

Keynote Speech for the BUT Annual Conference

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Grand Barbados Hotel, Barbados

A Historical Legacy of Academic Excellence Amidst a Landscape of Change and Educational Inequality: When and Where Do Teachers Enter?

Thank you so much for inviting me to give this talk this evening. This evening is special in many ways, but it is doubly so because of the presence of my mother Norma Alleyne, my sister Esther and my daughters, Olivia and Emike. Thank you for your support.

Using data from a recent report written by the staff of the Education Evaluation Centre, information gathered at the National Summit on Education which took place last year, references from a keynote address recently made by Dr. Pedro Welch, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education of the University of the West Indies, and some wisdom I hope to impart, tonight I want to talk to you about the social and moral context in which you find yourselves occupying the role of teacher.

My talk this evening will be empirically based. I will emphasize research findings because at this present time in Barbados, there is a lot of attention being given to what is going on in our schools, and much of the commentary is based on opinion or anecdotal evidence. I assert the need for more empirically based assessments of the success and challenges of our public education systems. An institute like the Education Evaluation Centre and research conducted by scholars of the University of the West Indies School of Education can provide us with such informed analyses. You may not agree with what is posited but there should be some satisfaction in knowing that at least some research was conducted before statements were made to the general public.

After painting a landscape of our teaching environment, I want to share some options that you have in terms of how you, as teachers, occupy these contexts or teaching spaces. Only you can decide what will be your sphere of influence but hopefully my words can help you ponder some of the consequences of your various options.

Education in Barbados: Historically and the Present

In his opening address at the National Education Summit last year, Pro Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus and Historian, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles noted that historically, the newly formed Independent Government of Barbados determined that a massive and sustained investment in education was the only way to move the newly freed people of African heritage beyond the mentality that sustained the plantocracy, which formerly comprised the Barbadian social structure.

Without knowing this history, we Barbadians have commonly shared beliefs as result of it, which resulted in the development of a collective and individual pride in educational attainment. Being able to read and write used to be and I dare say still is, a point of pride for the average Barbadian. I want to show you my own historical document that was written to me by my grandmother in 1990 when I lived in the States. She was 101 years old.



Figure 1: Estherline Alleyne (centre), with Governor General Sir Clifford Husbands on her 100th birthday.

Dec 26 1993

Gods blessings to my Dear and beloved grand daughter
 for may his blessing be all way with you where
 soever you go to guide and protect you in your
 going and coming in for Jesus or am in all your ways
 all ways remembers your loving heavenly father and
 pray to him for help let him be the first and last in
 your line and after that anything else can happen
 you will be able to bear it I receive your gift
 and it make me so happy to know how you got me
 at heart so far and yet so near I turn you the warm
 est thanks and may god bless you that you may never
 lack in Jesus name with thank going to a fund like
 send her best respect and love for you wishing you
 a happy an prosperous New Year an hope that you
 spend your time with great enjoyment and joys
 with all that was with you at that time I hope it is
 sweet as sweet sixteen she look beautifull I tell
 her as much that I do not know how she is fairing but
 I can see it in her apperance that you are caring for
 may god beless you. I wish you a happy and prosper
 New year and may you live to see many more
 with love and joy and peace and blessing for
 ever and ever Amen with love an X+X+X+X+X from
 your loving an old grand brother 'C' a c'ary

Figure 2: Letter written at the age of 101.

My grandmother died at the age of 104. She never attended school but somehow, she learned to read. She took great pride in being able to read her bible and she wrote letters to her beloved granddaughter in the US. I'm sure that they are countless more Barbadian grans and great grans who've had the same experience as Estheline Alleyne, my grandmother. That was the educational worldview in which I grew up in Barbados and which I believe, was the basis of my educational success in the States after leaving Community High School. [A moment of silence for the 'death' of my high school].

Yet, when Professor Beckles asserted the possibility of one university graduate per household, a debate ensued. Why? Are we as a nation now doubting the possibility of our education system to educate all our citizens? Professor Hilary did not say, one doctor per household, or one lawyer per household, he said, one graduate per household. Is this vision of education attainable? The debate continues. However, what it does bring to mind is in part, an admittance that in the past, there were many graduates in some Barbadian households and one or no graduates in other Barbadian households. And perhaps, considering the possibility of one graduate per household also brings us face to face with societally held, preconceived notions about the viability of such an educational option. Do we believe, as a nation that there are some students who are educable and other students, beyond those who are medically diagnosed as such, who are uneducable? If this is our belief as a nation today, on what evidence is this preconceived notion held? And what are the implications of such beliefs on the education of all of our students? These questions bring us to an examination of our current social landscape in which education is taking place.

