

Stay Focused

5th December 2008

There will be days when we will be challenged. There will be days when it appears that others will unhinge your plan and ruin the dreams you have for the future of Bermuda and their youth, but do not despair.

The Bermuda public high school system was given a gift which cost in the region of several million dollars that was the BTEC computer science programme. All the teachers were trained highly to teach it, and it went exceedingly well, Stanford University one of the World class Universities designed and delivered the course for Bermuda public schools. It was the only accredited computer science programme available for schools at the time. Professors attended Bermuda to follow up and ascertain the success or failure and made the necessary changes; fine tuned the programme and continued the upgrading as technology became more complex.

I studied this programme and wrote my masters' thesis on the programme from inception to implementation, a very professional timely programme, no expense spared, at times there were qualified graduates full time monitoring and aiding the teachers all paid for, expense to the Ministry of Education zero.

One recommendation made in that thesis was to ensure all teachers were trained and re-trained, as natural attrition dwindled the numbers new qualified teachers should be retrained to teach this course it was not a basic course but "a state of the art" programme. It brought the public schools into the forefront when it came to computer technology, students enjoyed the course and thrived on them.

Little by little teachers either left or were promoted away from teaching the course, there was no re-training, there was no updating, and there was less support for teachers, there was no effective representative in the ministry, and slowly the emphasis on keeping this on the "cutting edge" was allowed to drift.

Out of ten trained teachers it is thought there is only one still teaching the subject and that person was away for four years.

BTEC has disbanded, and the ministry and government have allowed the programme to gradually diminish until now BTEC has no news, no events and no newsletters. What does that tell us about the progress of the curriculum the standard of the teachers, and in fact the worth of the "cutting edge" programme? The last newsletter was in March 2005¹ (please read it).

So why do I say do not despair? The BTEC computer science programme was a "jewel" in the public education system but it is gradually sliding into mediocrity.

We need a programme and people that care about our youth and where they are going, we need our youth to excel in technical subjects to maintain and build Bermuda's future. It will not happen without enabling them to obtain the tools and a quality education; someone has to know what is required and how to implement it.

It is the implementation, expertise of those implementing and of having the knowledge to know what to do to produce first class technicians that will count. Too many times have we seen money thrown at

¹ <http://www.btec.bm/docs/March%202005%20-%20layout2.doc>

problems in education only to see the monies wasted. The programme used in the example above was handed over to the Ministry of Education by BTEC and received continuous support from BTEC/Stanford University and others until the last newsletter. Check out their website²

If you read from the “Committee on the rights of the child” this year (3) number 22 you will see;

22. “The BTEC project, provides a computer science and technology curriculum for students in the public school system.”

Is the answer in a report out about the “Committee on the rights of the child” Sept 15th – Oct 3rd 2008³

It appears from their well kept website up until *March 2005* that BTEC have ceased to operate, the programme for the public schools, so who is updating the programme, who is updating the teachers?

I hope I am making my point with all this rhetoric about a programme which was “World Class” and now who knows?

So no matter what happens and who does what, it is the quality and standards which are sustainable that will enable our youth to succeed. Putting up the money to implement a programme is easy, especially when it is public money, sustaining a quality programme over time, supplying the expertise to remain current, and supplying to industry the quality of graduate required is another matter.

We need to stick to the task, the plan and the education of the people, so that they know what we are trying to do and how. We need to gain support of the public by informing them that this is being done for the youth, the country and the future of the quality of life in Bermuda. In building a firm foundation of knowledge about this programme only, will we be enabled to gain the support of those in society that can help to make this school happen.

We are getting a lot of people telling us what a great idea this is, telling us “good luck” as if we alone will make this happen, that is not the case and if it is worth doing it will involve a lot of people working hard to gain the support and raising the funds. YES WE CAN raise the funds, YES WE CAN make this school a reality, it is only a matter of time.

If you are reading this and wish to become a “worker” for a good cause, for the future of our youth, e-mail us and we will be delighted to welcome you aboard this incredible journey.

Colin

² <http://www.btec.bm/news.html>

³ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.GBR.Q.4.Add.2.doc>