

ADDRESS TO BE DELIVERED AT THE CADET CORPS LUNCHEON
ON TUESDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2004

It always gives me great personal pleasure to participate at functions hosted by the Barbados Cadet Corps. Perhaps it goes back to my teen-age days when I held great admiration for the boys in uniform. Always healthy looking and immaculately attired, the cadets were able to set any young girl's heart missing a few beats while, at the same time, inspiring one to think of the higher ideals of order, structure and discipline! This year, the Cadet Corps celebrates its 100th anniversary and, therefore, this annual Principals' Conference takes on a special meaning. It highlights the collaboration between educators and those who manage the cadet corps in Barbados; it celebrates an association which has one common objective – that is, the welfare of our young people.

All of us gathered here are well aware of the ills plaguing modern societies. Barbados is not alone in the social confusion that accompanies progress and modernity. Indeed, recent comments by comedian Bill Cosby are as relevant to us here as the communities he was addressing in the USA. He was angry with the African-American community; its rate of juvenile delinquency, its parenting, the coarse language of its youth. He warned that they should not let themselves be victims and they could not continue to blame other things and other people. What struck me, however, is what

Cosby is doing to attempt to turn around the trend. He organized town hall meetings in inner city communities where he invited police chiefs, district attorneys, schoolteachers and parents to engage in dialogue about offering our young girls and boys better choices, better lives. I believe that you agree with me that at the heart of many of our problems is poor family life and that for many of our children, education offers the only hope as it has done for our people years ago. My contention is, though, that the school alone cannot bring healing to our hurt children and we must continue to call on all the other socializing agencies such as the Church, NGOs such as a National PTA Council and more prominent persons in our society to come to the rescue of our young people. For whether we like it or not, the moral and social confusion in which we now find ourselves did not happen with this generation! It has been spawned over a few generations and we are all responsible either through sins of commission or omission. Now, are there any solutions?

In 2000 when the Ministry of Education launched its Curriculum 2000, the rationale was to provide a response to the poor performance of some of our school children and seek to make education significant in the lives of our young people again. For too many, school is a baby-sitting agency and education is for the geeks!

John Dewey in *A Common Faith* said : “We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it.”

These concepts are at the heart of our curriculum reform and are embedded in the innovations:

- a solid core of subjects so that each child has at least a basic knowledge of communication skills, literature, mathematics, social studies, integrated science and exposure to a conversational foreign language;
- a good foundation in religious education, music, physical education and art;
- values education infused in each subject area so that the relevance of subjects to everyday life is made.

The emphasis is on holistic education which, according to John Miller in the ASCD volume 56 January 1999, attempts “to nurture the human spirit as well as to improve academic ability and performance...a broader vision of education and human development. Three key elements assist in this process; balance, inclusion and connection.” I want to address the matter of balance for a minute. As educators, we are aware of the factors which affect learning. I think sometimes that we oversimplify learning and the impact of the school experience. It is not just a matter of placing children in a classroom and by some sort of osmosis that they will learn! There are biological factors including brain development and other physiological processes which influence the learning of boys and girls differently. It is generally accepted that boys more than girls experience learning difficulties and that brain development generally favours language acquisition in girls. Then, there are out-of-school factors that influence learning. The socioeconomic status of parents – their occupation, their level of education and whether they are single parents or not. Important to the process also is the family with whom the child lives and socialization factors. There are also within-school factors which include the management of the school, teaching styles and classroom interaction between teachers and students and among students. Of importance too is the type of pre-school attendance.

This has been raised in the study done by Kutnick, Jules and Layne in Trinidad, St.Vincent and Barbados where there seems to be an association between pre-school attendance and later academic achievement. Now we in education have some measure of control over the in-school factors and that is what Curriculum 2000 has sought to exercise. Other Caribbean studies highlight the classroom experience as a critical element in learning and they all note the tendency for boys to be treated more harshly than girls. Evans in Jamaica and Carrington in her doctoral case study have highlighted this matter. These have implications for teacher training programmes to include gender sensitivity modules and these are being planned. Indeed, our revised curricula are designed to be inclusive and to cater to the needs of all children regardless of their background and their learning styles. Another major issue is Special Needs Education and there is a proposal before us to make provision for those with serious intellectual, mental and physical deficits which affect learning. Children with these developmental challenges make up 2 to 5% of our school population. So seriously have we taken the issue of pre-school attendance that over the next three years the Ministry of Education will provide access for the 1600 three-year-olds who now are unable to attend school. The Ministry is responding to the research being done in our schools and would welcome more of it from our teachers.

I have applied the concept of balance to policy making across the entire educational system. Let me now return to the issue of connection. One of the Ministry's ways of stressing connection is through other organizations, other agencies. One of these is the Cadet Corps. In planning for the Diploma of Secondary Education, credits will be given for engaging in enrichment activities such as joining the corps. This Diploma seeks to award students for all their talents, both academic and non-academic. Other examination systems cannot do this and the reality is that all children will not be able to cope with the CXC. It was not designed to cover the entire school system. So convinced are we, however, of the significant benefits to be derived from participating in the cadet corps that we welcomed the proposal from the cadet hierarchy to allow those children under thirteen to wear the cadet uniform. I want to commend Lt. Colonel Browne and Major Skeete for their untiring dedication to a cause that at times must seem daunting. Experience has demonstrated to us that the activities which the cadet corps offers to young persons can reduce the drop-out rate, generate greater interest in school-related activities and can enhance academic achievement. By engaging in robust physical exercises, athletics and adhering to strict rules about punctuality, uniform, conformity to established codes of discipline all assist in re-shaping the lives of children who may be at risk. The building of positive self-esteem, confidence and the social

graces are all undertaken in a controlled environment which we believe that most will internalize and practice in their daily lives. Of importance also is that a sense of right and wrong is developed as cadets pay directly for breaking rules.

It is with these issues foremost in our minds that the cadet corps will play a major role in the rehabilitation of those teen-agers who continue to challenge our school system by exhibiting serious forms of anti-social behaviour and are in danger of being recommended for expulsion. Indeed, we have requested that the Corps be represented on the Committee set up by the Ministry of Education to review the records of those students just mentioned. It is expected that rehabilitation will then take several forms ranging from periodic stints to full boot camp placement with the corps. This is one of the measures to be instituted under the Code of Discipline for schools.

Colleagues, the democratization of education in Barbados does not mean that we are providing a one-size-fits-all package. Instead, we are seeking to enable each child's talent to grow within a school system that is committed to providing opportunities that will unleash latent creativity and develop children who as critical thinkers will be able to apply judgement and

evaluation to their decisions. We cannot deny that human life is a problem solving process and that all children face problems. Not all children achieve success in tackling their problems and the school alone cannot teach the skills necessary to do so when the family has failed. We are, therefore, fortunate in Barbados to have an organized body such as the Cadet Corps to be so fully engaged in youth training. The Ministry of Education congratulates them on this milestone and looks forward to our continued association.