The Contemporary Social Landscape of Barbados

Perhaps there was a time when we achieved better academic results in Barbados. I don't know this empirically. The data on which all my assertions are based goes back only 10 years. However, what is clear today, is that the social contract is currently being renegotiated: On one hand, societies are changing: When we were young, how many of us had to deal with AIDS and Herpes as sexually transmitted diseases? Cell phones and laptops were nonexistent; television 24 hours a day and more than one channel? More than one radio station? Unthinkable. Gun violence and paros or crack cocaine addiction were unheard of. How many of us worried about designer clothing as monikers of our economic status in society? How many of us felt the need for such monikers? However, all of these comprise the reigning issues faced by young Barbadians. This is their social landscape.

On the other hand, we, as parents, want the best for our children. That has come to mean striving so hard economically to buy them things to make them more socially accepted that we lose actual time spent with them. Sometimes it means that we can no longer take care of our elders because our resources are focused on our children. It means building bigger houses in gated communities with little or no contact with our neighbors. Deference to authority figures is no longer taught to children. Instead, children are being taught to question authority. Note that I did not say, other parents. I said, we, as parents. Many of us educators are also parents. Yet we sometimes talk about parents as though they are some other breed of people. I'll say more on this later. However and unsurprisingly, the social landscape I just described impacts our educational system. This is the landscape we have to take into account in order to better educate our children.

Added to this landscape are the prevailing inequalities in our education system.

Inequality in Barbados Public Education System

There is inequality in the Barbados Public Education System. There may be many who disagree with this statement and may point to the following:

- Equal funding is given to all schools in Barbados.
- Adequate teachers are provided to every school to match the number of students attending those schools. In other words, even if a school is over-capacity (meaning, having more students in attendance than the number of students the school was originally built to hold). If a school is over-capacity, the data studied at the Education Evaluation Centre shows that an adequate number of teachers are provided to that school to maintain a certain teacher-student ratio.
- The majority of teachers (over 60% in both primary and secondary schools) are trained and/or qualified.

However, these “truths” must be juxtaposed with other truths like:

- Class and racial differences in Barbadian society have always and continue to exist;
- Affluent Barbadian parents are purposeful in their selection of the primary school their child attends;
- Test scores from the Barbados Secondary School Entrance Examination more commonly known as the 11-plus exam are significant indicators of student placement from primary to secondary school.

When we conjoin these truths, the result is an unequal system of education. Let’s define equality. But before we do this, I want us to engage in a little exercise:

Exercise: I don’t want you to talk to anyone in the beginning of this exercise. Think of our secondary schools. Which schools do you consider the “good” schools; which ones are the “not so good” schools. Write down your top 3 in each category on a

paper. Then each person should share their top 3 schools in each category. I'll give you a minute to share your results with each other. What was the outcome?

If your results are what I think they are, most of you are in agreement about which secondary schools are considered the top academically and which are considered at the bottom. I'll give a few more examples.

In the first report of its kind, the UWI EEC analyzed the academic achievement of Barbados public primary and secondary schools. The first report covered a 7 year period. The second edition of this report covers a 10-year period. Data from this study showed that over the 10 year period, four primary schools in particular had the highest percentages of students who received high test scores on the 11-plus exam. I won't ask you to guess which schools these are. However, if we have a schooling system where, according to the ministry, the majority of students attending primary schools should be from the surrounding catchment area, how is possible that four primary schools can empirically be shown as the feeder schools for the top four secondary schools? Is it possible that there are "smart" areas in Barbados? That if you live in these "smart" catchment areas served by these four primary schools, that it is no accident that your child will achieve the requisite scores to attend one of the four top secondary schools? Of course not.

What is clear is that the school system is being manipulated. This point is pure speculation, but I suspect that the four primary schools in question are known, rightfully so, as the primary schools with the highest percentages of students passing for the top four secondary schools, and so parents take every measure to get their children into these schools. We cannot fault parents for doing what they think is best for their children.

Another example: In this same study, 12 primary schools consistently had the highest percentages of students scoring between 0-30. Are all of the children in these catchment areas slow learners? Or can we say, that after 10 years, maybe we should examine the type of schooling occurring at these primary schools? There was

one primary school that in the first 7 years of the study, none of its students qualified for a Category 1 school.

I want to offer 2 more examples pertaining to our secondary schools: The earlier exercise in which you participated could be done by comparing learning opportunities for students in a single school. Are all math classes equal? English? Science? Information Technology? In another study conducted by the EEC that examined the degree and impact of technology integration in Barbados Secondary Schools, the following slide shows the findings regarding the different types of technology courses taught in the schools.

