

JEEVAN THIAGARAJAH

The College of S. Thomas the Apostle will be completing 100 years at Mt. Lavinia, in 2018. Much has been written on the history of the school, its illustrious products and the events around the centenary celebration. The purpose of this short piece is to look at a few other angles.

STC is not the only old school in this country. There are many lesser known entities. STC is blessed with four campuses located in Mount Lavinia, Colpetty, Gurutalawa and Bandarawela governed by one Board. It's uniquely placed to provide opportunities for education to children across many walks of life and regions.

Achieving greatness

A former Warden Paddyfoot captured the nuances of how school could really be great. He spoke about, "A school achieves greatness by responding imaginatively and creatively to the challenges posed by the world in which it exists and the world in which its pupils will live their lives. Great schools tend to have well-entrenched traditions, and those traditions can both underpin future progress and obstruct it, depending on how we deal with them."

"Schools must filter what is already known in order to present pupils with what is of permanent value in both their own traditions and the world's vast knowledge, while also anticipating what will be of value in worlds which do not yet exist."

"Of course, there will never be universal agreement about what is of permanent value, and such differences help to define different cultures and different value-systems, even different schools, but there can be little doubt – I at least have no doubt – the schools betray the trust bestowed upon them when they prepare children for a world already gone rather than a world yet to be. Their pupils will need to live their lives solving new problems, not regurgitating solutions to old ones, however useful that may be in some circumstances. Schools should therefore aspire to an embodied intelligence: an institutionally realised and established capacity to use what is already known in order to solve the problems of the unknown."

"In a great school, everyone is a learner and everyone a teacher; all are engaged in exploration of the vast possibilities of life; all relish

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the challenges presented by new problems; all are at their best when the going is toughest and the tough can really, get going. Great schools do not narrowly predetermine their measures of success: they do not praise only those who are academically gifted; they do not despair of those who struggle; above all, they never give up on any child under any circumstances, and see children who give up on themselves as a measure of the school's failure, not the child's."

These are very valuable thoughts. STC has undeniably been privileged and it is for that reason it must continue ceaselessly look for avenues to serve the larger populace and society in Sri Lanka. It's not my intention to catalogue the list of public figures, products of the

school who have led the country. I rather show how some continued to serve the less privileged giving them equal access to opportunities for their well being.

Examples of illustrious products

Prof. Dayantha Wijeyesekera, an academic and civil engineer left school after his O/Ls. Proceeded to Maradana Technical College and went onto earn two PhD's. A remarkable achievement. His entire working career has been for public service.

He was the first Vice chancellor of Open University of Sri Lanka in 1983. He later served as Chairman, Tertiary and Vocational

Education Commission (TVEC). In 2011, he was named chancellor of the University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC). He has spent considerable time maximizing opportunities for less fortunate students to access higher education.

His efforts were taken to its next level by equally well known old boy, Rajiva Wijesinha the son of an illustrious Thomian Sam Wijesinha. He enabled his Minister to present a Cabinet in 2016 which recognizes National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) for Employment Opportunities.

The Cabinet of Ministers decided at its meeting held in June 2016 to consider the completion of NVQ level 3 and NVQ level 4 as equal to passing the G.C.E. (O/L) and

G.C.E.(A/L) examinations respectively, at the instances where the requirement of NVQ level 3 or NVQ level 4 along with the G.C.E. (O/L) or G.C.E. (A/L) has been included in Service Minutes and Schemes of Recruitments as professional and educational qualifications for recruitment to posts in technological and technical sectors. It opens pathways to higher education, employment and income to scores of youth male and female in this country.

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