

Speech of Hon. (Mrs) L.D. Dookun - LUCHOOMUN
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education & Scientific Research
Prize Giving Ceremony
Dr Maurice Curé State College
23 June 2015

Good Morning,

It is always a great pleasure for me to be present in educational institutions. Schools are the custodians and disseminators of knowledge and it is only natural that, on days like today, when we are out to recognize hard work and celebrate success, we realise the significance that education plays- -- has played and will continue to play—in the developmental process of our nation.

So let me start by congratulating all of today's prize winners. Congratulations to you, to your teachers and to your parents and peers who have played a highly contributory role in your success.

I am greatly pleased that Dr Maurice Cure State College has, over the years, systematically and assiduously encouraged and motivated its girls to aim at the stars.

And this has paid off.

Indeed, bagging 8 Laureateships, including 2 on social merit criteria for the first time is no mean feat. Nor does having 17 students with an aggregate of 6 units at School Certificate and many others scoring remarkable scores in last year's national exams any less remarkable.

I am also highly pleased to hear that your excellence is not simply situated in the academic field but also in the active participation in co and extra-curricular activities as well as Sports, resulting in the

winning of many prizes at regional and national levels. DMC's Music Club also appears to be a reference in this field.

Keep it up. Every single parent should be proud of your achievements.

However, my dear girls, this is not the end of the road. Rather, it is just the start of a long journey - the journey of knowledge, of continuous learning and development of the self.

As Minister of Education, but especially as a former Educator, I am thrilled to hear that Dr Maurice Curé State College has safeguarded and nurtured for years a particular school culture, one based on the principle of respect, courtesy, discipline and, above all, kindness. I am told that this is what characterizes the school, *cet esprit de partage que beaucoup ont perdu et que vous avez su préserver au fil du temps.*

This I believe is a supreme message that you should share with other schools. No one can afford to be out of step with these fundamental values that give society its soul. As former US President Theodore Roosevelt once famously said, "To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."

There is therefore virtue in sustaining these values—*il faut les pérenniser.*

And the place where this has to start is the classroom. The classroom is the crucible for the successful moulding of the wholesome personality of the young learners.

Ultimately, as someone so rightly put it, "it is a question of holding students to a standard of behavior that they would wish, as adults, to see reciprocated by their children and the youth around them."

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my strong conviction that all schools today have to be driven by the quest for better learning outcomes of their clients, the students. This has to become a passion for them. And for this to happen, we are lucky in Mauritius in that we have no lack of one of the fundamentals. I am talking here of the availability of teachers, mostly trained teachers, and resources at schools.

But there is also another fundamental, another predictor of success and I will briefly comment on it.

This predictor is the degree to which an educational institution practices an outreach program and involves both the community and the Parents in its several actions. I am sure you have heard of the important interaction that should exist among the 3 S's, namely Students, Staff and Stakeholders (including parents). In the educational literature, this is referred to as the "3 S Triangular Interaction" that drives a school.

Allow me to further situate this within the philosophy of DMC State College.

I take it that you are all fully conversant with the motto of your school. It is "*concordia parvae res crescunt*". You obviously also know what this Latin expression means. It can simply be translated as "With concord (harmony), small things grow".

However, Girls, I think you should also know this is but one part of a Latin proverb. The whole goes along these lines:

"concordia parvae res crescunt discordia maximae dilabuntur"

It means, literally, "Where there is harmony, small things (will) grow; where there is disharmony, very great things (will) decay."

Our schools have to establish strong and harmonious links both within themselves and with other educational institutions. Harmonious relationships should equally be established with the

communities in which schools are found. In close proximity of DMC State College, for example, you have got homes for the aged and other institutions run by Civil Society Organisations and NGOs. We should not be paying mere lip service to the notion of volunteer community improvement work—we should rather make it our duty and responsibility, part of our social conscience, to engage fully in what can become a life-changing experience for our youth.

