

**ADDRESS TO BE DELIVERED AT THE 18TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
DOMINICA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS, GARRAAWAY HOTEL WEDNESDAY 8TH
APRIL 2015 BY H. E. ELIUD T. WILLIAMS**

SALUTATION

It is appropriate that I should extend my appreciation to the Executive of the Association for the opportunity to address you. Those who know me well, recognise that having been in the public view for most of my adult life, I truly enjoy the time afforded me to be away on private business. However, for reasons best known to others, periodically, private life is interrupted and I am asked to return to public duty.

I am advised that the theme of this Annual General Meeting is **“Policy Making Processes – The Role of the Classroom Teacher.”** As I reflected on the theme, it occurred to me that the DAT and its members and others in the field of Education would perhaps be best suited to speak to the role of the classroom teacher. However, as someone who has spent more than 25 years in policy planning and analysis, it may be fair to assume that DAT believes that I am well placed to share some thoughts on the chosen theme.

In this address therefore, I will speak to the some of the issues in policy planning and policy making processes and how the classroom teacher may be involved. According to Dictionary.com, a policy is a definite course of action adopted for the sake of expediency or facility or a course of action pursued by government, a ruler or a political party. Decision making on the other hand is defined as “the act or

the process of deciding or a determination.” In some instances therefore, the term decision-making will be used interchangeably with policy making to refer to the decisions that provide direction to an organization. Further, when we speak of the role of the classroom teacher, implicit therein is the concept of a shared commitment in policy making. Indeed, according to Van Leeuwen, one of the speakers at the 5th International Summit on the Teaching Profession, “without the willing involvement of teachers and their unions in education policy, you cannot get far with education reform.”

Your Mission Statement states that you “represent teachers at the highest level in a spirit of professionalism, fairness and harmony, so as to attain quality education and collegial relationship among all stakeholders.” This clearly speaks to a role as an advocate for teachers and therefore we will need to examine, though briefly, some of the areas of policy in which the classroom teacher and indeed your union can effectively participate. Noticeably, you seek to make that representation at the highest levels since it is there policy decisions are made.

I believe it will be readily agreed that one of the fundamental requirements of any modern society is the right of access to quality education. Therefore in the context of our political and economic environment, Dominica, like all other developing States must develop specific education policies aimed at realising the right to education for every child. The policies must be so targeted to ensure the provision of education throughout childhood, ensure the quality of that education and ensure it is delivered within learning environments that are respectful of the human rights of our children.

We achieved universal primary education decades ago and universal access to secondary education about twelve years ago. Therefore, our Government and other key stakeholders in education must continually invest in the infrastructure to create learning environments and opportunities for high quality education. This requires policies that are flexible and inclusive so that the specific needs of all children or groups of children can be addressed. The policy making process must therefore take account of children who are less visible; that is those with disabilities, those of migrants (Haitians and the DR) and those with health impairments.

These efforts and initiatives can best be achieved with the active involvement and collaboration of non-governmental organizations, community members, parent groups and religious organizations. It is in these kinds of collaborative efforts that our classroom teachers can begin to play a major role in the policy making process. Such inclusion according to UNESCO must be seen as a “dynamic approach responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as a problem but as opportunities for enriching learning.”

Let’s look at some of the areas that involve policy making and how the classroom teacher might be effectively engaged in that policy making process. These are:

1. Education Planning
2. Curriculum Development
3. Teacher Training
4. Resource Mobilization
5. Physical Infrastructure
6. Class sizes

7. Remuneration and other Benefits
8. Stakeholder Collaboration.

Typically, Education planning is undertaken by specialists within a planning unit within the Ministry and I am aware such structures have been developed to utilise the expert knowledge of those who have been so trained. The same observation can be made of curriculum development. Indeed, curriculum specialists help teachers understand content standards, how various components link together and how to use the curriculum in planning instruction and assessment which is essential for consistent curriculum implementation throughout the school.

Herein lies one of the best examples where the classroom teacher can be invaluable in contributing to the policy making process. Involvement of teachers by specialists in formulating and developing curricula would utilise the classroom teacher's experience and learning that could greatly enhance content and help design delivery mechanisms for effective teaching and learning. You might ask, how might these inputs be obtained? I submit there are several well established methods such as focus groups, administration of questionnaires and individual interaction.

Physical infrastructure is another area where the classroom teacher can prove invaluable from the point of conceptualisation, design through to implementation. There is research evidence in health planning where physical facilities were designed and constructed without the input or consultation of final users which resulted in serious constraints, fatigue and frustration of personnel because the flow and sequencing of activities were never thoroughly considered. I believe it is fair to say that with an active and vocal DAT we do not experience

such situations. And just in case this happens, this is an area where advocacy should ensure timely intervention by teachers that result in the construction of facilities that reflect the consultative process and thereby enhance teaching and learning.

Later we shall see how the active participation and involvement of secondary school teachers in Ekiti State in Nigeria resulted in policies that contributed to teacher satisfaction and cost effective achievement of organizational goals. There, education planners and principals with input from teachers developed mechanisms for active participation of these secondary school teachers. There the policy making process was seen as a holistic and comprehensive undertaking.

Decision making has been observed to be the heart of administrative process and leadership in schools. The principals and teachers in primary and secondary schools face a complex set of challenges in both teaching and administrative activities which seem to have consistently hampered the realization of the objectives of the schools. These problems required unified effort from the principals and the teachers for quality and effective administration. It has been observed too that teachers are central in the management of schools and their involvement in decision making process is such a sensitive issue that neglect by the principals could cause a lot of rift, conflict, misgiving and hindrance to the realization of the of the schools' goals and objectives.

