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THE ROLE OF THE ZIMBABWE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (ZIMTA) IN THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The study describes and evaluates the role of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association in the professional and academic development of teachers. The aim of the study is to increase the reader's knowledge and understanding of the association and to explore its changing role. Having been an active member of the Southern Rhodesia African Teachers' Association (S.R.A.T.A.) from 1961 to 1964, the author also attempts to assess the progress that has been made over the past thirty years and to describe the possibilities and problems of the association.

Information was obtained through a study of the association's published documents, literature searches on professional education and organisations, personal contacts and interviews with some members of the association and the National Executive in Harare.

The study revealed that whereas teachers were trying to assume control of their own professional development, they were, to a large extent, unable to influence their conditions of service, partly because ZIMTA is an association as opposed to a union and partly because of Zimbabwe's desire to make education one of the basic rights in the
country. This has entailed the recruitment of everyone who is willing and able to teach and with the minimum academic and professional qualifications. Entry into and exit from the profession has thus become difficult to control. The study further revealed that the association has not yet gained a strong and relevant role in the vetting of unsuitable and under-qualified members. It was also noted that the existence of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Union (ZITU) prevented the articulation of a unified position on a number of important issues.

The problems that militate against professionalism were identified as many and varied. They include hot seating, the low status enjoyed by the teaching profession because of uncompetitive salaries, the fragmentation of the teaching force as evidenced by membership either to ZIMTA or ZITU, inadequate support in the classroom, inadequate parental support and ill-conceived teacher development and inservice programmes.

The author argues that in order for ZIMTA to be regarded as representative of the majority of teachers, it will have to embark on a vigorous and sustained membership drive, draft a constitution which articulates the aspirations of a wide spectrum of teachers with varying qualifications and interests, achieve a standardisation of entry qualifications for all teacher preparation programmes, continue to provide opportunities for its members to acquire concepts, attitudes, skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for effective teaching, lobby parliamentarians for the enactment of education legislation in which teaching will be recognised as a genuine profession. Above all, it will have to work more zealously for the professional, social and material welfare of its members. Failure to maintain the delicate balance between its professional and trade union roles would result in depressed morale and act as a disincentive to professional development.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I propose to examine the role of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association in the professional and academic growth and development of its members and perhaps, of the rest of teachers in the country. In particular, it seeks to examine the extent to which the Association has been able to assume responsibility for the raising and sharpening of the academic and instructional skills of its members. Professional development, then, assumes greater significance in view of what R.W., Bamford (1965:90) advises that Colleges of Education should "abandon all pretence of turning out accomplished teachers" and leave that task to the post-college stage. These sentiments are
also echoed by E.G. Peirson (1965:30-31) who says that “professional training ... is a slow and lengthy process which cannot effectively be compressed into a short, intensive period of training immediately prior to entering the profession.” In a sense, this means that the further development and refinement of the teacher should be left to several groups including Ministries of Education, teachers’ professional organizations, Colleges and Faculties of Education and even the classrooms. For purposes of this paper, the emphasis will be on the role of the Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association (ZIMTA) in the professionalisation of the teacher.

IS TEACHING A PROFESSION OR VOCATION?

According to T.G. Cook (1973:1) “professions are distinguished from other occupations by the high status and prestige accorded them as well as a recognised reward system.” Cook goes on to say that “the high status relates to selective recruitment, prolonged training, standards of competence subject to qualification, and some degree of control over members of the occupation” (1973:1). Given Cook’s definition teaching appears to be a profession, although it is not always “identified with high incomes” but rather with the “service ideal.” (M.B. Ginsburg, 1988:142)

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1984:6) regard teaching as “a profession ... a form of public service which requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialised skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study.” The ILO and UNESCO go on to say “it calls also for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge” (p. 6).

In my interview with Mr P. Mabande, ZIMTA’S National Executive Secretary on 17th October, 1995, he indicated that although teachers were not the most highly paid civil servants, teaching has some of the elements of a profession.

Unfortunately for the teaching profession, some people argue that dancers, janitors, burglars and radiologists may be taught how to perform their tasks by people who are not trained as teachers. For instance, families teach their children mother tongues without the benefit of university degrees. Some people then begin to ask if “teaching knowledge” is special knowledge “marked off by character, quality, or degree from ordinary knowledge or common sense.” (M Buchmann, 1987:2). In fact, some people do not regard it as anything special and valuable, but like common sense and every-
day experience it is taken for granted. (Buchmann, 1987:1-2). In a way, this explains the large number of uncertificated teachers in our schools, estimated at about twenty percent of the entire teaching force by Mr P. Mabande. The ambiguities of teaching as a profession characterised by low pay and status, varying entry qualifications and low retention create doubts in some people's minds if it is a profession or vocation. According to M. Buchmann (187:2) some people have come to believe that only "the demented and flagrantly immoral" should be excluded. Some cynics have even gone to the extent of saying that preparation for the profession "need not be arduous and lengthy" (p.2). As the popular saying goes "those who can't, teach." Is it surprising then that members of the profession are not always adequately remunerated? It was because of the low status of the teacher that some people advocated the formation of a teachers' organisation for the enhancement of his professional and economic status.

