

**Inaugural address given on the occasion of the induction ceremony
as Principal of the UWI Open Campus
Friday 16th October 2009**

Chancellor, Sir George Alleyne, Excellency, Dame Dr. Pearlette Louisy; Excellencies, Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, Dame Louise Lake-Tack; of, St. Kitts and Nevis, Sir Cuthbert Sebastian; and of Grenada, Sir Carlyle Arnold Glean; Chairman of the Open Campus Council, Sir Dwight Venner, and Lady Venner, Vice Chancellor Professor E. Nigel Harris, Prime Minister of St. Lucia Mr. Stephenson King, Hon. Sam Condor, Minister of Education and Deputy Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, other Honourable Ministers of Government, Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Kenny Anthony, Fellow Principals, Deputy Principals, University Registrar, Directors, Heads and Staff from the Open Campus, Colleagues from Mona, Cave Hill and St. Augustine Campuses, my family, especially my children who have taken time from their study and work to share this moment with me, my spouse, Patrick McDonald, my siblings, Alnita, Dudley (and Jean who has travelled from afar to be here), nieces and other members of my extended family, friends who have come from afar – Pauline Christie fellow linguist and pioneer colleague for CXC Chief Examiner for English A; Professor Lawrence Carrington, friend, colleague and Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Professor Simone Billings from Stanford and Santa Clara Universities, colleagues from Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, especially Bob and Agatha who taught with me there years ago. It's wonderful to have you all here. Thank you so much for coming. Your presence makes this occasion very special.

I thank everyone who has brought greetings. I want to express very special thanks to Mrs. Veronica Simon who has worked hard for months to organize this event; and I also thank the staff of the Open Campus in St. Lucia; thank you also to our Campus Registrar Ms. Simone Augier and her team, Ms. Suzette Wolfe, Ms. Cheryl Slolely, my own staff Rosemary Jordan and Sherry Toppin for their professional handling of all the arrangements. I also express sincere appreciation to you, Excellency, Dame Dr. Pearlette Louisy, my friend and also colleague for the very generous offer of your house and grounds for this event. Thank you very much.

This moment is poignant because while I am at once caught up in the excitement of it I am the same time saddened by the death last weekend of my cousin, Claudine Walker, a dedicated teacher. I also feel most acutely the absence of my parents, Allan and Agnita, now deceased to whom I owe the deepest debt of gratitude, and who, had they been alive, would have been proud to be here with me. I know they would have introduced a necessary and practical perspective by reminding me that in accepting this singular honour and responsibility conferred by the University, my primary concern should be to serve with humility and to discharge my duties with rectitude, honesty and the highest levels of integrity and efficiency of which I am capable. It is a charge to which I dedicate myself with keenness and enthusiasm. I treasure most deeply their values that shaped my character and their nurturing which fashioned the trajectory of my life and career.

There are others to whom I also owe much. I can now appreciate the sacrifice my sister must have made when she used her spare change to indulge my craving for books. In Primary School Bernadette Augustin (Aunty Té) as we called her provided the best basic education that was available. In Third Form we had the good fortune of having a freshly minted graduate in the person of Patricia Ellen Charles who introduced us to the delights of literature, dramatic performances and the art of swimming properly. Most of us who were girl guides in the troupe at St. Joseph's are probably very good swimmers because of her conviction that one should not live on an island and not be able to swim. In sixth form Mrs. Anne King taught us the value of deep analysis and heightened our appreciation of literature. Our teachers taught us how to think critically through deep interrogation of the materials we read and dissection of arguments. Both Pat Charles and Anne King are here today and I salute you and offer you my deep appreciation for having made learning so enjoyable.

These days one hears critical thinking referred to as a construct that is unconnected to content. We were taught to think critically every time we encountered a text or a mathematical problem through deep engagement with and analysis of the material. It was a disciplined intellectual pursuit that took as its starting point the knowledge and experiences with which one came to school, used these as a framework for exploring the unknown, for apprehending the relationship between what we learned and real life, and to exercise good judgment and balance in dealing

with challenges and responding to the vicissitudes of life. That process is a systematic and incremental development of knowledge that serves one not only in the contexts of formal education but also in the more commonplace circumstances of community life.

