

Madame President, General Secretary, (ministers), Ministry Officials, Fellow Educators past and present, Members of other Unions, Specially Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This morning it is a pleasure and honor to be invited to speak to you.

Education is change – sometimes subtle
sometimes cataclysmic – in the consciousness
of man and thus in the structures man
has evolved to define and extend himself.

Education does not happen through
bureaucratic teaching

Through perfunctory learning.

Education is never impersonal

Or artless or cold.

Education has to do with Man becoming

Aware

To learn

To take effective action

To improve the condition of human beings

In the world

And one's self

But since

The world is large. History is long.

And the sum total of human knowledge

Is infinite

Disciplined understanding is essential

To change

The world

And ourselves

We begin

With respect

For each other

And

For all that can be learned.

I came across this quote several years ago in a book entitled “Kaleidoscope: Reading in Education” by Kevin Ryan and James M. Cooper. The notion of change is always with us and is in my view more relevant now than ever in Barbados. Societal, educational and technological changes are occurring at an unprecedented rate worldwide and it is imperative that we keep pace if we are to advance our people. Change, especially at such a rapid pace when not properly managed, can be problematic and have negative effects on any educational system. It can make it seem as though we are losing our way and falling off the edge. However, change through effective and purposeful action is the way to make the journey into tomorrow easier.

We are in a unique profession and therefore, we are obliged to keep redefining ourselves and improving ourselves and the conditions under which we work. And so this morning, I want to make some “shout outs” for, and make some noise for real changes in Education in Barbados.

I am using the first person for the most part not because I am an “I Man” or egoistic or egotistic, but because these are my views. Yet I hope others will share them. I came across a maxim years ago which is attributed to Fredrich Nietzsche:

“He who is a teacher from the very heart takes all things seriously only with reference to his – even himself”

That thought captures the burden of the teacher, a burden that I embraced from my first days as a primary school teacher. I have never apologized for being strict or serious. Gravitas or seriousness became a big part of my personal philosophy – which included punctuality, preparedness and preparedness of self.

Assertive discipline in which the teacher “establishes up front clear expectations and limits on student behavior, as well as appropriate consequences if rules are broken” (Teaching Bearing The Torch, Pamela Harris). I begin with managing behavior in the classroom because of its importance. Good classroom management is necessary for effective instruction, it ensures that engaged time is at a maximum.

In the same reader I quoted at the beginning, Bruno Bettelham posits that the violence we are witnessing today is because we are removing both inner and outer controls over our children. He says fear of losing parental love and fear of losing self-respect are features to be instilled in children from early. He goes on

to say that we must teach our children to wait and to learn self-control. But that is not easy in this age of instant gratification and spectatorship.

The child is a different child. My three year old grandson gets instant feedback and satisfaction as he manipulates the iPad. Were I given an iPad I may behave like the old man in the email joke making the rounds. I would wash it, dry it, cut up my stir fry vegetables and seasonings on it. Then clean it afterwards and place it in the dish rack. My grandson uses an iPad with greater ease than I ever can for recreation and early education.

The child today, however seriously we may take him lives in a scientific – technical – technological age, where language development is astounding. Thanks to the media today's childhood span is short, short, short and that presents many challenges for formal schooling. Yet it seems to me schooling can become even more individualized than ever before using media.

Yet for all the technology around, schooling must still be a humanistic activity. Now more than ever, traditional attitudes and values must be instilled by the school given the family's failure to do such. The school must do this in addition to teaching new skills and new ways of doing things.

Now I would like to recommend an eclectic philosophical approach to teaching, this would be a blend of Essentialism and Progressivism, in much the same way that I found it comfortable to blend Skinner and Rodgers in my own philosophical approaches to teaching. A disciplined understanding of the child and a change in how we teach will still meet the challenge. Teaching respect will remain a key element, despite the growth of technology. Teaching will always be an activity which emerges from some conception of how learning occurs and a

child with an Ipad may be part of the new vision that helps to embrace tomorrow's reality in education. The curriculum must begin to reflect that reality. It must of needs be one in which pluralism is the practice.

