

**EUA Conference upon the occasion of the 600th
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course between public service and commercialisation:
Prices, Values and Quality"
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Plenary Session I

**THE UNIVERSITY AND GLOBALISATION
Opportunities and challenges to core values; what new values should be embraced
by Professor Rex Nettleford**

The theme of this Conference which seeks to explore core academic values in the context of a changing higher education landscape characterized by globalization, internationalism and massification is timely if not for the entire Planet, certainly for both Europe especially in its present dispensation as the multi-national, multi-cultural European Union and the multinational, multicultural Commonwealth both of which share one thing in common – namely, a creative cultural diversity on which the dynamic and future of both entities shall have to depend for their survival. In this the Commonwealth, I daresay, has been somewhat ahead in facing the challenges of unity in diversity which has given to the world arguably the smoothest transition from colonialism to an amicable relationship between diverse members of a fellowship who with minimal rancour and enmity, know how to agree to disagree agreeably and to use the ties that bind not as shackles but as basis for promoting the contacts (continuing, formal and informal) through the very creative diversity that facilitates change without ignoring the regulative principles which do underlie all change. It is a value that is central to higher education designed to prepare people for peaceful co-existence.

As far as Higher Education is concerned those who tenant the Commonwealth are particularly concerned about a particular dimension of the new globalization (itself a transmuted form of the old imperialism). It is what a West Indian colleague (Tewari) describes as the “liberalization of trade and services” which the WTO now applies to higher education to become effective in 2005 under the umbrella of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). Admittedly, the world economy has been transformed into a “competitive knowledge-based environment in which Trade and Services have assumed new significance in international trade”, but the outcome of a tightened hegemony of one part of the world (a third of it) over the two-thirds “**Other**” is cause for concern expressed by many who lead in that Two Thirds world, a large chunk of which is to be found in the Commonwealth. The old-time promise to old-time imperial powers of a would-be permanent hegemony – economic, social, moral and cultural over -- so-called weaker and lesser races now seem to be renewing itself in the new globalization, forcing on to the knowledge market such hypotheses as the ‘clash of civilisations’ (according to Huntington) or a renewed war of religion between a crusading Christianity parading under the cloak of democracy and Islam

which with fundamentalist zeal proudly invokes its ancestral pedigree. Europe itself has much to resolve in dealing with the dilemma of difference, having recently enticed into a multivariate Union some ten new member-states each with its own language and other specific cultural attributes which must now be accommodated if the Union is to survive.

There was once, lest we forget, a Holy Roman Empire which ended up being neither Holy, Roman nor Empire. There was, indeed, much “**pluribus**” but little “**unum**”. So much, then, for “**e pluribus unum**”, the model motto which was to serve the purposes, albeit symbolically, of multi-cultural nations which followed.

The hierarchical structure of relating is then a challenge for higher education in generating, transmitting, diffusing and giving meaning to disparate bodies of knowledge which must in turn facilitate appropriate designs for social living.

An almost linear perceptual trajectory of such a brand of relating has persisted to this day and now flourishes under the umbrella of what is called “**globalization**”. To some it is “**economic globalization**”, since there is clear enough evidence (however reluctantly acknowledged by an arrogant North) that there can be no monopoly by any one civilization of cultural certitude, intellectual supremacy, moral authority, or social ranking. Yet the new globalization – a new name for old obscenities – while dominant in the realm of economics in its profile, is seeking to hijack to its defence as allies, cultural, moral and certainly social variables in the equation. The communications technology is certainly doing its best to assist in this particular. The print and electronic media of the North Atlantic dominate the news and entertainment fare dished out to the developing world, which provides ready and voracious consumers. If Marie Antoinette haughtily advised the French authorities in the late 18th century to let the poor eat cake when they asked for bread, as we are reminded, the rich nations in the early 21st century ‘shout let them have computers’, when the poor of the world ask for food and respect.

