails. Expansion could be operationalized in one of two ways. Expansion as addition describes the simpler process by which the "new" are taken aboard as mere appendages to the traditional, resulting in a heterogeneous system, with the "old" and the "new" as identifiable entities. Expansion as integration and assimilation, on the other hand would imply a more complex process; one that re-defines the traditional to absorb the new. The result, in this latter case, can be a homogeneous system where the "new" are not easily distinguished from the "old". The expansion process in Trinidad and Tobago is clearly expansion as addition.

Both types of expansion require consideration of the "treatments" to be dispensed. In the case of expansion as addition, it is now fairly obvious that the "additions" need a type of instruction that is different from what is practised normally in the traditional schools. By extension, they also need outstanding teachers. The teachers assigned to the schools in sub-system two should fit the following profile:

- enthusiastic, energetic and "positive";
- empathic patient and understanding;
- competent, resourceful, innovative and daring;
- warm, accepting and willing to give time;
- fully committed and willing to share themselves, their ideas and their experiences with other teachers.

Admittedly, these are the hallmarks of any "good" teacher. There is no argument here. But, a teacher could get by in the traditional system even if he/she falls short on some of these attributes. The system itself will survive, as indeed sub-system one has, because of the student factor. The high ability student will continue to achieve in spite of the teacher. In the new schools however, survival of the system and its constituents lies in the degree to which all of these attributes are present in the teachers because, the low ability student is likely to achieve mainly because of the teacher. It follows then, that if students' self-concepts are to be enhanced and if positive thoughts and feelings are to be fostered in them, then their teachers themselves must be positive thinkers. If students' interests are to be aroused and if students are to be moved to excitement, wonder and thirst for knowledge, then their teachers must be enthusiastic, dynamic people. If students are to be accepted for what they are, that is, potential learners, they must be met at their own levels. Their teachers must therefore manifest warmth, acceptance, understanding and empathy as they competently and resourcefully mete out instruction.

These attributes are the keys to the success of the students, of the teachers, and of the sub-system itself, and as such should define the intended "priceless" outcomes of teacher education programmes for the secondary level.

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