Table 1: Type of Information Technology Curricula Used By School

Course	No. of Classes	School Status
Programming		
Website Development	1 class	1 HP school
Teaching Math	1 class	1 HP school
AutoCad	1 class	1 HP school
Computer Programming:		
Pascal	3 classes	3 HP schools
Teacher Designed	11 classes	4 HP, 1 LP schools
Software		
Microsoft Access	4 classes	1 HP school
CXC Prep/School Based Assessment	5 classes	1 LP, 4 HP schools
Microsoft Excel	10 classes	2 LP, 5 HP schools
Microsoft Word	9 classes	2 LP, & 2 HP schools
EDPM	8 classes	3 LP schools

As you can see, the types of technology courses range from Website Development to Electronic Document Preparation and Management (EDPM). You can also see that the range is across the top performing and the low performing secondary schools as well. What the findings show is that the IT classes taught in the top performing schools and one underperforming secondary school comprise the coursework necessary to prepare students to take the CSEC IT exam. I want to name the underperforming school: Its St. Lucy Secondary. Too often the accomplishments of these schools are ignored. What all of this means is that only the students attending the top performing and this one underperforming secondary school will have access to the knowledge required to sit and pass the CXC IT exam.

My last example is a comparative look at one top and one underperforming secondary school. The schools are Queens College and Grantley Adams. These schools will be compared on the following data collected: geographical location linked to the surrounding property values; the school's capacity compared with their actual school roll; teacher-student ratio; teacher qualifications; and, student admission based on BSSEE scores.

Comparison of Urban Schools: Queens College and Grantley Adams Memorial

Queens College is located in the affluent area of Husbands, and is bordered by Thorpes and the other affluent areas of Prior Park and Oxnards. The property values in these areas range from approximately \$834,742 in Thorpes to \$1,460,655 in Oxnards.

Grantley Adams is bordered by areas with property values ranging from \$117,857 in Blackmans, to \$543, 056 in Horse Hill. The annual family incomes in those areas are lower than in the areas surrounding Queens College. According to WHO, the lowest average family income in the areas surrounding Grantley Adams was \$7,889 in Coffee Gully.

Queens College is a larger school in that its built to fit more students (1200) compared to Grantley Adams (1000). However, while Queens College is very underused with a roll of 1007, Grantley Adams was over capacity in 2006 with a student roll of 1021. The teacher-student ratio is relatively the same for both schools (1:16 at Grantley Adams and 1:17 at Queens College) but teacher qualifications differ. While 68% of the staff at Queens College is trained and 95% of them hold degrees, only 56% of the teachers at Grantley Adams are teacher trained and 74% hold degrees. Queens College has only one untrained teacher on their staff and Grantley Adams had seven such teachers.

Over the seven-year period 83% of the students assigned to Queens College scored between 71-100% in English. In Math, 99% of the students assigned to this school scored between 71-100%.

Over the seven year period under study, 74% of the students assigned to Grantley Adams scored in the 0-30 range on the BSSEE English examination. In Mathematics, 83% of the students assigned to this school scored in this range.

Following is a closer examination of the issue of school capacity compared to student roll through an analysis of these schools' student admissions over the last ten year based on students' BSSEE scores.

Table 2: Yearly Number of Students Assigned to Schools

School	Year									
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Queen's College	150	150	150	150	152	151	161	104	111	113
Grantley Adams Memorial	164	210	210	210	210	185	141	177	149	176

As shown in Table 2, Grantley Adams had been assigned at least 14 (in 1999) and 60 more students in three consecutive years than Queens College. The writers of this report were aware that students' allocation to secondary schools is based primarily on test scores. However, the comparison of students in the above table is focused primarily on capacity. As you can see Queens College will continue to be an under-utilized school while at Grantley Adams, even though the numbers are dropping they are still larger than the Queens College intakes.

Pertaining to the socio-economic status of students who attend these two schools, we collected such data in a more recent study. To be clear, this data does not pertain to the students in the previous findings. It pertains to the more recent students at the same school. This is our first attempt to collect data on students' socio economic status.

The Principal Investigators of this study determined that it would have been futile to ask students about their parents' income. Therefore, in order to garner some sense of family income level, students were asked the following question:

In your home, do you or your parents....(mark all that you have)

- 1 Own a washing machine
- 2 Own a television
- 3 Employ a housekeeper/helper
- 4 Attend private lessons
- 5 Own home
- 6 Own a computer
- 7 Subscribe to internet

8 Own a car

9 Travel internationally

10 Telephone or cell phone

The object of this question was two-fold: One, to garner a sense of ownership within the household of items or services that imply certain economic means. Secondly, we also wanted to know what were items that were considered “commonly owned” in Barbadian society today.