It is the venomous all-pervasiveness of the virus that challenges most in the Two Thirds World (in both the discourse and practical programmes and policies of that struggle to “**be**”) to look seriously at these challenges, cross the boundaries that have been traditional hurdles and enter the dialogue of the new Millennium as full-fledged participants – vocally constructive, actively creative, sharply focused and with a sense of direction rooted in self-interest as well as in the greater good. This takes into consideration one’s *capacity* to make definitions about the world and of self on one’s terms and to build the *capability* to proceed to action on the basis of such definitions; in other words, for the impoverished developing world to become part of the solution rather than remain “**the problem**” which it silently and invisibly is seen to be in the rhetoric that describes the challenges of the millennium in the multilateral fora of the world. This is indeed a major boundary to be crossed and an operation in which universities must be involved as they always have been.

The scientific intellectual inquiry or pursuit which has become the hallmark of the Western university’s remit must go back to the pedigreed responsibility of having this particular value of higher education informed by the arts of the imagination. The wheel has, indeed, come full circle starting with Medieval and Renaissance institutions of higher education which from Padua to Oxbridge, did embrace the indices of culture in shaping foundational mechanisms of learning and knowledge-generation by engagement with issues of language, religion, kinship patterns and the products of the creative imagination expansively and liberally exercised. It is such engagement which led to intellectual curiosity, creative skepticism, a sense of daring on the route to cognition to produce icons from Newton through Rousseau to Marx and Einstein. And all emerged from the specificity of the cultural reality of each to a universality which has benefited all of humankind.

I was challenged, therefore, to address the question posed by the last general conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities as to whether Universities were still guardians of culture in the broadest sense of that concept and if so, did it matter. Well, these questions remain relevant. The communications technology revolution, arguably the most effective driver of present-day globalization, has introduced rival agencies of cultural formation. Internet, cd-rom, radio, television, and visual images from the galactic spheres transform the entire planet into a 'global village' as the saying goes. In parts of the Commonwealth the CNNisation of consciousness is all but complete. The entire world now knows what Iraq looks like and gets nightly news of terrorism in action. Lifestyles not only of the rich and the famous but of the poor and the destitute unfold minutely on the box. And people rush from campus classrooms to dorms or private homes to catch the going American soap operas that keep us in serialized animation.

The University no longer has a monopolistic or near monopolistic hold on our cultural consciousness if ever it had! The WTO, as indicated, is going after higher education in its commodification enthusiasm and is about to liberalise Higher Education as a *service*. The borderless education that distance learning already offers throughout the Commonwealth from Australia and the South Pacific to Canada and the Caribbean is about to be enhanced by the free access to the minds of different people in the name of globalization. Many see this as a threat to the deepening and heightening of specific cultural investigation, analysis and explanation which have long enriched the business of higher learning and the advancement of knowledge into equations of mixed variables giving to universal life and living the textured diversity which the very globalization which threatens homogenisation will need to have the tenants of Planet Earth live together rather than side by side.

Universities have traditionally provided such a laboratory space in the preparation of skills and expertise which have gone beyond the walls and groves of academia to make a difference in a wide range of fields ranging from the arts and humanities through the social sciences to the natural and medical sciences. So, *does the loss of such cultural guardianship matter?* Yes, it does. And it matters even more to those of our more recent universities faced with the task of positioning themselves in a fluid globalised environment which must surely mean firm rooting in soil even while the branches spread into the open but must so do with the strength to withstand the whirlwind of dynamic change.

The vision of a future dedicated to the development of education towards a more resourceful, constructive and creatively dynamic Commonwealth, is regarded as a given. It is easy to assume that anyone endowed with a natural love of learning would equally want to address the question "*learning to what end?*"

The uncertainty of where we go and how we make the journey into the third millennium continues to haunt us, as it does all the political directorates throughout the developing world, despite the expressed commitment of most to education as a priority instrument in development strategy, both as medium and long-term initiatives.

What is obvious is that the education that is required for the Commonwealth's developing countries has to be output and throughput concentrated, in order to supply the resourceful and creative human beings needed to face the harsh realities of existence by developing communities in a world said to be increasingly globalised in the face of the communications technology revolution and the parallel rapid changes in world views and world order.