Flexibility will be the way to go. There are more and more demands being made on the school. Moral education is needed, environmental issues cry out for urgent attention. Renewable energy, alternative energy resources, energy conservation all require comprehensive treatment in our curriculum as modules in their own right. We as teachers must be committed to helping children to understand the 'structure' of all subject matter before them. Teachers will still be required to develop readiness in children for formal learning even as technology takes over.

The vision must be a profession that is a learning community to keep pace with unbridled developments in technology.

Years ago I read a small text by Jerome Bruner entitled The Process of Education. It remains in my list of compulsory readings for the twenty-first century teacher, even though it is more than fifty years old by now. Bruner represents a school of philosophy which I suggest that we embrace because this philosophy should direct action.

What kind of philosophy and what kind of curricula is necessary to deal with the absence of interpersonal skills in our services sector; our failure to develop a national food security initiative; our inability to produce certain food crops such as sweet potato, yam, cassava, corn, peas and carrots to adequately feed our people?

A curriculum that delivers programs in innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, critical thinking skills and design technology is urgently needed as well, especially at the tertiary level.

The Profession

A couple decades ago the current Minister of Education and Human Resource Development wrote an illuminating article in BUT's Outlook magazine. Before this, UNESCO and writers such as Etzioni identified the characteristics of a profession. These have subsequently been underscored by writers such as Ryan and Cooper.

I came across a definition recently that I like; it reads thus – “A profession is not created by certificates and censures but by the existence of a substantive body of professional knowledge as well as a mechanism for improving it, and by a genuine desire of the profession's members to improve their practices”.

The key directive here is that we should move in the direction of improving our standards of practice. How else can today's vision meet tomorrow's reality. Change and improvement in a learning community is the reality which leads to the implementation of new training programmes for the profession.

I am calling now for a process of recertification of teachers as a national initiative. By way of expansion let me refer to Fullan who gives five domains to deal with improving standards of practice:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subject matter they teach and how to teach the subjects to students.

3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from their experience.
5. Teachers are members of a learning community.

And I am going to add my own compulsory item:

6. Teachers must develop mechanisms for managing classroom behaviours.

Among writers in management I took to heart Peter Drucker who argues that to do a job effectively one has to know the task, possess the knowledge to do it and one has to use the right style to accomplish the task. A careful study of the various learning styles and the strategy and methods necessary to address them must be a part of the change process in education.

The Government

The Government must be the vehicle to effect real change in education. The Government must create a new model for the profession, make teaching and attractive profession and create opportunities to increase remuneration from recruitment to high professionalism in a model for the teaching profession. A few brief points:

- A key element in any new image must be public accountability.
- A revised and updated code of ethics with sanctions
- A fixed cycle of formative and summative evaluation with clearly identified measures to address deficiencies.

- The re-establishment of the education officer with its accompanying remuneration as a critical player in the education system and the change process.
- Articulate a clear philosophical position which reemphasizes progressivism, essentialism and speaks boldly to excellence and equality of opportunity.
- Ensure that the education system deals effectively with the demographics of society in our classrooms.
- The enactment of legislation to create a teaching service commission as has been espoused by the union for some time.

The Union

Barbados Union of Teachings must work collaboratively for the good of the profession, but I must warn that I do not support the view that Unions are alternative administrations in schools. I came across a quote recently which states collaboration is powerful, which means that people can do powerfully wrong things together. The Union must adopt a clear professional vision for itself so that just as doctors claim to the soul authority on doctoring, teachers are the soul authorities on Teaching. On a personal note I am still a teacher at heart and now take things more lightheartedly with reference to students. I often take in hugs, handshakes; shout out from cars and truck, and thank you from parents- the intrinsic rewards of seriousness.

I have been an ardent supporter and member of the BUT from the days of the much admired John Cumberbatch and the ever green Carl Springer. As

such I have a love and vision for this institution which is dear to me, but I want to caution you-put the child at the centre of whatever you do.

I want to thank the President, General Secretary and the executive members for affording me this opportunity to speak to you this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you and enjoy the remainder of you conference.

Desmond Browne