According to H. Wilensky (1964:142-145) an occupation undergoes professionalisation through a series of sequential stages:
(i) the creation of a full-time occupation;
(ii) the establishment of a training school;
(iii) the formation of a professional association
(iv) and the formulation of a code of ethics.

However, T. Caplow in T.G. Cook (1973:3) presents a different order of events:
(i) the formation of a professional association;
(ii) the change of occupational title;
(iii) the development of an ethical code;
(iv) the use of political agitation for recognition and
(v) the emergence of training facilities.

So it appears as if occupations in their maturer years turn themselves into professional associations either with a strict control of membership through registration or purely voluntary membership.

THE FORMATION OF THE ZIMBABWE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

According to The Golden Handbook for the Teacher Book 1 (1994:31), the Zimbabwe Teachers Association started in 1910 as an all-white teachers' associa-
tion with black teachers forming their own organization, the Southern Rhodesians African Teachers' Association (S.R.A.T.A.) in 1942 under the leadership of Mr. G.D. Mhlanga. After the break-up of the Central African Federation in December 1963 S.R.A.T.A. became the Rhodesian African Teachers' Association (R.A.T.A.) and on the attainment of independence in April 1980 it assumed the name the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (Z.I.T.A.). ZIMTA was the result of a merger between the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZITA) and the National Teachers' Association (N.T.A) and was registered at Mount Pleasant High School on 22nd April, 1981. Although there have been several changes in the name of the Association, it still remains committed to the promotion of quality in education and the enhancement of the status of the teacher. According to the fifty-one page Constitution, Rules and By-laws of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (1995:1) the objectives of the Association include:

(i) the promotion of the material, social and professional welfare of all teachers in Zimbabwe;

(ii) the advancement of the educational interests of all the people of Zimbabwe;

(iii) involvement in activities which promote the retention and further development of those aspects of Zimbabwean culture which are worth preserving;

(iv) cooperation with the Government of Zimbabwe and its various ministries in the promotion of sound, national education policies and programmes and the general welfare of the people;

(v) cooperation with organisations and associations with similar objectives in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world.

For purposes of this study, the Association's many objectives will be subsumed under the promotion of the professional, material and cultural welfare of the teachers and people of Zimbabwe.

THE PROMOTION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to W.J. McGlothlin (1960:23):

Education for the professions is designed to create practitioners who are com-
petent to discharge their social obligations, their responsibility for leadership, their duty to grow in usefulness through continued study and research, as well as their other professional tasks.

It is, therefore, expected that ZIMTA as a professional organisation would encourage the achievement of the following objectives:

(i) the development of sufficient knowledge and skill to enable its members to practice the profession;

(ii) the improvement of social understanding and the development of capacity for leadership in civic affairs;

(iii) the development of personal qualities which make possible effective practice of the profession;

(iv) encouragement of continued study in order to increase the knowledge and skills required by the profession;

(v) encouragement of research in order to add to the corpus of human knowledge “either through discovery or application of new truths” (McGlothlin, 1960:7).

Under ZIMTA “professional development is directed towards the creation of a forum for increasing knowledge and skills among teachers.” (ZIMTA - Lararförbundet, 1994:13). This is particularly significant in Zimbabwe where the emphasis has shifted from quantity to quality in education. But this quality in education is not likely to be achieved if twenty percent of the teaching force is underqualified and uncertificated according to Mr Mabande in an interview on 17th October 1995. To assist the uncertificated teacher, the Association has organised, in conjunction with the Canadian Teachers' Federation (C.T.F.), periodic inservice courses and other staff development programmes at the school, branch, district, provincial and national levels. In most cases, the courses have comprised lectures on scheming, methodology, methods of teaching pupils with special needs, assessment of instructional delivery and pupil performance and even content in subjects of the member's own choice. In an effort to enhance the instructional efficiency and effectiveness of untrained teachers who show genuine interest in the teaching profession, the Association has persuaded teachers' colleges to give these “teachers-in-waiting” priority when student-teachers are being considered and selected,
provided they satisfied the basic entry requirements into a teachers' college. Furthermore, in order to improve the academic status of its members, the Association has held periodic coaching clinics for some of its members preparing for 'O' and 'A'Level examinations. Some of the members of the Association have developed professionally through attendance at various meetings, conferences, vacation courses, seminars, workshops and undertaking outside travel. The Association has also continued to support and encourage its members to improve their academic qualifications through the Bachelor of Education Degree in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies offered by the University of Zimbabwe since August 1993. At the Thirteenth ZIMTA Annual National Conference held at Belvedere Teachers' College from 14th - 17th April 1994, the National Executive was exhorted to negotiate with the University of Zimbabwe a reduction of the duration of the course from four to three years as well as a lowering of tuition and other fees.