I also appeal to the parents and teachers here present not to bank exclusively on fostering the academic brilliance of your children. That is important, no doubt, But I believe you should also encourage them to improve their skills set and foster meaningful relationships.

I sometimes wonder if we should not make community service a major requirement of secondary schooling—very much like what obtains in the International Baccalaureate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students,

If existing in harmony with the neighbourhood and the community around you is primordial, I believe it is equally important to have an effective monitoring and supervision of schools.

I will always insist that better learning outcomes and quality of learning are a direct consequence of a sound quality assurance system.

And such a quality assurance system should first and foremost exist at the level of the school itself.

All Heads of schools will agree that they now have to operate in a context where greater accountability is sought from schools. Schools have to set their targets, work out outcome and impact indicators and ensure that everyone in the institution—Rectors, Staff, students, parents--is reading from the same page, looking in the same direction and has a buy in. And it should also be a regular feature for the

school to evaluate whether the targets set have been achieved—and if not, then do some soul-searching.

That form of accountability not just in schools but also across the system as a whole, ladies and Gentlemen, is part of the vast Reform Agenda being implemented by my Ministry.

Let me also remind you that such a Reform Agenda rests on some basic but inescapable realities.

One such reality is that a focus on basic numeracy and literacy skills at the primary school-level is critical for achieving future learning success. One major component of the overall reform agenda, the Nine Year Schooling reform, is centered on this important dimension. It is the linchpin in as much as it is during this time that the child can consolidate the foundation on which her future learning will take place.

And this is an educational and ethical investment that Mauritius has to make. We have to ensure a universalization of secondary schooling for all learners. We have to embed the notion of lifelong learning in all for we can ill-afford to see inefficiency and wastage of precious human resources.

Dear Students,

It is especially you who should understand the importance of lifelong learning. This is part of a coping strategy.

In fact, our world is becoming increasingly unpredictable, changeable and complex. It is a world of rapid transformation because such a change is technologically -induced.

And technology has pulled out all stops today.

It is a world that hardly leaves much scope for leisurely adaptation or the adoption of a laidback attitude. Illustratively, the days of a lifelong career are behind us. Existing knowledge has become

ephemeral, transient, short-lived. It is being supplanted even as I speak to you right now by new knowledge.

What then becomes our responsibility, the role of education, in this new global perspective, this new **Zeitgeist**, as the Germans call it?

I believe that we have to teach you, our youth, to hit the ground running and learn to dive at the deep end.

Indeed, in such a volatile context, it becomes the responsibility of schools to so prepare our young people as to enable them to compete with the best in the world. Many of you, young ladies, will be travelling the world, performing jobs that are probably unheard of today. In such a context, it is our responsibility to equip you with the means to do so.

I, as Minister of Education, have the responsibility to empower you to be creative and innovative, to develop the relevant skills to leapfrog into the world of tomorrow and become employable and socially apt citizens.

No doubt, if you are to be the catalyst and enabler for sustainable growth and development, you will require vital technical skills.

However, in addition to these technical skills, you will also need the **soft skills** that will facilitate your ability to adapt to a changing work environment and to new situations—professional and otherwise. You will have to learn to work in international cross-cultural teams and develop the life skills that will empower you to act as responsible citizens of the globalised 21st century world.

Critical and creative thinking and the ability to communicate have to be supplemented by such Life Skills as flexibility , initiative-taking and other social and leadership skills.

These are the 21st Century skills, the **deep-learning skills** that you, young ladies have to develop—and this concern is high on the education reform programme being implemented by my Ministry.

Dear Rector, Staff and Parents,

I rest confident that I can rely upon you in the fulfillment of this massive enterprise. I realise it will be no easy task—some hurdles will crop up here and there. But we have what it takes, we have the resilience to fulfil this tryst with our educational destiny.

Let me end on this note. Congratulations, once again to the prize winners of the day and congratulations as well to the entire institution for a highly successful ceremony.

That, if nothing else, is a reflection of the high standards you have always set for yourselves.

Keep that going always.

I thank you for your kind attention.