

Teachers must collapse the bridge of guidance and sustain the bridge of collaboration: My take for the World Teachers' Day 2024

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On Saturday, 5th of October 2024, I received an honorary invitation from a mentee to witness a remarkable feat in his professional career as a teacher. He was shortlisted as one of the three finalists for 2024 Ghana's National Teachers' Award 2024 for the Best College of Education tutor. He is a PhD candidate in Art Education who is almost done with his dissertation in my department. At the award's ceremony, the Minister of Education, Dr. Yaw Aduwum reiterated the 1931 quote in the book titled 'Report to Greco' by the Greek writer, Nikos Kazantzakis about teachers serving as bridges. He remarked that teachers are great innovators who can direct and lead the path of students who are from 'nowhere' to 'somewhere'. He used himself as a case, coming from 'nowhere', a family not privileged of formal education and better job opportunities in the Bosomtwe district of Ghana to 'somewhere', a worthy class of elites whose impacts on education are far-reaching. At the award ceremony, the Minister of Education glorified the teachers who gave him foundational training at the primary school as the bridge to his journey from nowhere to somewhere. While I sincerely appreciate his profound expressed view and recognition of the pivotal roles of teachers in the success stories of students, borrowing from Niko Kazantzaki's thought, I think Kazantzakis's quote has other insightful ramifications that I want to present a personal reflection and a critique in this brief writeup.

Kazantzakis in his famous quote said, 'True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.'

His quote exemplifies the significant and selfless roles of true teachers who act as mediators, instructing students with the requisite knowledge, skills, and values to function well in a knowledge society, institution, or organization. Thus, without dedicated tuition or facilitation from true teachers, it would be practically impossible for students to be successful in life. The transformation that happens when students are instructed well enables them to enjoy better career opportunities, hence, moving them from a state of non-relevance to relevance. This is what Ghana's Minister of Education referred to as 'from nowhere to somewhere'. Yet, ideal teachers also move beyond the step of offering knowledge to the co-creation of knowledge. The latter is what enables students to own knowledge to develop independence. Thus, ideal or true teachers act as coaches who offer expert guidance to students on how to discover knowledge. Such students are equipped with fact-finding capabilities as researchers even at tender ages. Students can develop 21st-century skills, attitudes, and core competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, cultural identity, and global citizenship. When teachers continue to imbibe and nurture these skills, attitudes, and competencies in students, they become sensitive to the problems in their environment and societies, challenging them to innovate and offer time-tested solutions. In this way, ideal teachers 'joyfully collapse, encouraging them [students] to create their own', allowing students great independence with little coaching as they engage in helpful interdisciplinary projects from the tuition they have expertly received in diverse disciplines. Yes, the bridge of instruction and guidance offered by ideal teachers is crucial in the formative and developmental stages of students. This bridge of guidance is expected to 'collapse' when students own knowledge and become independent in their capabilities to function without or with little assistance from their teachers. Well-instructed students should be able to act as mentors to others to learn from their shining examples. Thus, I agree with Kazantzakis that

students must be nurtured to create their own bridges, charting their own path in knowledge discovery while offering mentorship and training to others. This would promote several breakthroughs in our society.

However, I am of the view that the bridge of collaboration between students and their teachers should be sustained. The activity of co-creation of knowledge between students who were mentees and their teachers who acted as mentors in the formative stages of training must be sustained. This is important, especially in higher education institutions where postgraduate students engage in high-level research activities. Their mentors, who are established researchers in the field could help them build collaborative research networks and teams. When they work with their teachers, they will help in promoting and expanding the research potential in their field. Teachers or supervisors get the privilege of benefiting from the fine tuition and guidance they offer the students when students conduct various research projects. They become benefactors of their students' research output such as research publications as they continue to offer substantial contributions. Thus, teachers gain direct benefits from the products of their hard work. The bridge of collaboration between the teacher and student must not be collapsed but rather lowered to give room for students to develop independence. Afterwards, the bridge needs to be sustained perpetually. The teacher and the student become partners for innovative research, continually benefitting from their shared knowledge, skills, and expertise. Trust and respect are the key principles that would help to maintain the bridge of this sustained collaboration. Students must not exhibit any signs of arrogance or disrespect toward their teachers or supervisors after gaining a much firmer foundation in the field. They must continually take a retrospective look at their success stories as originating from the bridge of guidance offered to them by their teachers. An appreciation of the unwavering support of their teachers or supervisors would make them commit to the ideals of humility, an essential trait required to tap into the rich experiences of their teachers or supervisors. Students must remember that no matter how far they reach in the journey of knowledge acquisition, they will still benefit from the pieces of advice given by their experienced instructors. On the other hand, teachers or supervisors must not in any way see their students as subordinates or slaves in any project they collectively undertake. Teachers must treat their students as partners deserving of respect. Teachers or supervisors must offer significant input and work on their assigned parts of research projects, and not leave the task to their students who are now their partners. This dignity would ensure the sustenance of the bridge of collaboration. When the bridge of collaboration is sustained, it will lead to a more inclusive relationship based on mutual trust and respect. This would lead to innovative research projects and outcomes that would solve perplexing problems in society. On this note, I would give a different version of Niko Kazantzaki's quote 'True teachers are those who offer themselves as sustainable bridges for their students to cross, as they voluntarily coach their crossing, joyfully lowering, encouraging their students to create their own while working together as a twin bridge for better life opportunities.'

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Reference

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