

**Address to the 26th Annual Conference**  
**Theme" Globalization and the Changing Context of Education"**  
**By Undene Whittaaker - President**

In a presentation made by Professor Neville Duncan at a recently convened CUT/EI Round Table Meeting in Dominica, he introduced his paper with the following statement, and I quote" *when a society changes its mode of production, all of its institutions must change accordingly. If not like the dodo, the society becomes a historical anachronism'*

The theme chosen this year, Globalization, and the Changing Context of Education brings with it significant implications for our educational system in Barbados. For in discussing the issue of globalization, one recognizes that it is not totally an economic phenomenon, but that it will have serious far reaching impact on education and other issues such as health.

Globalization and by extension neo-liberalists policies will provide challenges to the Barbadian education system. The entire system will undergo changes, and the new technologies which act as engines of globalization will continue to be part and parcel of our working environment. Those entering the world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will face many challenges. The future world of work will be increasingly knowledgebased and technology-driven. With technology replacing labour, more individuals will shift to self-employment such as home working and entrepreneurial activities. These challenges will require them to be flexible in their ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, adapt to constantly changing production processes, and function in new work environments.

The decentralization of education will also be an issue in that privatization of education may become a number one issue on the national agenda. Recently, a meeting was held between the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs & Culture and the Private Sector. As a result, a project has been initiated between the private and public sector called Private-Public Sector Partnerships in Education. The document which was used as an information base spoke to the ultimate importance of the private sector as a major recipient of the product of the school, and further encouraged the fostering of a more systematic and mutually beneficial approach to the partnership.

One may ask - who will benefit most from this partnership? Last year, I asked who would have benefitted from the Social Partnership? This project may very well become one of significance to both the sectors in this globalization market, thus affecting policies which will impact on education. Globalization will affect who determines the substance of the curriculum, how education is delivered, who has access to education and to how much, and whether what happens in school is relevant to the cultural experiences of those being educated.

The question therefore is - will education continue to be recognized as a human right or will it be categorized as a tradable commodity? In a paper presented at the IDEA Hemispheric Conference in Quito in 1999, Larry Kuehn, in a paper entitled "Strategies for Defending Public Education" pointed out that free public education ensures that children can be educated regardless of the economic status of their families and thus contribute to social equity and moreover, the loss of universal public education consistently produces inequality in societies.

Where then is the point of compromise between the principle of education as a right and social service and that of the possible thrust to place education in the context of a tradable commodity?

What impact will the apparently changing philosophy underpinning education have on our class rooms? What impact will it have on teachers and students? What is the role of teacher trade unions in the changing context of education?

There has to be a response of globalization. Can one assume that such response has come in the form of the technological thrust, where over the next 5-7 years, the Education Sector Enhancement Programme EduTech 2000 will undertake to computerize primary and secondary in an effort to increase the number of young Barbadians contributing to the sustainable social and economic development?

Other changes which are envisaged are curriculum Reform, involving innovative teaching and learning strategies, curriculum and content adaptation and revision, classroom reconfiguration, assessment practices, and school-community links. Of major interest for the classroom teacher must be the implementation of training and re-training programmes, not only in the skills and competencies relating to the eventual mastery of the technology, but in areas such as counseling, parenting skills and other issues of a social nature which will affect the child in the classroom.

Globalization also affects the cultural landscape of the country. Fortunately, this aspect has been addressed by the Ministry of Education, in that it has conceptualized a programme which ensures that the Barbadian culture remains at the centre piece of our educational system.

One of the areas of significant focus will be that of the technical/vocational arena. For it is within this field that a symbiotic relationship can develop, but herein lies the rub. Who will be dictating to whom? Which of the partners will receive greater benefits? Will our developing society be able to respond to the demands which will be placed on it, with our limited resources? Will the school still see the teaching of life skills as one of its fundamental goals?

The Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational training which was held in Seoul , 1999, produced a set of recommendation captioned Technical and Vocational Education Training. A Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These recommendation constitute the foundation for UNESCO's new programme in TVET, which commenced in January 2000. The three (3) objectives are:

- to strengthen TVET as an integral component of lifelong learning
- to orient TVET for sustainable development and
- to provide TVET for all

BUT is positioning itself to respond to the challenges in the Tech/Voc area so as to better inform members and prepare them for the shift in the private-public sector partnership. Our P.R.O. Cobin Hinds attended the E.I. Conference TVET in Brussels and the recommendations of E.I. will be sent to the I.L.O meeting which will be considering TVET as a marketable commodity.

Our very environments are undergoing rapid change. With the introduction of the technology into our schools, we have experienced what is said to be unprecedented refurbishing and renovations of schools in order to accommodate this innovation. Although invaluable to the enhancement of the conditions under which teachers work, severe dislocation and disruption in some cases, characterized this renovation. Whereas teachers responded to the upheaval in as a professional manner as they could, they would have undergone both physical and emotional trauma during this period of change.

With the proposed piloting of the appraisal system island wide, the factor of teachers' health will feature prominently in the implementation of the pilot scheme. The Barbados Union of Teachers has made it abundantly clear that the impact of the disruption on the health of the teachers and students has to be recognized whenever the process of appraisal commences.

It is with the knowledge that many teachers are working under tremendous strain as a result of the serious social conditions which are impacting on the students, and by extension the school, that The Barbados Union of Teachers is reiterating that a number of teachers are looking forward

to their retirement, either at the voluntary age of fifty-five or the compulsory age of sixty, and that it will leave a void in the system. They have recognised that functioning as a maturing work force which has to find the coping skills to handle the societal ills which are being experienced in the school room, will present considerable challenges.

This period of unprecedented change must inspire confidence that although education is dynamic, that the initiatives will acknowledge the human element and show the human face. This behaviour will further engender the commitment necessary for the acceptance of the many changes which will characterise the professionalization of our educational system. This confidence must be inspired from the level of the Ministry of Education, so that confidence can be reposed in the Principals by the teachers and the students. Dialogue on all issues must redound to the benefit of the profession, which at times is seen as the scapegoat of society.

The recognition of the features of globalization is paramount if we are to attempt to tackle the issue. Foremost must be the education of teachers, trade unionists, and officials in the Ministry of Education, so that the impact of globalization is acknowledged.

Stakeholders must utilize opportunities to dialogue with the international bodies such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the IADB (Inter-American Development Bank), the lending agencies of the world, with a view to hammering out enhanced terms and conditions of service. Fortunately, the Barbados Union of Teachers has been accessing the requisite skills and knowledge in this field, through the various conferences, seminars and workshops in which we have been participating. Plans are well on the way for a Seminar which is being organized by the Barbados Union of Teachers and the Florida/Volunteer Association, to be held in early May. This seminar is aimed at providing an environment which will seek to provide some answers to the issues of globalization.

How then can small developing states like the Caribbean survive within the context of globalization? How will the practitioners of education continue to deliver the knowledge and skills which are to enrich the lives of our students when industrial countries are keen to export educational programmes? What are the implications for national development when education provision is from outside the country? How will our norms, values, cultures will be reflected?

If teachers, students, Ministry Officials, parents, trade unionists and the community are to advance the mission and vision of this profession, then we must recognize education as building a sense of national identity. We need to ensure that public education is protected at all levels. As a teacher trade union, we must continue to defend and promote the best professional interests of our members.

Finally, we must continue to foster the development of quality educational structures for all of our young people.