

# **EDUCATION AND INDEPENDENCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

by

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[Lecture delivered at the Methodist Church Hall, Kingstown,  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines on Wednesday, November 02, 2011,  
under the sponsorship of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
Community College]

Office of the Prime Minister  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
November 02, 2011

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[FORMAL GREETINGS!]

**AN UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATION**

Fundamentally, education and training, in our Caribbean and Vincentian contexts, have four functions to satisfy: First, to train critical minds fit to receive and transmit universal culture, including science and technology, but with a Caribbean/Vincentian particularity; secondly, to produce skilled workers, including professionals, with sound attitudes to work, for the modern, competitive production apparatus; thirdly, to inculcate a core of tried and tested values, including honesty, discipline, Godliness, resident in our Caribbean civilisation and its Vincentian

component; and fourthly, to shape well-rounded personalities and healthy beings for life, living, and production.

Our Education Revolution was, and is, designed to accomplish these four broad functional goals at the most optimal level possible, in all the circumstances. Much success has been achieved in these respects but we still have some distance to go. Indeed, given the fact that education never ceases for anyone or a society, the education system, both formal and non-formal, is necessarily dynamic, ever changing in its strategies and programmes, but always tried to these more or less immutable, over-arching goals related to the development of individual human beings to the fullest, and of the society as a whole.

Our Education Revolution arrived at a time when the production apparatuses in the economy had become focussed on the production of services as against the production of goods, particularly agricultural commodities and light manufacturing products, the production of which, by and large, did not require advanced skills or training.

This condition of economic diversification, from goods to services, grew more starkly after July 1993 when the seventeen-year process of dismantling the preferential market regime for our bananas in the United Kingdom, began in earnest. In 1992, St. Vincent and the Grenadines exported some 80,000 tons of bananas with a value of \$120 million; by 1995, the export figure fell to 55,000 tons with a value of \$60 million; and by the year 2000, banana exports were 22,000 tons with an export value of \$30 million. Simultaneously, gross tourism earnings grew from less than \$100 million in 1993 to over \$300 million in 2002.

Yet, the previous administration failed to prepare the population with the requisite education and skills for the modern, competitive, service-oriented, post-colonial economy and society. The graduates from primary schools had fewer banana holes to dig, but they were not accorded secondary education or post-primary training to equip them for a different and transforming economy. Education was not even keeping up with the economic changes much less being ahead or in the vanguard, of these structural, economic alterations. The education system, to a large degree, had become dysfunctional.

A bundle of telling facts, at the level of secondary education in the year 2000, illustrate this point: Secondary School Education was of a gradually low quality and access to it was hugely restricted: CXC grades especially in Mathematics, the Sciences, and English were woeful; (indeed, they are still not close to being good enough); in 2000, only 39 percent of the 12-year olds were at secondary school; between 1991 and 2000, enrolment in secondary schools increased by a mere 343 in total or by an average of 34.3 students per year; Science Laboratories were, in the main, very sub-standard; library facilities were limited nationally and in the schools; overcrowding in the schools was the order of day; access to Information Communications Technology (ICT) learning and computers was practically non-existent; in too many cases secondary school teachers were inadequately trained in the core subject areas; and generally-speaking the schools and the facilities within them were run-down, neglected, and wholly inadequate.

A similar tale of unacceptable educational inadequacy and insufficiency emerges from the real condition, in 2000, in early childhood education, primary education, special education, technical and vocational

education, post-secondary education in all subject areas, tertiary education, and adult and continuing education.

In short, the educational system was ineffective to the point of dysfunctionality in meeting satisfactorily the challenges which necessarily arose from any reasonable package of articulated goals of education and training. At the core of this ineffectiveness and dysfunctionality was the disconnect between the altered production apparatuses and the competitive environment, on one hand, and education, on the other.

The leaders of the pre-2001 administrations were not unaware of the educational malaise around them, but they were unable to fashion an appropriate way out of the crisis to which they had contributed immensely. Indeed, predecessor Prime Ministers in 1994 and 2000 publicly bemoaned the presence of a crisis in education. Their thesis was identical: The nation was not receiving adequate returns on the educational investments and the teachers were to be blamed. They were unable to see that the absence of a well-conceived educational policy, strategy, and action plan was the central brake on educational

advancement and that they were primarily responsible. The educational crisis was thus, at its root, political, philosophical, strategic, and programmatic in nature.

Swiftly, my government saw that an Education Revolution was, and is required, to be the mid-wife, hand-maiden, servant, and leader of the emerging competitive post-colonial economy, of an evolving sophisticated society lodged within the framework of our Caribbean civilisation, and of a modern and deepening political democracy. A solid educational foundation has been laid through our Education Revolution. Now, it is necessary and desirable to take it to the next, higher level. This is fundamental for our further economic advancement, enhanced social progress, and political development.

We shall address several of the salient issues in the consolidation, extension, and deepening of every aspect of our Education Revolution in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. I shall seek to ground our exploration of these issues, and their manifold interconnections, in relation to the active stakeholders in the educational system: the State,

the policy-makers and administrators, the community, the parents, the teachers, the students, and our regional and international partners.

