Professor Kenneth Julien spent 35 years of his life as a teacher and he continues to hold the point of view that it is the most important thing that anyone can do to help shape the minds of young people. He maintains that whatever else he has done, whatever he has contributed, if he can be remembered as a Teacher that would be the greatest satisfaction for him. He thinks that if there is genuine interest in the teaching profession then for him the interest shown by the stakeholders is a welcome sign.

Dr. Marva Ribeiro, Head of International Cooperation Initiatives in the Ministry of Education interviewed Professor Julien for this Special Report on Education. She discussed with him the work of the Cabinet Appointed Committee that was set up to look into teacher education reform in Trinidad and Tobago.

Q. Professor Kenneth Julien, as Chairman of the Cabinet-appointed Committee that has been working on teacher education issues in Trinidad and Tobago can you summarise for our readers the remit of the Committee?

A. When I agreed to accept this responsibility as Chairman of this Committee the first thought that occurred to me was “Why is this taking so long to happen?” The teaching profession should have been given the same recognition, focus and attention as the engineers, lawyers and doctors, etc. Those are well-established professions in that they have well established schools and faculties at the University with full degree programmes (in Trinidad and Tobago) and when you look at the training of teachers you cannot help but get the feeling that when it comes to raising teaching to the professional level it is low on the totem pole.

As far as the remit is concerned while I think there must be some discussions at the level of the Government the remit starts off with the assumption that something has to be done and it is specific that the committee was asked to look at the options - specifically with respect to the transfer of the Valsayn and Corinth Teachers’ Training Colleges from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, either as part of the University of Trinidad and Tobago or the Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies of which option is more feasible and yields the greater benefit in the education system.

That was our remit and we were asked to make recommendations with respect to this particular term of reference. So what that is saying clearly is that the Government has taken a decision that something has to be done about raising the level of the teaching profession, and the mere fact that the decision is saying that whereas these two-year teachers training colleges have traditionally focused on the training of primary school teachers we understood that remit to say that there is need to raise the level of the profession, raise the level of the teachers in that profession and the opportunity to do that must be at the level of the university and therefore to do that if UTT were not in existence it would be simply to, I presume, begin negotiations with UWI. The fact that we are here and we are the University of Trinidad and Tobago and our mandate is to look after the specific needs of Trinidad and Tobago as distinct from the regional needs of the UWI – so there is no conflict there – then there is another option - the specific point is that a decision has been taken to provide university type training for the first time as it were for what is now regarded as the colleges that focus on teaching at the primary level.
The other part of our remit is to develop themes for affecting the transfer of both teacher training colleges to the preferable tertiary level at either UWI or UTT. If the Government accepts the proposed recommendations we are to develop an implementation plan as well as strategies to provide the transfer or the change into the structure of what we propose. That in essence is our remit.

Q. **What are some of the issues and concerns raised during the committee meetings?**

A. Several issues emerged…and they are not new issues. I was really taken aback and must confess that a tremendous amount of work has gone on in this business of teacher training in the country. Voluminous reports, documentation and working papers were made available to us. There were policy frameworks for transforming teacher education in T&T; a Teacher Professional Development Unit was established. To some extent our work was easy; what we had to do was pull all of that work together and pull out of that, consensus, and on the basis of that consensus this is how we feel we should move forward. We saw our job as taking the whole step forward. As regards the issues, the issues that I am sure the teachers and other stakeholders have raised and will continue to raise…and there is nothing wrong with that, it contributes to a healthy debate…we identified at least twenty major issues and I will list some of these for you.

Q. **First, what are some of the most effective ways to raise the profile of the teaching profession?”**

A. That’s very important because my own feeling which I reiterate is that unless you do something about teacher training in the modern world …and in the modern Trinidad and Tobago…we will not move ahead quickly. Our resources are not necessarily oil and gas but our human resource. I have a firm belief, almost an obsession that we have to mobilize what I call our BP that is our Brain Power if we are to move forward and the only way we can do that is by giving a lot of attention to the teaching profession. If we do that it means that teaching itself becomes better, more efficient and therefore you have better students and better people – that’s where it all begins. This may be late in coming; it is part of our development process. Those of us who are around my age do not worry too much about that because the teachers of my era were all considered as Gods, there were small classes and the teachers each knew your name and we swore by our teachers. Nowadays that does not happen and with the larger classrooms, diverse students all from several cultures the teacher now has to be given tools to deal not only with teaching but the mix and the cultural norms in our society.