How we live in community defines the very fabric of our society and as we focus on development in this region we hope, we expect that our life in community will be characterized by a peaceful co-existence that is predicated on mutual respect and consideration for each other. Living in community is one of four concepts central to UNESCO's mission which, as stated in a documentⁱ of the International Bureau of Education that elucidates the four pillars or learning concepts for the 21st Century presented by Jacques Delors in his report to UNESCO, *Learning, the Treasure Within*ⁱⁱ the fourth pillar, *Learning to Live together* "is considered to provide the basis for the avoidance of conflicts or their non-violent resolution and for ongoing peaceful coexistence." Yet we encounter in most of our countries a trend of increasing intolerance and escalating violence that threatens our peace and leaves us most vulnerable. Must we accept this as the price of development? Are the indices of development to be gauged primarily by factors such as the number of monoliths we erect along our shores or the size of cruise ships that pull into our harbours? When we become prisoners in our own homes then there is cause to fear.

I recall a time when St. Lucia was considered to be underdeveloped but living in peaceful co-existence was the norm. One murder in a year was considered an aberration. This must undoubtedly have been the situation in most of our countries. For most of us, those earlier times are finely etched in the interstices of our memories and we would probably wish them here again if we could have them without diminishing significant strides we have made in certain areas. Now is a critical time to reflect on and reevaluate our systems to determine why - when our countries have increased expenditure on primary education and other social services - high rates of functional illiteracy, escalating violence and crime persist. There appears to be a general disaffection and malaise which stems from despair that these deleterious trends and their negative outcomes cannot be averted. But this is a pessimistic view.

Despite the deep recession and economic hardships we now experience, we have in our people the most valuable resource and the development of our human capital is an imperative from which we cannot resile. Much emphasis is being placed on the importance of knowledge in

development. The year 2015 has been set for the achievement of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) particularly for developing countries. Education and more specifically education for a knowledge economy is considered to be critical for the growth and development of nations and the World Bank stresses the importance of “skilled human capital needed to compete in global markets.” Two of the areas of focus are the creation of “a strong human capital base” which can be achieved through the acquisition of “higher level skills” by a significant portion “of the workforce” and the development of national innovation systems that involve the networking of companies “research centres and universities” to “assimilate and adapt global knowledge to local needs” in order to create new technology. (www.worldbank.com)

All levels of education as well as innovations in science and technology and information communications technology are important drivers of the development of a knowledge economy as is “lifelong learning” for those who would not have received formal secondary or tertiary education. One of the more popular senses in which knowledge is used in these contexts is that of knowledge technologies (or knowledge as a specific tool of development) for economic purposes. But there are other important senses in which we need to understand and apply the term in the context of development and these are knowledge as a tool for learning and understanding our world and the environment in which we live and knowledge as an end in itself which involves the pleasure of knowing about, such as one gets from doing research. All three senses become important in developing countries and there is a real danger of an imbalance if we focus our human capital development solely on knowledge technologies. We need the knowledge from research that will inform us of how well or how badly we are doing and what steps we need to implement to improve our lot. We also need to know in the sense of discovery of the world around us to live in civility with others and to develop the competencies that are needed for success in life.

Universities have a critical role to play in the development of human resources and our University of the West Indies, more than any other, has been influential in the development of the human capital of the region. Over ninety two thousand Caribbean citizens have graduated from the University in a range of fields. We count among our alumni several leaders of governments, doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers and others. Over the years the University has

responded to the demands for expansion to the extent that it was provided with resources to do so.

Having established at its inception the Extra Mural departments to provide continuing education primarily for adults, and having experimented with Distance Education first through the UWIDITE Experiment¹ and subsequently expanding this service through the UWIDEC², it harnessed the capabilities of these entities and the Tertiary Level Institutions Unit (TLIU) to create an Open Campus whose main mission is – as stated in the strategic plan - “*to enable the University to expand the scope, enhance the appeal and improve the efficiency of its service to the individuals, communities and countries which it serves*”.³ With forty-two sites in sixteen countries across the Caribbean region, the Open Campus is well positioned to drive the University’s thrust to provide increased access to its programmes and enable access to tertiary education for those who had hitherto not been able to do so. Through a transformation of the traditional methodologies for teaching and learning, and by broadening the range and scope of content, the Open Campus can address, in a more thorough way, government demands that it contribute to the development of human capital in the region.

The demands of the labour force for qualified individuals to contribute to the process of economic growth and the need for the development of a knowledge economy led to the creation of a needs or demands-driven model to provide the training of adults in the work force. Despite a severe lack of resources the establishment of the Open Campus occurred at the opportune moment when it could capitalize on the significant advances in and flexibility of the technology as well as the versatile use of ICTs to introduce a model that could offer the quality programmes created by sister campuses as well as a new and wider slate of courses generated by the Open Campus.

The pedagogical approaches used by the Open Campus are student-centred, needs-driven and based on constructivist strategies. They cater to the needs of a wide range of clientele, including

¹ The University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE).

