

# TTUTA ON TUESDAY

## Young teachers: The future of the profession

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### TTUTA

#### Part 1

WE OFTEN hear the maxim, “Young people are the future.” When this is couched in the context of the teaching profession, the obvious conclusion is that young teachers represent the future of the profession and by extension the nation.

It is therefore imperative that all teachers are very clear about the nature and purpose of education in the context of current social, political and economic realities, so that we can ensure our young colleagues are clear about their role and function heading into the future.

There is too the growing trend of other social institutions abdicating their responsibilities and turning to schools to fill the gap. From dysfunctional families, broken communities, diminishing roles of religious bodies and bombardment of social media, the child of today is forced to contend with large gaps when it comes to ethical, moral and social education.

Schools are often seen as the last ray of hope for the moulding of good citizens. In our current society, many children are forced to grow up without a moral compass. Teachers are thus forced to deliver not just an academic curriculum, filling the vacuum left by parents, elders and leaders.

An attitude of selfishness and entitlement is being increasingly inculcated in the minds of young people at every turn. This is the future that our young teachers face.

In the current circumstances of moral and ethical bankruptcy, and given the extremely rapid pace of communication and other technological developments, predicting the face of the future is extremely difficult, if not impossible. As if keeping abreast of the current “screenage” generation is not difficult enough, we are required to prepare them for a future that none of us can predict.

Add to this the growing dilemma of climate change and environmental degradation and we can appreciate the formidable task that lies ahead for our teachers.

As a profession we have recognised the need to redefine our practice in the context of technological advancements, so that we have had to shift the learning paradigm from “what to learn” to “how to learn.” Information is no longer power. Power lies in the capacity to use that information: a major challenge of teachers of today and of the future.

There is also the growing emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), which is being touted as the new frontier of learning, threatening to replace teachers.

AI refers to the intelligence demonstrated by machines or machine intelligence, in contrast to the natural intelligence displayed by humans. Leading AI textbooks define the field as the study of “intelligent agents,” any device that perceives its environment and takes actions that maximise its chance of successfully achieving its goal.

In simple terms AI is often used to describe machines that mimic cognitive functions that humans associate with the human mind, such as learning and problem-solving. The general idea behind AI is that human intelligence can be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it.

This is where teachers may choose to differ from our scientific counterparts. Teaching is a human function and our jobs can and will never be duplicated by machines. The job of teaching requires us to not just get children to acquire and display certain

competencies; it is about getting them to be good decent human beings.

They must not just be able to perform routine tasks, but be able to display ethical and moral capabilities that would not just ensure the propagation of the species but also the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of people whose diversity is acknowledged and who subscribe to universally accepted principles of humanity.

Teacher unions are also facing a continued onslaught and demonisation by politicians, large corporations and multinationals. We stand in their way and they have been consolidating their powers to destroy and systematically dismantle our collective strength.

We know that more and more the wealth of the world is being increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small group of people who see other people as property to own and exploit at their whim and fancy.

The agenda of teachers of the future is to confront these challenges and to mould citizens who are capable of enjoying their full range of human rights, endowed with the capacity to realise their maximum human potential. We educate people because they are entitled to a certain level of human dignity regardless of colour, class, race, gender identification, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or religious persuasion.