First, though, let us establish, conceptually, the link between the further development of our Education and our Independence as a nation.

### **AN UNDERSTANDING OF INDEPENDENCE**

In a formal, juridical sense, the attainment of independence of a nation means its legitimate right to exercise authority within the physical and other internationally-recognised limits of its territorial jurisdiction. Constitutional independence signifies the formal end of colonialism and is reflective of the nation-state's capacity to determine its own affairs through the various apparatuses of the State: The flag, the national anthem, and the acquisition of an independent constitution are the outward signs of an inward grace of independence.

More profoundly, independence means the people's collective ownership of their destiny; it manifests itself necessarily in independent thought and action. Independence endows a nation not only with the

instruments of a formal sovereignty but clothes it with a capacity to address its challenges in the people's interest, without any interference from any external authority, save that to which the nation-state itself voluntarily agrees to submit as part and parcel of the community of nations.

Independence in relation to a nation-state conjures up other associated or related concepts and ideas such as: Freedom; Sovereignty; Self-Determinations; Authority; Power; Self-Awareness; Emancipation from Mental Slavery; Cultural and Historical Authenticity; Raising the level of the Productive Forces; Equality of Opportunity; Just Economic Rewards for Labour; Independent Thought and Action; Self-Rule and Popular Democracy; Improved levels of Cultural and Material Living; Peace and Internationalism; Solidarity and Social Cohesion. These concepts and ideas are of relevance, too, to the independence of, families and communities within the nation.

The formal, juridical termination of colonialism and the arrival of our constitutional independence with its promise of a better future did not mean an immediate decolonisation of the mind, thought, and action.

The emancipation of the mind, like the phenomenon of decolonisation generally, is a process; it is on-going: Imitative thinking and action by mimic men and women, to adopt V.S. Naipaul's telling formulation, is a curse which afflicts ex-colonial societies, particularly those which are still bombarded daily by the mass media internationally, regionally and locally, which are infused with the malady of cultural and informational imperialism.

Imitative thought, which is the antithesis of an emancipated mind, is manifest among huge slices of our society, including too many in all classes, from some among the economic elites to several among the intellectual/ professional class, and "lumpen" elements wedded to bling and criminality of North American ghettos. An unemancipated or colonised mind is necessarily rigid and uncurious; it acts in accordance with borrowed fixed notions which are resistant to the legitimate quest of seeking truth from facts. The unemancipated or colonised mind has a tendency to avoid facts or to stylise them in accordance with pre-conceived political prejudices or ideological blinkers. Such a mind is historicist, rather than possessed of a genuine historical understanding; it puts a cosmetic gloss to historical processes and ignores their core

meaning. Indeed, the unemancipated or colonised mind prefers to live in a permanent present without truly understanding from whence we have come, where we are, and where we are going.

This historical amnesia or collective memory-loss suits neo-colonialism and imperialism (monopoly capital overseas) quite well. After all, it is mercantile, and later industrial, capitalism from Europe which is historically responsible in the Caribbean for genocide, slavery, and indentureship long after those forms of conquest and settlement had become anachronistic among and between the elements of Anglo-Saxon civilisation. Later, in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a particular strain of the virus of racism and monopoly capitalism found genocidal expression against the Jews in Europe which mirrored, but did not surpass, the unspeakable crimes against humanity committed by Anglo-Saxons against the Garifuna and Africans in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The historical ledger, of course, includes not only these unspeakable crimes but also, over time, the introduction of representative government, the rule of law, a public service bureaucracy, modern

technology, and Christianity. These progressive advances had to be conceded by the ruling class as a consequence of popular struggles locally, regionally and internationally against colonialism and imperialism amidst the alterations in the character of monopoly capitalism itself, which had to assume new forms to renew itself and its hegemony.

Several strands of imitative thought still dominate, or find a central place in, intellectual circles in the Caribbean. These include the following:

1. An avoidance of the realities of our condition or the concrete circumstances of life, living, and production. This is reflective of an intellectual tendency by some to take us on quixotic intellectual adventures which are removed from, or possessed only a marginal connection to, our realities.
2. Connected to a tendency to avoid that which is the reality before us, is a pre-occupation by some with stylising facts in their futile search for a proper theory of explanation. Such

persons engage in discourses which seek to choreograph the dancing of angels on the head of a pin, while at the same time insisting that they are uncovering truths of the essence of real phenomena. Many of these individuals are trained to observe, but their ideological or politically partisan pre-dispositions turn their observations into myths, even amidst their make-believe, non-ideological posturings.

3. An absence of a sound grasp of history even among those who are most adept at chronicling events, their dates of occurrence, actions of personalities and so forth. A chronicler does not a true historian make. The socio-economic underpinnings of the events and the actions of personalities must be correctly unraveled and understood. Three titans of Caribbean historical scholarship teach us to understand properly our history, namely: CLR James in his Black Jacobin; Eric Williams in his Capitalism and Slavery; and Walter Rodney in his How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. These are examples of the decolonised mind at work.