The universities of the Commonwealth (including my own UWI) are endangered, and are likely to be of little use in the foreseeable future if they ignore the implications of tying education narrowly to a specific job or skill area. For such jobs contribute the “**text**” while University education is concerned no less with the “**context**”. The University dare not yield, then, to the temptation of churning out Management Studies graduates bereft of knowledge of the deeper forces of the society in which they function and this includes the wider world in these days of voluntary migration. For such forces take on ideal, form and purpose precisely at the point where people spend most of their waking lives - the workplace. The training of the engineer must produce more than a technical wonder. He or she ends up, after all, “engineering” situations involving human beings whose emotional quotient may figure more than the IQ expected in any given set of circumstances. This is as true for the civil engineer called upon to construct a bridge on terrain where the soil structure is unsuitable but which must be erected at a certain spot because of the political interests of a particular MP who must deliver to his constituents or lose the next elections. The trained lawyer without an inkling of jurisprudence or of the sociological/political/ cultural realities of his arena of practice (the wider society) is likely to become the jackass many say the law already is. The education of such key skills for development and survival requires more than over-specialised technical training.

We will have to join other forces in the world and look at education in ways that make sense for the foreseeable future. This Conference jointly sponsored by the **EUA** and **ACS** is therefore welcome.

The Commonwealth's own *global* location in the world should give support to the concept which rests education on four pillars as outlined by the Jacques DeLors Commission in a Report to UNESCO - "Resting on four main pillars - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together - the learning process should be designed so as to enable every individual to develop by making the very most of his or her abilities. The concept of education can then be enlarged in time and in the social space to embrace that of learning throughout life" [DeLors Commission Report, 1995.]

The notion of "learning throughout life" is very germane to the topic of the presumed gap that exists between educational development and cultural reality, which is itself a lifelong reality, between education and the community, the cradle of culture, this lifelong reality!

One area of serious concern for all of us is the delivery of the sort of education to our people so that they grab a hold of their destiny, take decisions in their own interest consonant with the demands of a country that may be poor in material wealth but rich in human resources, so that they can take hold of the legacy of that spirit of independence, of self-reliance, individual initiative and the capacity for co-ordinated social action towards mutual growth.

We must never forget that there are a certain number of human values that need to be activated and kept alive in human-scale communities in both Europe and the Commonwealth - values such as the dignity and responsibility of the individual, the freely chosen participation of individuals in communities, equality of opportunity and the search for a common good and cultural certitude, all of which can be realised through the field of education.

In many places the neglect of culture as integral to education persists among many in the public bureaucracy and the teaching profession, despite some of the clearest evidence that many of the people who have had anything of value to say about life and living are those who have exercised their creative imagination to make sense of their countries and regions. This is certainly true of the many Commonwealth countries which have plumbed the depths of their reality through study of their historical experience and existential reality.

The economists and planners notwithstanding, it is the artist as cultural activist who has plumbed the depths of our anguish and our possibilities, producing words and music, movement and myths, syntax and satire. With these have come hard cash or precious foreign exchange to the monetarists and bottom-line advocates who are yet to view them as productive variables in the development equation rather than self-indulgent exercises that cannot contribute to the per capita income, the GNP and the GDP. Where there is a change in perception, such change finds drive and energy in universities of the Commonwealth.

Planet Earth needs the lessons which cultural activists (individual and collective) have taught for the journey into the new millennium. For nothing short of an expansiveness of thought embracing a new vision of a groping rainbow world, a new sense of self and new ways of knowing to underpin new ways of living, can guarantee us safe conduct into that millennium.

The best among many Commonwealth artists, by definition, have no problem with being the creatures of all their ancestors the textured, complex, concentrated, offspring of the willful accidents of modern history. This is true of Commonwealth Caribbean artists like Walcott, Brathwaite and Lamming as it is of Ngugi of Kenya, Gordimer of South Africa, Achebe of Nigeria, Aron dhathi Roy of India – all of whom will have read Shakespeare, Marlowe and Dickens. That this reality endows the educated Commonwealth person with a unique knowledge of the crafting of a new sensibility, not out of some void as in the Book of Genesis but out of the disparate elements of differing cultures, is cause for celebration rather than for self-negation, self-contempt or self doubt.

Despite the myriad influences via the colonial conditioning of yesteryear and cultural penetration in these electronic times, the human being is able to retain a capacity for self-reflection and self-realization. That sense of self must be manifested in our capacity to distinguish through our actions what in us is autonomous from what is determined. Contrary, to still commonly held beliefs, the writing of poetry, the composition of a piece of music, the creation of a play, the painting of pictures and so on are all forms of action and not modes of escape from reality. They are valid routes to cognition which the educational system and higher education ignore at their peril.