The next question greatly debated was **“what model do you use?”** If you look at the world of teaching today you will find that there exists between five and eight models of how to go about training a teacher. That is a continuing exercise…you can give the teacher a degree, a four year programme of training, two years at a teacher training college, one year of professional training and so on. Our Committee included people knowledgeable about structuring teacher training programmes but we nevertheless did invite a few key people and organizations from outside the country, from Canada in particular, to tell us what they had done.
The next question was the regulating model - “How do you certify a teacher?” Again I come back to the other professions. You just cannot turn up here and practice medicine, you cannot practice engineering – there is a professional association of engineers, a medical association and you just cannot turn up in the courts and practice law. Teaching, well you can just turn up and say “here I am I am ready to teach wherever and whatever.” Clearly, that has to change if we are to raise the level of the profession. That’s another issue that has to change…the need for regulating and certifying of teachers. This must have teeth in the law. You cannot practice architecture, engineering, law or medicine if you do not go through a process but yet you can just come up off the streets with four or five Ordinary Level subjects and say you are ready to be a teacher. In the private school system you do not even need to have that…you just say you are an available body. And, having done that however you have to accept the fact that there is a large number of teachers out there who did not have the opportunity to qualify and gain certification. We need to look at the system and say what we can do to help persons to get up to the required level so these are among the issues that came up. And then we came to the very basic point, “How do we treat the basic requirements of entry into the teacher training colleges?” That jumps the question because if the teachers colleges are to be transformed into a Unit of the university then that’s a whole new ballgame.

Q. “Will a degree programme do it?”
A. Again you come back to the model. Does the mere fact that you went to a university make you a better teacher? Clearly, the answer is yes provided the programme is made up to ensure that you are a good teacher. What of pre-service teacher preparation at the primary level? Improved teacher preparation at all levels of the system. These are some of the questions (we discussed). One of the fundamental questions that we had related to whether there is the need to discriminate so far as the teacher education is concerned, between those being prepared for early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education? These were issues that we spent much time discussing.

Another issue that engaged our discussions was “What do we do to attract really outstanding people who have a genuine interest in teaching?” It comes right back to the other professions. There is no lack of highly qualified men and women in Trinidad and Tobago who are queuing up to do medicine and engineering, even law. Part of the rationale of the UTT is to help treat with those young men and women who are well qualified but cannot get into UWI to do engineering or follow a course in technology or do an engineering technicians’ diploma, or indeed follow a particular course in the sciences at any level – Bachelor, Master or PhD level. This is not merely the report of the Committee but a continuing issue and TTUTA – or the teachers themselves - have to play a significant role in this exercise to begin to attract people to the teaching profession. This is by far the most important profession so far as the development of the country is concerned and as a result we are looking for the finest minds. We need to have some of the finest minds to think less in terms of medicine, engineering and law and more in terms of teaching. That’s easier said than done because it implies “what are the incentives?” Clearly the incentives must be tied to that…I can go on…there are several issues. We had a very large Committee, very knowledgeable people and the work that has been forwarded to the government is not very much my work but the work of some really excellent people who certainly have tremendous knowledge and experience in teaching. I was a teacher myself but I have a lot of sympathy with what they are trying to do. That in essence, are a few of the issues
raised and they were discussed with a great a deal of passion but also with a great deal of information and knowledge.

Q. So you made a recommendation to the Ministry?

We felt that arising out of our discussions that there are some basic issues on which we need to get firm decisions and guidance from the government before we move towards implementation because of the options that surfaced. We had a lot of input and firm recommendations and voluminous materials from TTUTA, the principals of the teacher training colleges and statistical information generated by the Ministry of Education. TTUTA, for example, had a view that perhaps what was needed was more resources for the UWI. They supported the idea of a Bachelors’ degree. The question now is “what is the best way to get that done?” They had concerns about union negotiations, the surplus of teachers at the primary level and a number of smaller issues.

We have now gone to the Ministry of Education with some firm decisions - one is that the teaching profession should adopt the practice of all other professions... that is a very fundamental thing and if it cannot be done we are back to square one. What does that mean? It means that your educational level must be at least at the Bachelors’ level, possibly at the Masters’. There is now a trend – certainly in engineering – that even to get formal international recognition and accreditation you have to go up to the Masters’ Level. That’s our first recommendation. We are saying the Bachelor’s degree and it is quite possible depending on the length of the programme, the induction and several other things that it may be at the Masters’ level.

