

EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR PERSONAL ADVANCEMENT AND NATION BUILDING*

BY

Dr. Melville D. Malamah-Thomas, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board of Governors, parents and guardians, staff and pupils, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I feel deeply honoured by the invitation from the J. T. Reffell French Friendship Memorial School to be the guest speaker for this afternoon's Graduation and Prize-giving Ceremony.

I have chosen the theme, Education: A tool for Personal Advancement and Nation Building. There are several definitions of education. I prefer the definition which says, to educate someone is to provide schooling for that person; to train the person by formal instructions and supervised practice in a skill, a trade or a profession; to develop that person mentally and morally. Mental development is related to emotional and intellectual response of an individual and involves the person's learning ability or capacity. Morality in education deals with the principles of right and wrong behaviour in a given society. I would like to stress the moral side of education to you the pupils. Please realize that education not only deals with your capacity to learn and acquire knowledge, but it involves your behaviour; the way you comport yourself; the way you talk; how respectful you are.

A tool is something, as an instrument or apparatus, necessary in the practice of a vocation or a profession. An example was once given that a scholar's books are his or her tools. That example could be interpreted to mean that somebody in the academic field who is well known, uses his books to further his or her work to continue to pursue knowledge. A tool is a means to an end. Something you use to achieve a goal. Let us look at two simple everyday-life examples of using a tool to achieve a goal. If you have a loaf of bread and you wish to eat part of the loaf, you will need a knife to cut the loaf of bread. Another example is the use of a bucket, or any suitable container to fetch water from a tap or from a well. The knife and the bucket are tools which made it possible to achieve something, to achieve a goal. The first goal is the piece of bread and the second goal is to obtain a quantity of water.

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I would like you the pupils to regard the education you are receiving as a tool, an instrument, an implement, to achieve your goal, to achieve your objective. The education you receive now is something you can use in the future to advance yourself, to improve yourself. Your education is like an investment for your future well-being.

EDUCATION AND PERSONAL ADVANCEMENT

Primary education is extremely important. It is the foundation for entry into secondary school, vocational school and eventually into University. Primary education must therefore be taken very seriously. Personal advancement starts right from primary school and is related to career development. Career development involves identifying a vocation or a profession, and learning all the skills related to that vocation or profession. Parents and guardians and even teachers should be in a position to recognize as early as possible special talents which children possess or their liking for particular subjects. This means that right at the primary level you the parents and guardians must begin to observe and study your children. Once you recognize a particular talent, you should go all out to encourage the child to develop that talent. Similarly, the child must be encouraged to put more emphasis on subjects he or she is good at. But this does not mean that the other subjects are not important. The child must have a solid foundation in all subjects taught at the primary school level.

It is important that parents and guardians and you the pupils realize that gone are the days when emphasis was placed on academic subjects. Gone are the days when everybody wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer. Every profession is now important. The present educational system for schools in Sierra Leone encourages both academic and vocational subjects. Learning the skills related to tailoring, catering, carpentry and masonry, to name a few, is equally important as learning skills related to academic disciplines such as medicine, law, engineering, social science and history.

Whatever career you choose you will have to go through the process of being educated at the primary and secondary level, at vocational training schools or at the University. The institution you attend after secondary school will depend on the profession you choose, your own ability to pursue higher education, and perhaps more importantly, opportunities that will come your way.

Two of the most beautiful things about education are that once you acquire education nobody can take it away from you; and secondly once you are educated you have in your possession a very powerful tool for life. A tool that will help you live a decent life. Education is **THE TOOL** that can enable you to fit well into society. Education is the tool that will help you bring in income for you and your family in the future. We should not forget that when one learns skills like tailoring and carpentry, one can become self-

employed and have one's own business enterprise. You become independent and can determine your own income and life style. Education is the tool that will teach you how to behave, how to relate to others, how to be polite and how to carry yourself in a respectable manner. Education is the tool that will allow you to appreciate that which is good and reject that which is bad. All of these, the mental and the moral aspects of education, contribute to your personal advancement as you grow up and become adults and later in your adult life.

Parents and guardians you have an enormous task to guide and encourage your children. Teachers too have an important role to guide pupils. I am not sure how much guidance counseling is done in primary and secondary schools, but it is an important aspect which should be incorporated into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools.

Let us all try to put aside some of our old fashion ideas, many of which hinder the education of our children. I will illustrate this point by narrating a story I once heard. It happened somewhere in Europe. An African mother was traveling in a tourist bus with her child. There were other parents from Europe with their children in the same bus. The European parents were busy answering questions posed by their children and explaining things the children didn't understand as the bus went through different important historic places. The first time the African child asked a question, the mother gave the child a good slap and told the child to shut up and be quiet.

EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING

I would like to spend a few minutes on education as it relates to nation building. Time will not permit me to cover all the important aspects related to nation building from an educational perspective.

It is not usual for people in many developing countries to link personal or individual education to the welfare of the nation as a whole. I believe it is time for us in Sierra Leone to start thinking about both our personal advancement and our contribution to the nation as fruits of our education.

I believe it is extremely important to lay much more emphasis on science and technology in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. The curriculum in the sciences and in technology should include all aspects of agriculture. Many countries in Europe and the United States invested a lot on science and technology education, including agricultural education. In fact, part of the history of education in the United States was at one time dominated by the creation of what was called land grant colleges. They were basically agricultural colleges. Once a strong agricultural base was established and the nation could feed itself, science and technology benefited from research and development in agriculture. Science and technology were the basis for industrialization, the improvement of health facilities and other public services.

I would like to appeal to you the pupils to begin to link your education with the needs of the nation. It becomes a collective responsibility for all of us to use our knowledge and our skills to create what has been called "sweet Salone" in the Government's report on Sierra Leone Vision 2025. The Sierra Leone Vision 2025 report envisages the development of national policies in many areas including housing, health and sanitation, food security and adequate nutrition, natural resources exploitation, town and country planning, and improvement of the teaching of science and technology at all levels of education. These are areas in which specialized skills are needed. In this regard, I would like to encourage pupils to start thinking about certain profession that are useful in nation building but are rare in Sierra Leone. These include my profession, plant pathology (which deals with diseases of crops) and is part of agriculture. Other rare professions in Sierra Leone include Marine Engineering and Navigation, Marine Biology, Aviation Engineering and Navigation, Petroleum Engineering, Forestry, Entomology (which is the study of insects in agriculture and health), Psychiatry and Psychology, and Geology.

In my opinion, Sierra Leone also needs more analytic historians, more writers, more musicians (cultural and popular music), more actors and actresses, more comedians and more film and theatre directors.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, I believe I can safely assume that pupils from Prep 1 to Prep 6 understood most of what I said. However, I would like to request pupils in Receptions 1 and 2 to please stand and repeat after me:

- I must always go to school
- Because I don't want to be a fool
- I must always pay attention in class
- I must never cry in class
- I must always be ready and happy to learn
- Because tomorrow I will be somebody important
- Because tomorrow I will help my country

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the challenge is enormous for all of us, parents, guardians, and teachers. We can shape the destiny of our children in a positive way by giving them the right type of education at home and at school. It is also a challenge to the nation. The nation must adopt education policies that will train our children in the right way. The right way should mean a dual benefit for our children. They should benefit from their personal advancement; but the nation, Sierra Leone, should also benefit from their skills. All of us then would live in a beautiful Sierra Leone; in a "sweet Salone", in a peaceful, stable and happy Sierra Leone.

Thank you.