4. A colonial and imperial cultural imitativeness which is preoccupied with a gradualism within existing imported socio-economic and political models. Such a pre-occupation is excessive on the description of problems, not an analysis or understanding of them. This pre-occupation of cultural imitativeness and problem description leads inexorably to opportunism and a failure to find relevant home-grown solutions. To be sure, a sound study of comparative and historical circumstances can assist in understanding our real condition, but we must grasp the peculiarities of our own circumstances which demand creative, home-grown solutions.
  
5. The petit bourgeois class outlook of too many of our Caribbean intellectuals constrain the full flowering of their creative imagination by their formal parroting of a make-belief non-ideological posture while embracing the “Washington Consensus” centred on an IMF-World Bank outlook. Many of such persons see their career prospects as tied up with their acceptance of the “Washington Consensus” as the only feasible, viable, permanent, and just framework for development. In

short, they see little or no space for home-grown solutions, adaptations or alternatives.

6. Sectarians on “the left” of the political spectrum, nationally, while not worshipping at the altar of “the Washington Consensus”, unfortunately do not sufficiently comprehend our real condition and tend to overestimate the possibilities of independent space for action. It is an error, derived from an incorrect analysis of the concrete conditions of life and production in our context, to overestimate or to underestimate our possibilities and limitations.
  
7. Too many Caribbean, including Vincentian, intellectuals have an insufficient methodology or theory of history to understand change. Too many of them adopt a mechanistic “either-or” approach to change because of their failure to analyse the multiple and contradictory inter-connectedness of real phenomena as reflected in the actions of real flesh-and-blood persons in our society. Unraveling the source(s) of this

contradictory interconnectedness is at the core of understanding, facilitating, and making the change.

The liberal-democratic and parliamentary road to change adds to the complexities of the situation to be unraveled, understood, and altered.

### **SOME RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES**

On November 01, 2010, I authored and caused to be published a 74-page paper entitled Lifting the Education Revolution to the Next Level. It was published in the Searchlight newspaper and on the Unity Labour Party's website as part of my contribution to the public debate on relevant issues as the general elections of last year approached. I remind you, too, that I also authored and caused to be published around the same time full-length papers on other subjects, including those on "the Economy" and on "Crime". These were in addition to two books by me respectively entitled The Making of the Comrade: The Political Journey of Ralph Gonsalves and The Diary of A Prime Minister: Ten Days Among Benedictine Monks. Further, there were two ULP

Manifestos, one for the youth and the other generally. In each of these publications, the issues raised in this lecture, were, to a lesser or greater degree, addressed.

Several relevant educational issues are available for comment. They are: The actual, concrete, state of education in 2001 when the ULP assumed office; the record of the Education Revolution, thus far; Access to Education (Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, Special, Adult and Continuing, the Four Divisions of Post-Secondary Education at the Community College, and Tertiary Education); Remedial Education; the Partnership Between the State and Non-State Actors in Education; Counselling, School Discipline and Education; ICT and Education; Critical Thinking and Education; Quality Teaching and Education; and Parenting and Education. I addressed all of these subjects in my extensive paper of November 2010. In my presentation this evening I shall speak on four of them: Critical Thinking; Quality Teaching; Parenting; and Core Subjects in the Curriculum.

(1) **CRITICAL THINKING AND EDUCATION**

Our educational system needs to take a quantum leap by infusing ever more, “critical thinking” in its delivery of teaching and learning at every level. “Content” teaching and learning has its place; so, too, does elemental “role” learning which tests the memory. But every learning environment ought to be challenging for the students, reflecting a full infusion of critical thinking. Critical thinking, properly applied, will enhance students’ understanding of the real world and integrate much better theory and practice, thus leading to problem solving in both the general and specific spheres of thought and activity.

Critical thinking involves engaging the student’s mind with ideas, abstractions, concepts, theories, logical reasoning, research methods and techniques, methodologies and analytic frameworks, but always grounded in the real practical world around us. Critical thinking will contribute immensely to the decolonising of the mind and an avoidance of rigid or imitative thought.

Decades ago, the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire addressed this issue, among others, in his splendid book, **The Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. He specifically critiqued what he referred to as the “banking concept of education” – a condition in which teachers placed deposits in the children’s heads which may later be mechanistically and uncritically retrieved.

Each discipline or subject of study has its own content which must be studied but such knowledge can best be acquired through a process of critical reasoning, the grasping of the interconnectedness of ideas and reality, comprehension, comparative and historical thinking, and logic. Teachers must refocus accordingly; and text books re-written to reflect this more “critical thinking” approach. All this takes time, but the process must swiftly be put in place sooner rather than later.

To be sure, the current educational system is not devoid of critical thought. But there is a sense that too much mystery and confusion attend teaching and learning. This is very evident in

some of the teaching and learning at all levels in Mathematics, the Sciences, Modern Languages, History and Literature.

Universities across the globe are fighting back in the cause of critical thinking. Indeed, top-notch universities such as Oxford and Cambridge are keen on testing students on their own admission examinations on “Critical Thinking” and “Communication Skills”. Following this trend, the scholarship examinations of the University of the West Indies test students on similar-titled examination papers, not on content by itself.