Aware of the obsolescence of knowledge, the application of technology to teaching, the pupil explosion and the need to raise the level of knowledge and skill required by the teacher today, ZIMTA has continued to assist the certificated teacher improve his classroom performance through a variety of professional inservice courses. Like every other professional association, ZIMTA is keenly aware that "the enhancement of [professional] competence is a lifelong obligation" (McGlothlin, 1960:21)

STUDY CIRCLES

One of the fascinating innovations in the professionalisation of the teacher was the establishment of Study Circles under the sponsorship of Education International (E.I.), LO/TCO (Sweden) and Lararforbundet, the Swedish Teachers' Organisation. A study circle has been defined as "a group of teachers within the same school or locality who have come together to learn through sharing experiences in a spirit of comradeship" (ZIMTA Lararforbundet, 1994:5). The group usually discusses, shares and swaps experiences on a wide range of issues such as the Education Service, its structure, operations, problems and achievements, conditions of service in the Education Service, the role of ZIMTA in the promotion of the professional, cultural, social and material welfare of teachers and the problems and challenges of living together. Clearly then, the programme which has been running for the past ten years, was intended to sensitize the teacher to his trade union role. Many teachers are reported to have benefited
immensely from the inservice courses. ZIMTA has also, with the support of teachers' organisations in Canada, Finland and Sweden, run other professional development programmes such as Leadership Seminars for school, branch, district, provincial and national executives and the Teacher Management and Professional Support Programme which aims at assisting the teacher achieve greater competence and self-confidence in the classroom.

CONTACT WITH MEMBERS

Apart from annual conferences, seminars, workshops, inservice courses and study circles, all aimed at sharpening the professionalism of teachers, the Association has continued the tradition of the Rhodesian Teachers' Association (R.A.T.A.) which first published its first issue of RATA Views and Newsletter in 1965 and the National Teachers' Association (N.T.A) which published its own journal called the N.T.A. Journal. ZIMTA today publishes, on a quarterly basis, The Teacher's Voice in Zimbabwe (T.V.Z.) in order to maintain contact with its members in the interest of professional development.

THE VETTING OF ASPIRANTS TO THE PROFESSION

Most professional associations control membership through registration which is "one of the hallmarks of a true profession." (J. Lawson, 1965:19). However, the Zimbabwe Teachers Association is a voluntary professional association. In my interview with Mr P. Mabande on 17th October 1995, ZIMTA would have preferred to define more clearly and accurately the qualities needed by the teaching profession, but in our case this has not been possible because of the desire for education and particularly the introduction of Universal Primary Education and the corresponding expansion at both secondary and tertiary levels. However, the Association is aware of the need for a professional code of conduct. In an effort to enable members to build and maintain the teaching profession it has provided for the establishment of a Professional Standards Committee comprising the following ten members: the Secretary General, Deputy President, one National Executive representative, a primary school teacher, a secondary school head, a secondary school teacher, a tertiary education lecturer, a tertiary education representative and at least two women (Article 13:1 of the June 1995 Constitution). The committee is charged with the responsibility of setting high Professional Standards and a Code of Ethics and ensuring that they are implemented and kept. Since the inculcation of "a sense of professional ethics is an almost universal objective of professional education" (McGlothlin, 1960:17), the Association may be regarded as truly professional.
In order to be effective in controlling entry into and exit from the profession some members of the Association like M.C. Ndlovu, the chairperson for the Matebeleland South Province, propose the introduction of some Teaching Profession Legislation in which the teacher's status would be clearly defined, entry into and exit from the profession closely monitored, a code of conduct formulated and a Statutory Council for the discipline of members established (T.V.Z, July 1995:17). Only with this legislation in place will the Association be able to exert moral influence on its members.

COOPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT AND ITS SERVICE MINISTRIES.

