

Changes in Elementary Education

English translation:

A: How are you?

B: I am fine, and how are you, my child?

A: I am fine.

B: Okay.

A: What is your name?

B: I am Mrs. Chiroodza.

A: Okay. What is your profession?

B: I am a teacher.

A: Okay. How many years have you been teaching?

B: For twenty years now.

A: Ok. Can you tell me what inspired you to become a teacher?

B: I was a person who loved children. So I felt that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with children. I just like children. I love children. At church I teach Sunday school. So, when I began to love children, that's when I wanted to become a teacher.

A: What age group do you teach?

B: I teach primary level from grade one to grade seven.

A: What is the age range for children who go to primary school?

B: In the past years, say from 19-something to 2004, the Ministry of Education had changed. They were admitting underage for grade one that is five-year olds. After some time that is when they discovered that such a child would not be ready. It is the same as giving a new born baby *sadza*¹ on the day it is born. You can not do that because the baby can die. Meaning that the work that was given to these five year olds in grade one, was too much for them. That is when they agreed that we should go back to the old days.

¹ This is the Zimbabwean staple food which is made from maize.

Long time ago, a grade one child was from the age of seven. That is the system we have right now. A five year old will be in grade zero, and a four year old will be in crèche. Five year old will be in grade zero preparing to go to grade one. So these days they are taking 6+ years old children for grade one.

A: So you talked about the changes in the Education system. Do you think it is now better or it was better in the golden old days?

B: It was better in the old days when the child started at the age of seven. A child would go to school when he/she is mature, when she has grown in mind and in memory. The baby and playful behavior would have ended. When the child is still aged five, he/she will be in the mood of playing with toys. They do what they want. You know children have freedom. If they feel like going to the toilet, they just go. If they feel like eating, they take their lunch boxes and begin to eat in the class. They do not know that there is break time. All of this affected children. Even going to the toilet, some could not go and they would pee on themselves where they will be sitting. There are many other things that were affecting these children and these children, who were going to school early at the age of five, were failing to progress well because they were not able to read. This is because they were forced to do big things for their age which they could not do. When that happened their brains were damaged. They ended up being confused. A child gets to grade three and cannot read. The child cannot even write his/her name. He/she started to go to school early when he/she was not ready to go to grade one. But if a child is seven years old like in the old days, when they reached grade seven, they would be mature. He/she listens to what the teacher would be saying and the child is able to memorize it.

A: Okay.

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