I have been advised that Dr. Didacus Jules, the Chief Executive Officer of the Caribbean Examinations Council, is anxious to push the CXC Examinations into testing on “critical thinking” not merely as a subject of study, but as a bedrock element in the teaching and learning of “content” courses. I feel sure that ICT from graphics to prose, can assist in fostering this critical approach. Critical minds, fit to receive and transmit science, technology, socio-cultural studies, and the humanities, are what must be at the core of education and training.

(2) **QUALITY TEACHING AND EDUCATION**

Trained, dedicated teachers are the fulcrum around which students' education revolves. The basics in this regard are well known: On-going teacher training and learning; competence in the subject area being taught; industriousness and studious preparation; the delivery of the material in a manner which commands attention, listening, critical thinking, and learning; the integration of theory and practice; the seeking of truth from facts; the ability to draw out that which is best in the student; the possession of a balanced personality which exudes respect for the students, calmness and love for them, inspiration and caring, and professionalism; the capacity to be part of a team and the ability to lead when required; honesty and self-criticism; meaningful engagement with the parents and the community; respect for, though not uncritical subservience to, authority including that of the Principal and the Ministry of Education; and generally, the recipient, shaper, and transmitter of that which is best of our Caribbean civilisation, including our tried and tested values.

These are the basics. Individual teachers may deliver additional value as they and their circumstances permit. Fundamentally, though, a teacher not merely teaches a subject but teaches himself or herself to the student. An incurably bad person has no business in teaching; impatient and temperamentally-challenged persons ought to avoid the teaching profession; cruel, violent and dishonest persons ought not to have a place in the teaching profession; lazy, indifferent, and capricious individuals will not make good teachers; teachers who use the school or the classroom as a political war zone are in the wrong profession; teachers who resist self-improvement or sensible methodological changes will inevitably short-change their students; and teachers who think that education and learning are about them and not the students will fail.

Experienced teachers, including persons who have been in leadership positions in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, have averred to me that between one-fifth and one-third of the teachers in the educational system ought to be in

another profession. They have so concluded on the basis of anecdotal evidence only. That probably was the case in 2000 before the extraordinary education and training opportunities made available for teachers at all levels. In any event the impressionistic, critical testimony offered on this matter is insufficiently persuasive to me. But even if the numbers of teachers ill-suited to the profession are actually far less, the suggestion is still credible that perhaps a not insignificant number of teachers is performing below an acceptable level. It is an important matter for dispassionate research, analysis, and sensible correctives.

This is a conundrum which policy-makers and educational managers must clearly tackle with wisdom, fairness, and balance. In no country in the world has any alleged teacher deficiency been successfully tackled by traducing or making enemies of teachers. To do so would be unnecessarily disruptive of the profession and the classroom; it would do no good for anyone, especially the students. This does not mean that teachers are “sacred cows”; there are no such species in the educational system. But this is an

area of educational praxis – theory and practice – which demands a cooperative approach by the State’s authorities, the teachers, the parents, the community, and even the students who understand the issue. This cooperative venture relates to analysis, diagnosis, prescription, and implementation. It would be helpful for an external referent, perhaps one or more informed and sensitive educational consultants from outside of the system itself, to facilitate the corrective process.

I begin from the standpoint that only a very small percentage of teachers are likely to be assessed as incurably bad. But even a small number of these can be a standing danger to the students’ well-being and education if they are strategically located in the learning environment. If they are incurably bad, they must be made to exit teaching, and possibly be employed elsewhere in the State apparatus, if appropriate.

I am absolutely sure that most of those teachers, who are assessed to be unacceptably deficient, are quite capable of reaching an acceptable level of teaching. Training, further training, re-tooling,

and peer solidarity are likely to prove successful, so long as the deficient teacher is willing to have his or her teaching skills and competencies upgraded, and poor attitudes corrected. This has to be an on-going imperative of the Education Revolution. No child must be left behind; no parent must be left behind; and no teacher worth the name must be left behind.

The ULP government has invested immensely in teachers over the past ten or so years. Practically every teacher is now trained at the level of a qualified teacher. Further, hundreds of teachers, including primary school teachers, have become university graduates or have undergone specialist training in a range of pedagogics, including the teaching of literacy and numeracy, early childhood education, learning disabilities, remedial education, reading and mathematics, information technology, special education, science and modern languages, counseling, classroom management, and leadership. On an on-going basis the Ministry of Education and the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union conduct workshops to advance further the professional development of teachers. Never in the history of St. Vincent and

the Grenadines, or indeed of any other OECS member-country, has there been so much post-secondary, university, and professional training of teachers over such a concentrated period of time. It has been absolutely remarkable.

At the Teacher Education Division (formerly the Teachers' College) of the Community College, the breadth and depth of the course offerings have been enhanced spectacularly, including those touching on learning disabilities, remediation, and core subjects. Undoubtedly, the teachers are better trained, formally, than ever before; and practically all of them in the classrooms have been trained. Yet, there are still some unacceptable deficiencies to which I have earlier referred which require correction.