² The University of the West Indies Distance Education Center (UWIDEC).

³ The University of the West Indies, Strategic Plan 2007 -2012, p. 31.

teenagers who may have dropped out of secondary school, single and working parents as well as senior citizens, through a ladder approach to education that offers a seamless transition from one level to the next through the application of Prior Learning Assessment to facilitate access and by designing re-usable learning objects for building certification. These enable the learner to achieve outcomes of as high a quality as the traditional campuses and they also enable seamless transfer to these campuses.

Using a technology environment that is flexible and responsive to learner needs, the campus provides courses and programmes online, onsite and on demand to its learners across the region. The existence of forty-two physical sites in different locations also allows the campus to offer selected courses and programmes face-to-face and provide additional support in these contexts for learners who may need special tutoring. Under the current management the Open campus is pursuing a plan for the strategic development of all its sites in the OECS and for promoting them as Centres of excellence in research that focuses on the cultural, social and economic aspects of the respective countries, thus making them the locus for study by scholars from the region and internationally.

Through the enhancement of its Distance Education capabilities, the Open Campus of the UWI, itself an innovative entity in the delivery of higher education in the region, seeks to contribute to the development of our Caribbean societies by transforming the learning – teaching enterprise to attract and engage adults and young adults seeking personal development opportunities as well as disaffected youth who may have dropped out of the education system early. The potential for an education system such as the Open Campus to transform societies and support the efforts of regional governments to develop the human capital of the region in such a way as to create societies that are ordered, industrious and prosperous is tremendous.

In addition to the methods described for transforming the system of education provided by the Distance arm of its operations, the UWI Open Campus also promotes partnerships as it seeks to achieve its strategic objectives. In keeping with University tradition, the campus espouses the benefits of establishing such partnerships. The Open Campus partners with established

campuses of the University to promote the overall well-being of the University. This is an enduring objective to promote the regionality of the University as well as a collaborative effort to position the institution to propel human and capital development in the region. While partnerships with governments and non-governmental organisations in the region are important for the further development of our peoples, partnerships with other educational institutions are also necessary. The Open Campus supports the concept of a network of institutions including Community Colleges with which it can partner first, to further enhance the reach and slate of pre-university programmes to Caribbean communities and second, to provide opportunities for staff development through the Open Campus which will also function as a gateway to the wider University. Such partnerships would not only allow for extending access to University programmes they would also lead to better articulation of programmes.

Through partnerships with UWI and its Open Campus, State and community colleges would receive assistance in strengthening their institutions to build capacity progressively and create a distinct possibility for offering programmes at higher levels. The application of stringent quality assurance procedures, would reassure governments that the UWI and other local institutions they support would be providing education of a high quality in a wide range of specialisation to as many in the population who would seek and benefit from this education.

In the Caribbean, education has always been considered a vehicle by which an individual could break the cycle of poverty and achieve social mobility. However, in contexts in which children cannot see the relevance of what they are learning in school to their lives, when they also struggle to learn to develop literacy in a language of instruction which they do not understand because it is different from the language they speak when they come to school, a possible result is that they become frustrated, resentful and drop out of the system. The statistics that represent a trend of functional illiteracy in St. Lucia give cause for concern⁴. One may well wish to test the hypothesis as to whether some of those who did not benefit academically from the years spent in

⁴ In the case of St. Lucia, for example, functional illiteracy after primary school was indicated at 64% in 1984 (Carrington 1984: 176) and a subsequent literacy survey supports this finding.

school because of linguistic reasons are more likely to get involved in aberrant behavior. Our societies need to be innovative and bold in seeking solutions to problems they face.

In modal logic semantics linguists construct a theory of possible worlds in which they test the truth value of propositions and make claims about some possible world. Lately, I have been fashioning this fantasy of a possible world of the Open Campus. I have been somewhat timid in doing this because if my claim were true in the possible world it would be false in the actual world and considering the extravagance of the claims I have created I would not want them to be false in any world. So I am in the process of recreating the theory to deny the possibility of falsifying claims I make about the Open Campus in any world. Having convinced myself that this was possible I came up with the following claim:

In 2015 the UWI Open Campus will be hugely successful and the most sought after institute for Distance Learning in the region and the diaspora.

Then to satisfy myself of the necessity of this claim – not just its possibility - I made another one which said. *To this end I will serve with all my might.* I want you to know that in any possible world the latter would be true. Thank you.

ⁱ www.ibe.unesco.org/en/learn-to-live-together.html

ⁱⁱ *Learning: the Treasure Within*, the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century.