One glaring limitation of the question are the imbedded assumptions of what items could represent the economic wealth of Barbadian families who utilized the public school system. One important element missed was asking students about the marital status of their parents since, the literature suggests this as an important element of the socio-cultural context of children’s lives outside of school with serious economic implications. Nonetheless, we considered this survey a first step in collecting data in sorely neglected category of education research in Barbados, namely, economic status and its outcome on educational outcomes.

The first slide shows the percentage of students participating by gender.

Table 3: Student Participation by Gender

School	Percentages		
	Male	Female	Missing
Queen’s College (n= 58)	66%	34%	-
Grantley Adams Memorial (n= 53)	40%	57%	4%

The next slide shows parents' highest level of education by each of the schools.

Table 4: Parents' Highest Level of Education by Gender

Father						
School	Percentages					Mean
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	University	Missing	
Queen's College (n= 58)	3%	7%	10%	43%	36%	4
Grantley Adams Memorial (n= 53)	-	36%	2%	8%	53%	2
Mother						
School	Percentages					Mean
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	University	Missing	
Queen's College (n= 58)	2%	12%	17%	38%	31%	3
Grantley Adams Memorial (n= 53)	6%	45%	4%	9%	34%	2

Interestingly, even though Queens College was the only school with fathers whose highest level of education was primary school, it was also the school that had the most fathers with tertiary as their highest level of education. Similar results were found when we compared mothers' highest level of education, where 12% of the mothers had only a secondary education, compared to 17% attending tertiary education and 18% attending university. At Grantley Adams, the majority of the mothers (45%) had only a secondary education.

The next slide compares the answers of the students from the two schools regarding the questions on socioeconomic status.

Table 5: Measures of Students Socio-economic Status

Measures of Students Socio-economic Status	Queen's College (n= 58)		Grantley Adams Memorial (n= 53)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do your parents own a home?	79%	21%	68%	32%
Do you/your parents own a computer?	98%	2%	60%	40%
Do your parents subscribe to the internet?	95%	5%	40%	60%
Do your parents own a car?	88%	12%	36%	64%
Do you/your parents travel internationally?	86%	14%	36%	64%
Do you/your parents own a telephone or cell phone?	100%	-	87%	13%
Do your parents own a washing machine?	97%	3%	62%	38%
Do your parents own a television?	100%	-	81%	19%
Do your parents employ a house-keeper/helper?	17%	83%	6%	94%
Do you attend private lessons?	57%	43%	15%	85%

Based on the results of the data discussed above, it appears that at Queens College, students come from higher socio-economic backgrounds, are taught by a highly trained staff, and very comfortable on school premises since the school is under-utilised. In contrast, at Grantley Adams, the school is over capacity with students who have significant academic needs as shown by the test scores, and these students are being taught by fewer highly trained teachers.

Thus, even though the Ministry has made attempts to address the social and economic needs of individual students (for e.g, the textbook scheme, lunch programme, etc.,) more should be done to address the needs of schools that serve students with greater academic needs.

So how can we redefine equality to address these differences in academic achievement?

Equality

Scholars have defined equality as all human beings having the same basic rights against the government—the right to own property, to vote, to plead in court, and to share equally in the costs and benefits of government. Hovenkamp (1997), posits that what most of our society subscribes to is political equality even though we don't name it that. We just name it as equality.

Social equality (Hovenkamp, 1997) is a little different because this type of equality is measured not against the state, but against individuals. So, historically, in the US, the Black person who wanted to vote was imposing on the state, whereas the Black person who wanted to attend a racially segregated university, and thus, impose integration on this university, was perceived as imposing on individuals who did not want him there. In essence, to impose his rights to an education was to impose on the rights of individuals who did not want him to be educated among them. They weren't saying that he couldn't get an education, just not with them.

Historically in American society and even today, these moments are where equality and equity collide. Crenshaw (1988) also analyzes equality within the law. Her definition of restrictive equality parallels the definition of political equality but she goes further and adds that this type of equality “downplays actual results.” Expansive equality she argues on the other hand actively redresses present manifestations of past injustices. In the case of America, especially pertaining to African Americans, we can clearly see the need for redressing present manifestations of past injustices. Looking at our society, the inequality of which I speak is socially inequality. However, it still needs to be addressed within the educational system, because if we continue to ignore it, we are setting the stage for injustice.