By and large, the physical environment and the teaching facilities or tools available have been dramatically improved over the past ten years. So, too, have been the salaries, allowances, bonuses, benefits, terms and conditions of the teachers' employment. Of course, as always, further enhancements would be worthwhile

and deserving, but the financial constraints of a small island developing economy are undoubtedly felt. Still, every teacher is far better off today materially than in 2000. The ULP government is a friend of teachers, always; it will forever look out for their interest.

There is a complaint from some quarters that an insufficient number of our teachers, particularly from the primary schools, focus on the pursuance of university education in core subject areas, including Mathematics, the Sciences, Modern Languages, History, English Literature or Information Technology. The allegation is that too many of them take university offerings in education generally or in sub-disciplines of that broad area.

This complaint, this allegation is not without merit although the rush to the “education” subject matter, simpliciter, is understandable in the context of the paucity of highly trained educators hitherto. This imbalance is already in the process of being redressed by specific, targeted interventions. So, in the next five years, my government will ensure that a greater focus is

placed on university education in “the content” of the core subject areas. This is vital in the linking of education more firmly to living and production.

In the educational system, the question of the monitoring of teaching arises for policy and managerial action. What are the criteria of quality teaching? What are the modalities for monitoring? Who should do the monitoring? What are the purposes of monitoring? How should the results of the monitoring be used? Are there rewards or sanctions to flow from this monitoring? These and other salient questions ought to be sensibly addressed by the technical persons responsible for this facet of educational management.

From a policy standpoint, I consider that, at a minimum, the following principles be applied:

- ✓ An open and transparent system for monitoring and assessment of teaching be put in place;

- ✓ Precise criteria of monitoring and assessment be drawn up;
- ✓ Monitoring and assessment ought to be done internally at the school level through a peer review system and possibly involving parents and the students;
- ✓ The internal monitoring and assessment be bolstered by periodic assessments by an external referent;
- ✓ The Ministry of Education, the teachers, the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, the parents, the community, and the relevant students be engaged jointly in the entire process of monitoring and assessment;
- ✓ The monitoring and assessment results be used as one of the criteria directed towards rewards, promotion, professional advancement, or correction.

I have discussed this subject with a number of teachers and educational managers. Overwhelmingly, they advise that it is an

area in which we ought to proceed. Indeed, any modern system of personnel management, such monitoring and assessments are now routine. In time, standards will rise further; and all the stakeholders in education would benefit.

However, not only must teaching be assessed; so, too, must schools in which the teachers teach. After all, the individual teachers do not function in a vacuum. They perform their professional duties with a particular staff; leadership; community environment; physical facilities, equipment and tools; the Ministry's performance; and under a host of other conditions, including the school's recent history. This school assessment must be done along similar lines and in accordance with similar principles as for the monitoring and assessment of teaching. Indeed, both assessments though separate are inextricably linked. Accordingly, I suggest that an Office of Standards in Education be established in the Ministry of Education to guide these twin-processes of monitoring and assessment. There is a mountain of comparative experiences from developed and developing countries, from which to draw in this regard. These processes

ought not to be bureaucratically cumbersome or expensive. They must be designed to help us, not to rule us in a dogmatic way.

(3) **PARENTING AND EDUCATION**

Comparative research, and actual experience in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, teach that the quality of parenting has a major impact on the child's or student's educational performance. Good parenting, which encompasses, among other things, a keen parental supervision and support for a child/student, and a sensible engagement with the education of the child/student, contributes to enhanced educational achievements. Conversely, poor parenting leads, more often than not, to low educational attainment.

The Education Revolution recognises these truths regarding parenting. The challenge is to lift the quality of parenting to levels of greater responsibility and support for the students so as to make a difference for the better. The Ministry of Education has been mounting "parenting classes" across the country but its

efforts have not borne the requisite educational fruits. The problem is that the indifferent parents avoid these parenting sessions while those who are, by and large, sound parents attend them in the push for further improvement.

The quest for an improved quality of parenting is not a matter to be addressed in an half-hearted or episodic manner. It is a complex sociological, economic, and psychological issue with a host of ramifications. Good parenting has to be a national crusade taken up by all and sundry but driven by civil society entities, including the PTAs and the churches, the State, and the mass media of communication.

As our society becomes more saturated by practically every species of attractive entertainment available to the Western World, be it in music, film, television, video and computer games, dances and parties, and live entertainment of all kinds, children and young persons naturally become drawn to them. As a result, they too often spend an excessive amount of time with these popular entertainment outlets and an insufficient amount of time

on their reading or homework. The very computer or the cell phone which can be used to facilitate learning, can become time-wasting distractions. So, a close and disciplined supervision of the child's time at home, which involves necessarily a proper or efficacious balance, is required by the parent or guardian. It is often not easy but it must be done.

Sometimes, the child/student may become involved in plain bad company or illegal activities which take him or her off course to the detriment of the school work. The parent has to know and see the signs and take corrective action. For various reasons, too, the home may not be a conducive place to study; thus libraries, Learning Resource Centres, the school itself or some other safe, comfortable place may have to be found.