According to ZIMTA'S National Executive Secretary, Mr Mabande, the degree of cooperation between the Government and its relevant service ministries and the national association in the promotion of the professional development of the teacher is quite high, although there is ample room for improvement. It is generally accepted that it was a result of the recommendations of the 1984 ZIMTA National Workshop on the Content and Structure of Secondary Education that there was a new Policy on the Content and Structure of Secondary School Education. This illustrates the beneficial influence of ZIMTA on the Ministry of Education. ZIMTA is also represented on all the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) subject panels to ensure that teachers' views are taken into account in matters affecting the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the nation's curricula. After a long struggle and persistent pressure on the Ministry of Education, the Association was pleased to witness the establishment of a Single Teaching Service in September 1987 which standardised the conditions of service in Government and other types of schools and ended the status of women as temporary teachers.

According to Mr Mabande, the association continues its termly consultative meetings with the Ministries of Education, Higher Education and Sports, Culture and Recreation. Among the professional issues discussed with the Ministries of Education are the implementation of the Accelerated Salary Advancement and Progression to Senior Teacher Grade. Although the two facilities have been fraught with a few problems in that some teachers who thought that they had attained a satisfactory standard of performance to warrant advancement have not always benefited from the scheme because of inconsistencies in implementation (T.V.Z, April 1993:2).
Asked what activities the association had undertaken in order to promote and retain those aspects of Zimbabwean culture that are worth preserving, Mr Mabande indicated that there was close liaison with the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Recreation. He said that the association actively supported the establishment of cultural clubs in schools and colleges and cooperated with the School Development Associations (S.D.A.s) and college authorities in the promotion of sports and culture at every level. The various sub-associations like those for Primary School Teachers, Primary School Heads, Secondary School Teachers, Secondary School Heads, Education Officers, District Education Officers and Lecturers are all committed to the development of sports and cultural activities. What is of greater significance is that these sub-associations demonstrate democracy at work in that members are able to discuss and articulate their own sectoral problems and aspirations under the overall guidance of the National Executive, thus preventing the fragmentation of the national association.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER TEACHERS' ORGANISATIONS

Keenly aware of the need to keep in touch with sister organisations in friendly and neighbouring countries in order to keep abreast of developments in the teaching profession, ZIMTA's involvement at national, regional and inter-continental levels has increased greatly. For instance, Mr T.G. Molefe, the National Treasurer, is now second Vice President of the All Africa Teachers Organisation (A.A.T.O.) while Mr Mabande, the National Executive Secretary, is the Treasurer of the Southern African Teachers Organisation (S.A.T.O.). From 19th-24th July 1995, ZIMTA hosted Educational International (E.I.) with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Education International was the result of a merger in January 1993 between the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (I.F.F.T.U.), largely concerned with the trade union rights of teachers and the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (W.C.O.T.P), more interested in promoting professionalism among its member organisations. In a veritable sense, the merger is symbolic of the complementary nature of the trade union and professional roles of teachers' organisations.

TRADE UNION ROLE OF ZIMTA

As already noted, teaching is "a mass occupation characterised by relatively low pay and low status, ambiguous entry qualifications and low retention" (Buchmann, 1987:2). Unless something is done to improve the social and material welfare of the teacher with the view to increasing the association's "real influence over the terms, conditions and
standards of the profession's life and work" (H. Perkins, 1973:81), the profession is likely to continue to enjoy a low esteem. The argument being advanced here is that greater attention to professionalism coupled with the recognition of the trade union rights of the teachers' organisation in seeking improved conditions of service, including competitive salaries, is likely to have a beneficial effect on the quality of education since teacher morale would be high resulting in greater commitment and higher motivation (T. Bediako, July 1995:5)

These sentiments are further echoed by K.M. Zeichner (1992:1) when he affirms that in order to improve the quality of education we should aim at "improving the status, power and working conditions of teachers." This is particularly so because if the reform of education is to be meaningful and permanent, then we need the cooperation of teachers who are on the shop floor of the process of learning. We need to be keenly aware of how they define and understand their work. More importantly, it means paying closer attention to their working conditions and supporting their efforts to "play more meaningful roles in determining the content and contexts of their work" (K.M. Zeichner, 1992:2) and building school environments which are conducive to professional commitment. Quite clearly, what is being advocated here is that unless teachers' conditions of service are improved, they will "continue to undermine the authenticity and social value of efforts to facilitate teacher development" (p.3) and the engendering of professionalism.