When and Where Do Teachers Enter?

So what can teachers do? You are constantly blamed for all of the ills that currently exist in our education system. And that's not fair. However, I say that you have to take some responsibility for what's not going right in our education system today. For one, some teachers don't care. I believe that, and if we are honest we can close our eyes and think about at least one teacher that we know should go home, be fired, let go, however you name it. I'm not a union person. I make no apologies. I don't think we can point to any one person and say that's a teacher that does not care. And perhaps that teacher came into the system caring, perhaps, but at the point that we get where we don't care we should leave because similarly to a physician, the first order of business is to do no harm. To find out where we are on the scale of caring we can ask ourselves some questions: Why did we come into teaching? How do we feel about our school? Our students? How much time do we commit to the continuous development of our craft? As children have told me, some teachers will tell them, "Whether you learn or not, I'll still get my paycheck." To which I respond: Barbados is too small to lose large percentages of our greatest resource: our people.

Others of us care, but in frustration, we sometimes blame the parents or the students. This leads to an unfortunate situation in which two or three of the most influential people in a child's life are now engaged in an adversarial relationship. Can we truly educate the child if we hold no respect for the parents? Because you will tear that child apart. As "bad" as a parent is children love their parents. So if you disparage their parents can you really win them? Others of us are aware of our current social landscape, the adversities which children face today and which inevitably impacts our classroom. We constantly adjust our pedagogy and teaching practices to better serve the needs of our parents. We cherish each of our students, and we don't let their socio-economic backgrounds or whatever we think about their parents stop us from trying, everyday, to educate them. We get tired as hell,

but we still rejoice in any small achievement that our students make. These teachers are the ones children remember. Let's do another exercise?

Think of your favorite teacher? Why was she or he your favorite? What class was it? What subject?

Now think of the teacher you disliked? You remember that teacher with almost the same intensity don't you? Why didn't you like this teacher? How do you feel about the subject taught by this teacher today?

Teachers, I say we have a choice. We can blame the parents, the students, the ministry, the principal. That's one option we have. Or we can explore some other options with better outcomes for us as teachers and for our students.

Options

Be aware of what we think we know about the children who come before us.

Analyze to what extent our beliefs help or hinder our efforts to effectively teach all of our students. For example, we have a diverse student body in Barbados today.

In Barbados, we may argue that we are a small nation so how different are our children's habitus. I don't know as yet, but with limited investigation I try to categorize the students who attend Barbadian schools. So far I've listed the following:

- Black Barbadians
- White Barbadians
- Barbadian children born here
- Barbadian children born abroad
- Children sent back home after living in developed countries for the early or later years of their lives

- Children of immigrants
- Guyanese
- Jamaican
- Trinidadian
- St. Lucian
- British
- American
- African
- Children from different religious backgrounds

- Christians

- Muslims

- Hindi

- Buddhists

Clearly this list is not exhaustive but it highlights the point that there are disparate cultures facing our educators today.

Acknowledging that first source of children's culture is very important as they engage in the culture of schooling since many researchers have empirically shown that students' success or failure at school is closely linked to the degree of congruence or dissonance between these two cultures.

And we have to report on the areas where we need to improve our education system. There are primary schools with high percentages of students who perform well on the 11-plus exam. And there are other primary schools with high percentages of students who underperform on the exam. However, the RAW number of actual students who underperform (for example, who score between 0-30) may be identical. The difference is that one school had a higher number of students sitting the exam. However, the parent of those students who obtained

scores between 0 and 30 from either the perceived low-performing or high-performing primary school shares the same worries about the future of their child. Thus we need to pay attention to these children at every primary school whether or not the percentage of these students are high or low at a particular school.

Finally, I ask you to enter your discomfort zone. You are in your discomfort zone if:

- You hear yourself talking about an unresolved issue that occurred in your classroom between you and your students with no commitment on your part to return to your classroom and resolve the issue.
- If you disparage your students who are from different class and cultural backgrounds than you, instead of modeling the care that you ask students to show each other.

We are responsible for educating our children, our children, not somebody else's children. Barbados is so small we cannot afford to lose our human resource. Based on the data, there were 2,000 children who scored between 0 and 30. That's a lot of potential to lose if we don't try to put measures in place to address this inequality. Demand the professional development you need especially if you are asked to teach a subject in which you were not trained.

I end with two quotes that I hope inspire you as much as they do me. A Buddhist Scholar, Daisaku Ikeda writes that "Change in the world begins in the actions of a single individual," and Mahatma Gandhi encourages us to "Be the change you wish to see". Thank you.