All of these challenges and more confront the parent and the child. Sometimes the child's economic circumstances may be a brake on his/her learning efforts. Other times, the parent may be simply negligent or oblivious to his or her basic responsibilities.

Clearly, a child/student requires nurturing, care, love, maintenance, and proper supervision from his or her parents. The parents cannot shirk their elemental responsibilities in these respects. To be sure, the school is the principal locale of formal instruction but it is not the only environment for learning or studying. The home and parents are critical in this educational enterprise.

My government intends to continue its efforts to make “good parenting” a centre-piece of the Education Revolution. The parents and the teachers must work together to deliver quality teaching and education to the students.

Allied to all of this is the formal role of counseling for parents, teachers and students. Schools now have available to them, trained counselors. They must be optimally deployed.

(4) **CORE SUBJECTS IN THE CURRICULUM**

In the modern educational system, students are required to acquire a satisfactory competency in a number of core subjects by the time they write their CSEC or “O” Level examinations, usually between 16 and 18 years of age. Additionally, there are optional subjects depending on a student’s interest, inclination or intended career choice.

Educators often differ on which subjects ought to be designated as “core” subjects. Given the four central purposes of education which I have earlier advanced, I consider “the core” to be: English Language, a foreign language (Spanish, French, or Mandarin), Mathematics, Information Technology, Caribbean History, and Critical Thinking. Clearly, too, given the requisites of applied science and technology to the modern and productive processes, more students ought to be encouraged to embrace Natural Sciences (Chemistry, Physics and Biology) without in any way down-grading the Humanities or the cluster of Business subjects.

I have already commented on the importance of Critical Thinking in education. Clearly, English, Mathematics, Information Technology, and a foreign language must feature as “core” subjects. In the foreign language category, French and Spanish have been the traditional ones and ought to remain at the centre of Foreign Languages Departments in schools. But given the growing importance of China as a world economy and its population size (1.3 billion) in a world of 7 billion, serious consideration ought to be given to the teaching of Mandarin. Similarly, Brazil (200 million population), which is near to us geographically, is now the world’s sixth largest economy, with Portuguese as its mother tongue. That is a language of growing importance, not because of Portugal (a small economy with 10 million people), but because of Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Angola, one of the expanding African economies. Always, we must seek to dovetail our education with the altering external environment.

Historically, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the entire Caribbean, our students’ performance at the CXC or “O” Level

Examinations has been most unsatisfactory. Obviously, our students are not being adequately taught this subject at primary and secondary schools. This inadequacy, more than likely, relates to two factors: A wrong or wholly inappropriate methodology for the teaching of the subject; and an insufficient competency in the subject matter by the teachers themselves. This deficiency in Mathematics demands urgent correction. The Ministry of Education has this objective at the top of its priorities. It is currently engaged in an initiative to achieve this urgent corrective.

The performance in English Language has been moderately satisfactory, but much better can be done. Between the years 2004 and 2011, the highest percentage of passes in English “A” (English Language) at CSEC was 76 percent in 2010. In 2011, the comparable percentage was 69 percent. Fourteen of the 26 secondary schools scored below the average pass level of 69 percent in 2011, and six of these schools scored below 50 percent passes. Indeed, four of these schools scored below 40 percent. At the same time, impressive scores in English were attained by

some schools: Girls' High School (100 percent); St. Joseph's Convent Kingstown (98.6 percent); and the Grammar School (98 percent). Rural secondary schools which were above the average scores in English Language in 2011, are: Mountain View Academy (89.5 percent); St. Joseph's Convent, Mespo (89 percent); Barrouallie Secondary (83.9 percent); Union Island Secondary (80.6 percent); Bequia Seventh Day Adventist (78.6 percent); and Bequia Community High (75.5 percent).

I want to make the case for Caribbean History to be taught as a core subject. In my view, every student at the CXC level ought to be taught and examined in Caribbean History. How can we further enhance the nobility of our Caribbean civilisation when our students are accorded very little formal education in Caribbean history? How can our students properly know ourselves without this historical knowledge? Are we condemning our students to live in a permanent present without an antidote against the ever-present virus of cultural imperialism? Would Caribbean History not assist us in our quest for greater

independent thought and action? These and other related queries ought to cause us to ponder carefully on this issue at hand.

What are the facts before us regarding Caribbean History and the CXC Examinations in 2011? Students numbering 1,411 took English Language in which subject area 69 percent passes were recorded. Students numbering only 325 sat the Caribbean History Examination. There were only 170 passes or just about 52 percent. But more alarmingly is that the very low number, 170, is but 12 percent of the total number of students, overall, who sat the CXC Examinations. Surely, this is unacceptable!

I have made a detailed analysis of the performance of the 26 secondary schools in Caribbean History both in respect of the numbers who sat the examinations in the subject area in 2011 and those who passed, and it makes depressing reading. I have made a detailed presentation to Cabinet on this and other aspects of our students' performance (including in Mathematics and English), using the raw data, school-by-school, provided to me by the Ministry of Education. Several appropriate conclusions were

arrived at for corrective action. The Minister of Education is currently leading the charge, robustly, on these and related issues in education.