In his discussion of "ZIMTA's trade union role," Mr D.C. Chimhini (July 1994:11) argues that the Ministry of Education in its quest for a disciplined workforce has tended to neglect "real trade union issues like collective bargaining, autonomy, the right to withdraw labour and the right to organise and educate members...". Cognisant of the need to improve the teacher's economic welfare, ZIMTA encouraged the establishment of economic ventures. The ZIMTA Cooperative Credit Union (Z.C.C.U.) is a very successful venture launched in 1987 enabling teachers to obtain "loans equivalent to five times the member's savings after at least six months of uninterrupted contribution at the interest rate of one percent per month" (Mabande, April 1993:1). As a result of the loan facility, some of the members of the association have been able to "acquire residential stands, build or extend their houses in town or at home ... pay school fees and buy uniforms ... buy family vehicles, and ... meet other huge financial obligations in the family". (ibid). Besides, teachers who are members of the ZIMTA Cooperative Credit Union benefit from the O.K. Bazaars Scheme under which they are allowed to purchase goods on credit from OK shops without paying a deposit and the Z.C.C.U. facilitating the settlement of such accounts. Some discount houses also give members of the
association five to ten percent discount on some purchases.

PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST PROFESSIONALISM

According to Mr Mabande, some of factors militating against the emergence of a genuinely professional teacher include:

(i) hot seating which saps the teacher's energy resulting in inadequate preparation and ultimately classroom incompetence; the high teacher/pupil, lecturer/student ratio demotivates both the teacher and pupil;

(ii) the low status enjoyed by the profession because of uncompetitive salaries and poor conditions of service;

(iii) the difficulty of coordinating effort among teachers with a variety of qualifications-primary, secondary and tertiary. Is the fragmentation of the teaching force the answer? What about the duplication and dissipation of effort?

(iv) inadequate resources resulting in inadequate support in the classroom and lecture room, shortage of technical staff;

(v) in a number of cases, inadequate community support- inadequate parental support;

(vi) no properly coordinated teacher development and inservice programmes - no properly conceived follow up services to encourage professionalism.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

Despite the problems facing the association it has scored a number of successes:

(i) membership has increased from 5 000 in 1981 to 54 6000 in 1995 - a more than tenfold increase from 1981, with 4 500 leaving the profession each year.
it has been able to reduce, in conjunction with various ministries, the number of uncertificated teachers to twenty percent of the teaching force (93 000) from a large pool of uncertificated teachers in 1980;

through persistent pressure, it was able to influence the establishment of a Single Teaching Service and the ending of the status of women as temporary teachers;

has organised, in conjunction with sister teacher organisations, a number of vacation courses, workshops, seminars, professional meetings and conferences. It has sent a number of its executive members to other countries with a view to benefiting from other countries' experiences, enhancing cross fertilisation;

has supported professional and academic development through loan facilities to undertake further study, negotiated bursaries with Z.P.H., College Press and Longman for deserving students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels;

has endeavoured to raise the economic status of the teacher through its annual collective bargaining exercise;

has supported the establishment of self-reliance and provident schemes - Z.C.C.U., OK Bazaar Credit Scheme and negotiated discounts for members of its Credit Union;

has played an important role in the establishment of professional sister organisations in neighbouring countries and participated in regional and inter-continental teachers' conferences aimed at enhancing the status of the profession.

CONCLUSION

If the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association is to play a significant role in the professional development of teachers and be taken more seriously by the Government and its various ministries, it will have to ensure that all teachers are members. It will have to demonstrate its numerical strength, its "battalions". It will have to prove that it repre-
sents the majority of teachers and is the accepted voice of teachers at all levels. This means that the association will have to embark on a vigorous and sustained membership drive. To be able to do this, it will have to draft a constitution which is comprehensive, realistic and likely to be accepted by a wide spectrum of teachers with varying qualifications and interests—some people would argue that this is an almost impossible task.

In particular, the association will have to strive for a standardisation of entry qualifications for all teacher preparation programmes such as the holding of a Bachelor's degree in order to be licensed to teach in a primary school. It should also provide opportunities for its members to acquire concepts, attitudes, skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for effective teaching. This is necessary in view of the fact that teachers are one of the important factors in the educational process and consequently have to assume responsibility for their own professional development. Above all, if the association is to earn and maintain the respect and support of its members, it will have to work more assiduously for the improvement of the professional, social and material welfare of its members. It will have to take more seriously both its professional and trade union roles and in particular, the improvement of the working conditions of teachers. Quite clearly, unless the social and material welfare of teachers is taken care of there would be, to all intents and purposes, the creation of an illusion of professional development. More importantly, the association will have to lobby parliamentarians for the enactment of education legislation in which teaching will be recognised as a profession and rewarded accordingly.

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