Secondly, there must be a period of Induction – that’s the word that is used. The medical people call it Internship; the engineers call it Graduate Apprenticeship. The idea is that you need to spend periods – perhaps a year – under some kind of supervision or mentoring before you get the final blessings so that you can go out and practice your profession. We are saying a minimum of one year.

The other recommendation, and a very fundamental one, is that there really ought not to be any distinction between a teacher that ends up teaching early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary or technical vocational levels. In other words the general professional requirements must be the same so when someone leaves this programme they can say I am trained to be a teacher; but I have a special interest in secondary school teaching, teaching the differently-abled, early childhood etc. Right now we feel that people are pitching for holes.

Q. Is your committee focusing on the training of ECCE and primary school teachers only?

A. We are not focusing on any........ there is a special problem and we are saying that the colleges that cater for the primary school teachers have to be treated within that total picture. The programme we are proposing, whether it be done at UWI or UTT, must cater for a four year programme for teacher training and the idea now – which I will come to in a moment – implies that the teacher training colleges really have to be upgraded to a four-year programme. If we get a positive decision on that then the implementation is the other issue we have to face. But even if we upgrade them (the colleges) they will not necessarily be training just primary school teachers but they will offer training for teachers in early childhood education, primary school
education; somebody who wants to opt for a secondary training programme... whatever the motivation, there is no reason why that person ought not to be admitted into a teacher training college.

The other recommendation is that you must have a Teacher Certification Board which will treat, as I have explained, that looks at your educational qualification, induction period and certifies that you can now teach. That Board will be independent of the Ministry of Education and independent of the teachers themselves. There are models throughout the world that show how this is done. Engineers and the Medical practitioners have their professional Boards that certify.

The next recommendation is that both teachers colleges be integrated into a university system. At this point we have made some recommendations about how this can be done and there is no conflict between UTT and UWI which now has on-going programmes at the part time level for teachers at the primary and secondary levels. Prospective teachers can enter UWI for special programmes. We are saying that that should be enhanced and made an integral part of teacher training.

So far as UTT is concerned we are saying that here is a new tertiary level institution that has, as it were, a clean page so far as teacher training is concerned and therefore we can do, as it were, what we wish with it. Which could be nothing - nobody will be offended - or you can then say we can really do something different using the teacher training colleges without interfering or prejudicing the work that is going on at UWI and coming up with a new four year programme that surrounds the two campuses that we have. Having done that however, lets ensure that there is no conflict...what you can then do is use the credit system which UWI now has, and which UTT will have, and provide for seamless movement both ways. So for example, as it happens in the USA system, one may spend two years and get 50 credits at UWI in becoming a teacher and one may wish to specialize, or because of where one lives, or whatever the reason, complete the remaining 50 credits to get a Bachelor or Masters’ degree at UTT and one can take credits across and vice versa. So that is the thinking that came out of our committee.

There might be two different approaches to teacher training which many countries have. One can be traditional as in the UW I system and the other can be a brand new approach to teacher training that may or may not attract everyone and...Why not? You then have two options and potential teachers have the option of moving into either of two systems, and in fact, along the way changing their minds.

Back to the credit system! The other recommendation concerns ‘how do we go about the professional certification? What kind of (certification) body needs to be put in place? One needs to be very careful about how that body is structured and certainly there is need for consultations with the teachers themselves, their trade unions to ensure that in particular that we do not leave anybody out. In other words, there is a large body of teachers out there who are doing excellent work at the primary and secondary level. One does not want to create a situation where they will wake up one morning and find out that they are no longer certified to teach. Having said that, one may wish to see special training programmes to bring some of these teachers back into the system, by giving them the tools that are needed without interfering
with their careers. Of course, the other thing we need to do is have career paths for new entrants and graduates to the teacher colleges. What all of this is saying is that before we go forward the Government has to indicate whether these basic recommendations are acceptable. If they are acceptable then the work begins about how you put them in place. And in this connection one of the very firm recommendations is that the key stakeholders will have to be consulted...there will be need for discussions and consensus on how we move forward. The plan is that immediately after these discussions that there should be a Symposium so that we may all benefit from the views and experiences of people other than those on this Committee.

*Look for Part Two in our January issue.*