The success or failure of any school is largely dependent upon the groups that make it up and effective utilization of the intellectual abilities of these group or human resources helps the development of such an organization or school. Udo and Akpa in their (2007) publication on Education Administration in Nigeria

asserted that where teachers are adequately involved in decision making processes, there would be commitment and adequate support to the principal and the realization of school goals will be easy, while apathy and opposition within the school will be minimized.

The system of participative decision making has also been defined as “higher level individual’s effort to provide those at a lower level with a greater voice in organizational performance. The definition makes it clear that in the intelligence quotient literature, participative decision making represents a deliberate change from traditional management in which a minority of upper-level management employees make all of the decisions regarding organizational policies and functioning.

Jewell (1998) summed up participative decision making as an effort to avoid the “nobody asked” syndrome. He further explained it to mean soliciting employee’s ideas for turning the situation in an organization around. He further opined that along with the expectation that asking, will improve the quality of organizational decision making, it is an expectation that people who participate in decisions that affect them will understand the issues better and accept the decisions more readily.

It has also been noted that where teachers are not involved in governance, teachers normally behave as if they are strangers within the school environment. Thus, most teachers do not put in their best to have a full sense of commitment and dedication to the school

Laurie J Mullins in the 7th Edition of his Book: Management and Organizational Behaviour states that staff participation in decision making leads to higher

performance which is necessary for survival in an increasingly competitive world. It has also been reiterated by some organizational theorists that boredom and frustration at work is often the result of an employee's lack of involvement in organization's decision making processes and a feeling that their ideas are not wanted or listened to. They further posit the view that staff turnover increases as employee's walkout of the door for more interesting jobs.

In the wider Caribbean context, focussed group research has corroborated this fact and saw involvement of employees in decision making as empowerment while a neglect of employees in decision making as a failure to recognise workers as resources with knowledge and experience and a willingness to become involved. Employers therefore need to provide opportunities and structures for employee involvement. It has therefore been concluded that participative decision making is likely to lead to job satisfaction and better quality decisions.

Staff cooperation is believed to be an indisputable asset to the school principals while involvement in decision making process by the teachers could ease the principal's mounting problems as many heads would be put together to intellectually solve problems that could have remained unsolved by the principals alone.

Many managers express a belief that involvement of workers in decision making will improve the quality of workers decision making in the organization. In contrast, where teachers lack motivation and involvement in decision making, truancy, excessive excuses, absenteeism and complaints usually emerge leading to general ineffectiveness, inefficiency, low productivity and non-achievement of organizational goals.

I hope many of you here today are familiar with the kind of school climate that encourages involvement in decision making; such a school is characterized by openness and risk taking. This environment encourages teachers to try new ideas and approaches. However, it should be noted that teachers would be less willing to participate in decision making if they perceive that their principals sought their opinions but makes the final decision which is reflective only of his knowledge.

If managers/principals seek participation from their classroom teachers, they must demonstrate that desire for participation. If these statements for participation are verbally expressed but never allow teachers to become intellectually and emotionally involved and their suggestions are never used, the result may be negative. This is buttressed by the fact that when people are part of decision making process, there is greater opportunity for the expression of mind, ideas and for resolving existing disputes and more occasions for agreement.

This suggests that classroom teachers must collectively demand a greater voice for consultation in policy formulation in the training of teachers and more importantly in the development curricula, in infrastructure development and in establishment of criteria for promotion that is based on performance - objectively measured, qualification and experience.

Let us recall that according to your Mission Statement you seek to represent teachers at the highest levels of decision making. I am mindful however that yours is an organization which is predominantly female, reflecting a Caribbean reality where some 80 per cent of teachers (certainly at primary and secondary levels) are female. Given that reality you must be aware that United Nations Department of Public information in 2006 reported on international women's day that

women's participation in high-level economic decision making remains low even in the developed countries, despite educational advances for women in many parts of the world, while women participation in decisions in parliament was said to be 10.99%, (even though this year we have a doubling of that number in our Parliament.)

In the Nigerian study referred to earlier, teachers' suggestions in the schools' management were rated as high as 87%. It is possible to infer that there is openness in the administration of these schools in Ekiti State where teachers were actively involved in making rules and regulations and contributed to school development in no small measure. Also, teachers took an active part in the supervision of students.

Notwithstanding these challenges to be overcome by our women, DAT must take a leadership role in ensuring that teachers are heard since they are the ones who must help develop the required skill sets, work ethics and civic responsibility critical to nation building.

Involvement of teachers in decision making would reveal that they are well empowered and they are seen as resources with knowledge and experience that are tapped. The day to day participation of teachers in the administrative activities enhances teachers experience, removes boredom, frustration and increases workers' commitment, efficiency and job satisfaction.

Let me remind you that according to UNICEF in its 2007 Paper on "A Human Rights Based Approach to Education for All" the organization states "that while the wider educational infrastructure is vital, it is teachers who have the most impact on the day-to-day experience of children in school. A quality education,

in which children take part, is dependent on the commitment, enthusiasm, creativity and skills of teachers. It is their task to translate national policies into practical action in each school and to ensure that they embrace a culture that is inclusive and respectful of every child. In order for this to happenteachers' rights must also be fully acknowledged and respected.”

In conclusion, it is therefore left for you as teachers, through the collective of your union, to continuously seek ways to bring to the attention of Government and other key stakeholders in education, the need to draw on the expertise, qualifications and experiences of teachers in the policy making process. This can be achieved through panel discussions and meetings with parents and Ministry officials where policies can be reviewed and evaluated.

Another approach would be the preparation of papers and recommendations on policy matters for Government's consideration. Teachers can also seek representation on Boards of Governors, Ministerial Committees, National Councils and structured meetings with policy planners, policy analysts and decision makers.

Let me end by congratulating the DAT on your 18th AGM and for your leadership and professionalism in advocating for our teachers.

I thank you.