For every true artist understands the tension that exists between becoming self and having that self as agency in a wider whole. All art is, after all, mediated by social reality and the self has to reach out as well as in, if it is to appreciate the world we tenant.

The wider implications for art and culture in the development process is therefore far less removed from the *action* of artists than first meets the eye. It is now universally recognized that the importance of culture to development has to do with the enhancement of the social capital, the sustaining of an ambience of civility (and civilization) based on the intellectual and cultural bedrock of any social aggregation whether it be tribe, nation or region. And with the massification of higher education the university must avail itself for ready access to far more people than previously, from diverse classes, races and religions. Perhaps this is one of the best things to come out of globalization.

Walcott, the Nobel Laureate was exposed, as were all of his generation who received an education, to antiquity and that meeting point of cultures in the Mediterranean which gave to humanity not only Greece and Rome (to be hijacked by those who were to feel they had a monopoly on civilization) but also Egypt and the great monotheistic religions, thought systems and value-configurations of the Orient. An understanding of such civilizations is not possible without knowing the cultural context in which they flourished. Universities have long been an effective agency of transmission of this meaning of human life and living for moulding character.

The pluses for character formation are legion. The discipline that underpins the mastery of a craft through which all art finds expression, the demands made on continuous re-creation of effort and application, the challenges encountered on the journey to excellence, habits of realistic self-evaluation, the capacity for dealing with diversity and the dilemma of difference, whether in academic disciplines imaginatively pursued, the performing arts or in the key branches of sports, (themselves for me part of the performing arts), constitute excellent preparation for *learning to be* (which is the stuff of ontology), *learning to know* (the substance of epistemology), and *learning to live together* (the essence of the creative diversity which characterizes human existence, a fact which is about to overtake the entire world). It is of seminal importance that University Education must not only teach people to *make a living*, it must also teach them *how to live*.

Adaptability, flexibility, ready code-switching, innovativeness and a capacity to deal with the complexity of complexity, are all core values of higher learning and attributes of the creative imagination which provide yet another route to cognition other than the Cartesian rationalism we have inherited. For if we *are* because we think, we also exist because we *feel*.

The educational system, of which the university remains a vital hub, with the help of those who are charged with directing it (including governments), should take full responsibility for the promotion of dynamic interaction and co-ordination between cultural, artistic, intellectual creativity and other policy domains such as education itself, working life, urban planning, and industrial and economic development strategies for the benefit of all.

Part and parcel of this is the phenomenon of unity in diversity. One here speaks culturally to a totality of human experience as well as to a totality of meaningful articulations of environmental integrity - the cause, occasion and result of one's culture. The teaching of science would do well to start with this rather than with the computer. It is this bifurcation of knowledge into science and the rest that has served to misguide many among the educated.

It is now conceded in large measure that both capitalism and apocalyptic socialism, two European legacies, in their would-be purest of forms have been basically a-cultural in their approach to development. Neither has had a place for the specificities of experience culturally determined over time and among particular sets of people. Development, it was felt, had to be scientifically determined and pursued universally according to immutable laws, whether of the market or on the basis of unrelieved class conflict.

Any invocation of cultural particularities and differences has been considered reactionary or revisionist. And although popular cultural expressions have been tolerated, they have been obliged to appear, in both dispensations, as an ornamental folkloric element only. Many who have abandoned this position have drifted indiscriminately towards another panacea - the culture of technology. But the task of higher education has to be to ensure that the source of technology - science - finds a central place in the process without prejudice to the Humanities.

Perhaps it is culture that really counts at this time in the important pursuit of education defined on traditional lines but adaptable to the changed and changing circumstances of the contemporary world. I see governments, teachers, academicians and the institutions of learning in whose name they labour as major contributors to, and principal facilitators of the

cultivation of the kingdom of the mind with rank shoots of creativity sprouting from the exercise of both intellect and imagination, and these in turn working in tandem to produce a self-reliant, self-respecting, tolerant, enterprising and productive community of souls on all of Planet Earth.
