To: The VAPA Dip. Ed Class

From: Dr. Jeniffer Mohammed

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Subject: Sociology Lectures/Workshop Reflections

I was thinking about our session last night and wanted to add a few more words. The powerpoint (PPT) for Lecture 3/Workshop is largely a repeat of the PPT for Lecture 2, except that it has what was to be the workshop activity at the end (which we did not get to). I decided to review the information in PPT 2 because I had a feeling that the Sociological Perspectives needed some more attention than just you reading the slides. I also want to tie up some of the thoughts we pursued in the session, in a sociological fashion!

Our discussion went far and wide and I would like to nail some of it down to sociological concepts, socio-historical contexts etc:-

* Socialization – which we often don’t think about much in our daily lives, works us over and over and over all the time. In this way we come to take on (as if we originated the thought or the position ourselves) the major values and ideologies of our society. Once this shared position becomes entrenched it becomes well nigh difficult to ‘*become an object to ourselves’* and see things clearly. A case in point is if Martians were to land here and observe the furore, consternation, panic, and the ferentic pace of work that attends children sitting an exam at the end of primary school to facilitate the transition to secondary. It would be puzzling, especially when we have places available for all sitting the exam. Forget the Martians, just someone from another society with a more humane system where its just a movement from one type of school to another. …

 Unless, our historical context is brought into play. We are continuing to play out the old values and ideologies. We are so thoroughly socialized that reforms come and go and we are hardly aware. Of course, the reformers are partly to blame because they ignore all this socio-historical baggage we carry around and pay too much attention to ‘rolling out’ the reform (which is a political event), to producing documents to guide the teacher etc etc,…and pay scant attention to training teachers into what are perhaps more enlightened practices, and no attention to the monitoring and evaluation of the reform. It is not far-fetched to think that the people at the helm of the reform are in the grip of the same ideologies that value (at a visceral level) the type of education one gets from a classical curriculum in a denominational school, and therefore do not pay much attention to the reforms and how they are faring??? I say this because it takes a lot of expense, energy and people power to develop these measures meant to improve the system, and then they are not followed up with purpose and meaning. What else is one to think?

 Studying sociology encourages us to ‘*become an object to ourselves’* – to take a removed stance where some of our practices are concerned and examine why we are doing what we are doing. And, does it serve us, our children? And, why should we be doing this? The process of socialization is insidious and sinister, it dulls our senses into accepting….even the things that do not seem to work for us.

* Becoming a Teacher – a theme in the foundations of education. From a sociological point of view, becoming a teacher means an initiation into the historical ways we organized schooling and continue to do so – case in point is the College Exhibitions (CE), the Common Entrance Examinations (CEE) and the Secondary Examination Assessment (SEA). A beginning teacher must know about the genesis and development of the education system. One cannot understand education today without the historical context. Carl Campbell’s book, *Colony and Nation*, is a good read. History and Sociology complement each other as disciplines.

 The beginning teacher must necessarily have as well a good grasp of how teachers are organized as a group – with the factions and separateness we have come to accept, without taking much thought about it (and you know why). I am alluding to wide chasm between primary teachers and secondary teachers and indeed the two systems are palpably different.

 The *primary system* was developed by the British to anglicize the colony – remember we were mainly Roman Catholics and spoke some variant of French, the curriculum in the largely R.C. schools at the time was a French curriculum reflective of French culture. In addition, a newly free people would need basic literacy and numeracy skills to survive. However, who were the persons to teach this group of low-status persons? In the beginning there were some ‘master teachers’ from England but eventually the monitor system was established and bright boys and girls from the primary system were recruited to teach their own class (*social class* is a major concept in sociology).

 It goes without saying that these local ‘teachers’ had to be rigorously and thoroughly trained – to get out of them any criticism they may have had towards their colonial overlords. Indoctrination would be an apt term for the ‘teacher training’ they underwent. It is said that they were trained and trained and possibly over trained. They became a conservative force upholding British values and customs and passing them on, and doing all that for the comfort of having a ‘respectable’ job (nothing menial and manual) where their own social group held them in high esteem (they were not highly paid though). This was a tremendous boost to the authorities – they hardly spent a cent to cement their rule. Teachers were rewarded by the knowledge that they were looked upon as ‘dedicated’ and ‘altruistic’ – myths that we today continue to struggle with. (In sociology, a ‘myth’ is a strong belief that is shared).

 The *secondary system* evolved differently. Primary school teachers did not have a secondary education themselves. The latter was of a different social class altogether. It was a paying school and so the children of the elites attended, as well as the few poor boys who had won a College Exhibition. University graduates taught, as well as those who had had a secondary education, as trainees. The emphasis was on having the specialist knowledge of the classical disciplines deemed important in White, Western culture. As a result there was no question of teacher training – the specialist knowledge was what was deemed important.

 In Trinidad & Tobago in more modern times as teachers we have struggled with some of these myths that we have inherited through socialization processes; they no longer serve us, the British are long gone, but we continue to have them in our consciousness at some level. The secondary school teacher who feels that the Dip. Ed is a ‘waste of time’ is in the grip of such a socialized view. I think there is possibly no clearer example I could offer to show the importance of studying the sociology of education as a beginning teacher.

 In closing, I encourage you to try the workshop activity yourself. It has to do with the sociological perspectives. If you want to email me your responses for comment, you can reach me at jeniffer.mohammed@sta.uwi.edu