

Teacher Productivity

At a time when the issue of productivity forms part of the national debate in Barbados, it is to the credit of the Barbados Union of Teachers that its 43rd Annual General Conference will address the theme of 'Valuing Teachers: Improving their status'. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that teachers play a pivotal role in the development of the lives of each individual.

Part IV Section 41 of The Education Act of Barbados, places a duty on parents to ensure that every child of compulsory school age receives a full time education suitable to his age and ability. This provision in itself underscores the importance of education in the life of each citizen. It follows that teachers are a special group of professionals, as they touch the lives of all. They perform a variety of roles including those of educators, trainers, facilitators, counselors, mentors and surrogates.

It is significant that to read the commentary carried in the Wednesday, 8 March, 2017 edition of the online newspaper, Barbados Today, which was attributed to the Rt. Hon Frenduel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados. As reported he commented that, "I have always believed that the most important productive sector in any country is its education sector because whereas other productive sectors produce things and money, the education sector produces people, the human resources we need and have needed over the years to make Barbados the great country it is. That is why we have invested heavily as we have in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. We believe that education is the most productive sector in Barbados."

As a former teacher himself, such a profound accolade on the teaching profession couldn't have come from a better person. He would have lived the classroom experience and therefore is in a perfect position to make a value judgment of the contributions made by those were or are members of the profession.

If there is a real appreciation of the role that teachers play, then it is expected that the observation made by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister is one that ought to be supported by every Barbadian. It would be a grave mistake to measure the productivity of teachers primarily on the number of students who gained passes at the CXC and CAPE Examinations, or the number of

students who pass the familiarly known 11+ Examination for entry into the islands secondary schools. Inasmuch that the work of teachers extends to the total development of the individual, the highly educated and literate society, of which we boast, can only be credited to teachers. In every sphere of life, inclusive of one's profession, the ground work which leads to one's advancement in life, has to be credited to the work of teachers in the educational system. This commences from preschool to tertiary level education.

Society can be unjust and unkind to the teachers, who are sometimes the subject of ridicule because of the vacation period they received. They are often abused and vilified when they stand up in defense of their rights, and make demands for improvement in their status as it relates to pay increases, better terms and conditions of service and the enhanced recognition of the teaching profession.

It is rather unfortunate that the value and status of teachers is not deservingly credited. It is to be expected that the community would be far more reasonable and considerate, if it were to consider the work teachers do outside of the normal hours of the school day and the responsibilities they are required to assume. Consideration also ought to be given to the service they give to the community in many different ways.

In reflecting on the value and the status accorded to teachers, it is worth it if the reassessment considers the treatment and respect meted out to them as professionals and key contributors to the development of the society.