

Present Day Education

21st February 2009

Education in Bermuda's private schools shows the need for technical education to be an option, one of our private schools very recently held its science fair. A school where practical applications are not articulated, facilities for practical innovation is not available, and an outlet for the practical experimentation is not the norm.

It was a display of incredible outpouring of "we want more", the intelligence levels, thirst for understanding and experimenting was a credit to the students and their "wanting to know". Some were better than others but the standard was far beyond the actual years of the students. More incredible was the research and understanding of their chosen field was truly amazing.

If these talents were developed, if the innovation was encouraged, this very small Island would be a leader in so many fields. These students will take an international baccalaureate, go on to college and into the world of high finance or business yet a few of them will be uncomfortable in that role, they have a yearning for "making things", "making things work", "designing and developing things". What a waste of talent because they were never subjected to the mysteries of technical innovation.

It must be pointed out that the private schools are not doing an injustice to education In fact they are doing a great job of educating but there are a few students uncomfortable with this pipeline narrow field of academic education. There are a lot more exciting facets to education where innovation is the norm, not just once a year slog to get the best marks, where the research tends to be shallow because of time constraints and the full thrust of the enjoyment of learning is cut-off.

In a school where the practical mathematics, innovation, research and history can be learnt, and where the theories of physics and chemistry can be "real" live and used in daily lives. True learning and depth of knowledge are key. An example, a student did a very good project on truss bridges, the depth of knowledge was shallow because of time restraints and other activities, yet the myriad of research into Isambard Kingdom Brunel would have brought this subject to life. Real life examples of a pioneer in the field, what he learnt, materials he used and where he sourced them and how things were done when technology to punch info into a computer can bring a finished product out at the other end did not exist. He had to literally design and build the factory to produce his creations.

The mathematics of "stress and strain" would be required, bending moments are a must and strength of materials essential.

There were projects in chemistry and biology, subjects in which interest has been awakened by being taught at the school. There were projects on acid rain, bacteria and caffeine but the best projects were those on engineering technology. Enquiring minds researched blade length, shape and size for wind generators; questions that students asked themselves how and why these things work. Bridges, their strength and configurations, Thermal qualities of

materials, solar panels and their place, position and orientation and one excellent project on biodiesel. These are the students that would benefit by learning the technical side of life and how it fits into our daily lives. Yet each and every student, except one did not know what they wanted to be once leaving school. The one exception wanted to be an engineer.

The point in all this is that we have a small Island depleted of technical expertise and little potential in encouraging graduating students because we are not exposing them to real life technology.

The projects on biology and chemistry were the result of exposure to the subjects. It maybe, that the more technical undertakings were a result of parental expertise and help. Topical subjects like wind power and biodiesel were possibly the result of a documentary or personal interest. Whatever the motivation the more technical subjects were, in my opinion, far better researched, understood and presented.

What can be done to accelerate the implementation of a technical school in Bermuda? Keep looking and hounding those who are already busy but would be better making a difference to Bermuda; ensuring our most innovative minds are not left to stagnate, making sure we act sooner rather than later, and spreading the news that help from everyone and anyone is help in the right direction.

Most of all we must portray the fact that we care what happens to the Island. We need the best minds to engineer our leisure as well as our residential space in a fashion that is beneficial to Bermudians and the future of Bermuda.

The pace of life on this tiny Island is too fast. Things are happening without planning, forethought and most of all, the outcome in the future. Sustainable development has proven to be a farce. The environment is polluted, greed is uncontrolled and it appears that to become a politician is a right of passage and a method of making a quick buck, without thought for the people or future of the Island.

Education is the key and technical education is the answer to a lot of our problems. All we need to do is act on educating our youth for the future. The time for talk is over; we must act and act as one. (One people, One voice and One result).

C.V. Palmer