## **EDUCATION, INDEPENDENCE AND OUR POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Education and independence provide vital instruments with which to leverage further economic development in a small, open, developing economy with resource limitations and constraints.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has an estimated population of 110,000 persons, slightly more than one-half of whom are too old to work, too young to work, to ill, or are at study in one of the various educational institutions. Thus, roughly 50,000 persons are economically active or are available for work. In the absence of oil, natural gas or precious metals such as gold, diamond, silver or other minerals to propel the economy, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has to fashion and implement an economic policy which focuses on enlarging the possibilities of our landscape, seascape, climate, people, and sovereignty/independence and on reducing, as far as is humanly possible, our limitations. This

bundle of considerations resides in our all-embracing political economy, not in the economy simpliciter.

Three central guiding principles arise from this analysis. First, seek truth from facts; secondly, do not turn observations into myth by way of pre-conceived political prejudices or a jaundiced ideological outlook; ground analytic enquiry, diagnosis, and prescriptions in the reality of our condition.

An economically active population nationally of 50,000 persons and a land area of 150 square, are unlikely, without more, to provide, sustain, and further develop the material requisites of a modern, sophisticated, post-colonial society which is located a few hours away by jet aircraft from the most materially prosperous country on earth, the United States of America. Think of the resources required for our physical infrastructure; health, education, and other social services; housing; modern consumables such as motor vehicles, electronic appliances, and other creature comforts; quality housing; the level and range of public utilities; modern fashion and entertainment; overseas travel and leisure.

To provide the requisite resources demand, as a priority, the enlargement of our possibilities and spaces.

How do we enlarge our population so as to facilitate the further development of our productive forces? This can be done in four basic ways: First, by engaging productively our diaspora overseas, estimated at some 350,000 persons, by way of their remittances, investments, and as consumers of the goods and services produced locally. Secondly, by attracting nationals or non-nationals from overseas with skills and investments required for the further development of our productive forces. Thirdly, to bring tourists, particularly the categories of stay-over visitors and those on yachts, who add considerable value to the economy. Fourthly, the education and training of our population, self-evidently enlarge our possibilities.

Let me further illustrate the point about the enlargement of our population. Currently, roughly 100,000 stay-over visitors come to us annually. The Argyle International Airport is likely to triple that number swiftly. Three hundred thousand stay-over visitors will enlarge the market for our goods and services.

Education and training of our people through the advanced processes of our Education and Revolution lifts the level of the productive forces, directly and by the application of science and technology. The virtual enlargement, by way of connectivity, is enhanced through the revolution in ICT, including the ICT facilities at the educational institution, and production entities. The one-lap-top-per-student policy is an important plank in the ICT platform.

The enlargement of virtual space through ICT mirrors the enlargement of physical space, and its possibilities, through a series of practical policy measures such as a good road network (including the construction of the Rabacca Bridge and the proposal for a cross-country road from north-east to the north-west of St. Vincent); a sound infrastructure for sea transport between and among St. Vincent and the islands of the Grenadines through improved port facilities and more modern ships; the improvement of sea ports especially at Kingstown and Campden Park to enhance an external traffic in goods and persons; the building of the Jet Airport at Canouan to aid immeasurably air transportation and economic advancement in the Southern Grenadines;

the leadership of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in keeping LIAT in the air to ensure enlargement of our physical space through direct regional, indirect international, connection; the current construction of the Argyle International Airport, a most revolutionary development of our country's productive forces.

The lack of independent thought and action, reflective of an unemancipated and colonised mind of timidity, rigidity and a lack of sufficient creativity in successive political leaderships and the intellectual or policy-making class, was primarily responsible for our nation's failure, hitherto, to build an international airport. The recognition of the absolute necessity and desirability of constructing an international airport was a plank of successive governments, going back to even pre-independence times. Several relevant studies were done on this matter from the early 1970<sup>s</sup> to the late 1990<sup>s</sup>. Yet, a paralysis of thought and action stymied any further advance.

The predecessor political and intellectual elites in our country were hemmed in and constrained by orthodox, uncreative, traditional thinking about the financing and implementation of a project of such

magnitude as the international airport. Since no single country or international financial institution would make a grant and/or soft-loan of EC \$500 million or thereabouts to build such a project, it was declared impossible to be done. Further, since St. Vincent and the Grenadines was unable to borrow all that money either on “soft” or commercial terms, the project was seen as a pipe-dream. Indeed, at the height of the Cold-War in the early 1980s, one Prime Minister sadly, but memorably, declared that an international airport in St. Vincent and the Grenadines was possible only if built by international communists or criminals. In short, the matter was not seriously on the developmental agenda. Preceding political and intellectual classes in St. Vincent and the Grenadines were constrained in their creative imagination as to what was possible in airport development in a small, poor, topographically-challenged country, tied irrevocably, in every material particular, to the hegemony of the North Atlantic axis of great powers.

