



Notes for High Commissioner Stephen Hallihan on the opening of the University of the West Indies Geology Museum Interactive Learning Centre, UWI, March 11, 2010

I am very happy to be here this morning to open the Interactive Learning Centre in the Geology Museum. This centre represents a small beginning of an expansive vision. I really want to commend the Curator for this vision of what this museum can be, and for acting upon that vision to bring this component to the reality we see here today.

The Canada Fund is very pleased to be associated with this centre. It is very much the type of project that we love supporting – it is an imaginative and innovative project, which will achieve an impact far beyond its cost.

We have all seen the stories in the media that there has been a steady decline in students who are interested in the science subjects, and this interactive centre offers a very real opportunity to influence the choices that students make – at the primary, secondary, and even the tertiary level. The museum, and particularly a centre such as this one, plays a critical role in science education and must be acknowledged as a place for ‘doing’ science. A hands-on museum experience becomes an invaluable teaching and learning tool and an important resource centre for both students and teachers.

Theoretical and empirical research have argued that there is a direct connection between museum visits and classroom work – the museum visit, therefore, goes far beyond a mere field visit, to become a strengthening agent in the learning process. It would be important for teachers to recognise this and situate the museum visit as the centre of a process that has both before and after components, explicitly designed to consolidate the new knowledge.

Interactive museums designed around young children are fun and the idea that learning can be fun is now mainstreamed into education systems the world over. This acceptance of ‘play’ has brought about new innovations in learning, drawing on the latest computer technologies, such as the ‘SMART-BOARD’, which enhance children’s awareness, knowledge and generally, the use of computers themselves – essential foundations for today’s world.

This approach can open up new ways to introduce students to traditional subjects. By using materials that really engage the students, and capture their

attention, it can help them develop a positive disposition to the hard work of learning. Through this learning process, the children can establish a solid foundation on which to move forward in their academic careers, and in fact, their whole lives.

In closing, I want to go back briefly to the idea of a Canada Fund project as being 'big beyond its size', as we see this centre as an important UWI outreach step that will build and strengthen a network of relationships between the primary and secondary schools across the island that promotes the notion that 'Science' is creative, accessible and fun!

We congratulate the Department of Geography and Geology, and Dr. James-Williamson for this fine initiative, and wish you great success as you move forward in the further development of the concept.

Thank You.