In the same way that my government challenged conventional wisdom, for example, on the construction of the Rabacca Bridge and the praxis of our Education Revolution, we challenged the traditional, uncreative, orthodox assumptions of the unemancipated, colonised minds regarding

the construction of an international airport on St. Vincent. Rather than believing and asserting that it cannot be done, we asked “why not”? Instead of harping on the limitations, my government actively explored our possibilities. We never permitted the naysayers from North America, Europe, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to think for us; we engaged ourselves in independent thought and action. Rather than sticking to traditional or orthodox models of project financing and implementation, we went “beyond the boundaries” to find appropriate home-grown solutions. Instead of viewing our sovereignty and independence as appendages of neo-colonialism and imperialism, we insisted that they were our existential instruments to be deployed creatively, without fear, in our people’s interest to fashion a “coalition of the willing” in a remarkable and far-flung axis of internationalist solidarity. Most of all, we have believed in ourselves, and have tapped into the resourcefulness of our people and our material resources, including land.

It is truly a tragedy that important segments of the political and intellectual class “still do not get it”, as the saying goes. The slavish, colonised, and unemancipated mind still cannot yet embrace the

majestic creativity of what is unfolding before us. How else can one seriously explain the Leader of the Opposition's damning and infantile commentary in his 2011 Independence Day Message that the construction of the international airport is "untimely and therefore unlikely"? Right before our very eyes the international airport has been under construction, unbroken, save and except for inclement weather and holidays, over the last three years. The construction is proceeding well; and we are on target to complete by the end of 2012 and to open it for business in 2014!

Such a perspective like that of the Leader of the Opposition is not one akin to "the doubting Thomas" after the Resurrection of Jesus. No! It is the outpouring of a mind constrained in its imagination about our possibilities for independent thought and action. It is the classic mental colonial condition of negativism, the enthronement of our limitations, and an insidious celebration of our presumed lack of capacity for genuine emancipation. Bob Marley's lyrical plea to "emancipate ourselves from mental slavery" appears to have fallen upon deaf ears of those who eschew, a priori, our real possibilities for independent thought and action. It is vital that our educational system emphasise the

positivism of the possibilities of our Caribbean civilisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

More broadly, the enlargement of our landscape and seascape is made possible by a more sustainable exploitation of the resources therein, in our interest.

Our nation's sovereignty and independence are being utilised in a manner which enhances our nation's capacity to address in a more efficacious way the challenges in the external environment in the interest of our further humanisation and development.'

Developing the productive forces of our country is one aspect of economic advance. The other relates to the nature of the production and social relations. The actual structure and ownership of the economy, our people's location in the social organisation of labour, our people's control and ownership of the democratic state apparatus, and the weight of their social capital, determine the broad character of the production and social relations. Education and training are critical in the process of fashioning these production and social relations.

In November 2009, I spearheaded a national effort, in a referendum, to effect a root-and-branch constitutional reform in order to deepen democracy and representative government; to bolster fundamental rights and freedoms; to strengthen popular accountability of, and transparency in, the state administration; to enhance the quality and independence of the judiciary; to provide a home-grown structure of good governance; to bring the constitutional monarchy to an end; to establish a truly democratic, popular republic; and to complete our nation's constitutional independence. Unfortunately, this constitutional reform package was rejected, setting back the on-going struggle for a further decolonisation of the mind, thought, and action.

Whatever my government's achievements and my personal accomplishments, I will leave public office in a state of disappointment because of my failure to persuade our people to make the constitutional step in quest of enlarged freedoms, democracy, justice, effective governance, and independence. I do not regret my efforts at constitutional reform in aid of a further decolonisation of the mind, thought and action. I am sure history will judge me kindly on this score.

But as a democratic, I fully accept the people's verdict. One day when I am no longer around to excite the passions of protagonists, the people would use our noble platform of November 2009 to further the process of constitutional decolonisation. I am confident of a future vindication on this matter when a more united and politically conscious people will exercise a preference for an uplifting home-grown constitution than for the ignoble ease of a hand-me-down document from the bowels of empire.

### **SUMMATION**

In my recent Independence Day Address 2011, I ended in a manner which I consider warrants a repetition:

*“We have withstood enormous external socio-economic challenges over the past three years. We have not wilted. We have stood steadfast and we have moved forward in progress on several fronts. We shall not be daunted by new challenges or old ones, amplified or in altered guises. We have endured far worse burdens during our history and have triumphed*

*over them. We shall do so at every turn. We are fortified by an invincible spirit which has enveloped us from ancestral times. We must look out for one another. We must bind up the broken-hearted; comfort all who mourn; assist in the provision for those who grieve; bestow on the poor a crown of beauty instead of ashes; mark their bodies with the oil of gladness, not of mourning; and put on the garment of praise instead of despair. Each of us in this blessed nation can become a plank of justice, and an oak of righteousness. Our Lord will continue to help us: He will go before us and level the mountains and raise the valleys; He will break down the gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. Our prophets and leaders of old shall be our guides; our people, our rock of solidarity; our Lord, the source of our faith, love, and hope.”*

Thank you! And may God continue to bless us all!