

Why does Bermuda Need Technical Education?

7th September 2008

Since the closure of “Tech” in 1972, we have had few tradespersons trained in groups or classes on homegrown soil where the “networking” of fellow students interact in a way individual’s cannot.

This is an important point when considering where to train your students, instead we have encouraged gangs, because people need to belong and be part of a meaningful group of some kind.

In the past there were plumbers, electricians and mechanics, all proud of their trade. They were part of a bigger team in which they had earned the right to belong and Bermuda was the beneficiary.

To belong to a gang one must undergo some form of initiation, normally a daring attack, theft or senseless act against society, to prove they have the nerve to become a “brother”. The new initiate wants to belong so he throws caution to the wind whether it is right or wrong.

In the days of trade training they already belonged to an honourable team and there was no longing or need to want to belong to something else.

Technical Education creates a community of individuals that have been taught a discipline and creativity that is satisfying. When a job has been finished well the team, that put it together, are proud of their accomplishment.

Presently few Bermudians have that satisfaction; the guest workers have replaced them as the requirement for tradespersons is still in demand to build and maintain our infrastructure. Our “infrastructure” is the installation of electrical systems, the maze of pipes used for plumbing, the cables installed for our computer networks, the cables stretching across our countryside to provide us with cable television, the system of our roads and bridges, and our system of water and power distribution. Collectively the examples above, and there are more, are considered the infrastructure of our Island which was once installed and maintained entirely by Bermudians. This is no longer the case. The infrastructure of our hotels and hospital, our office buildings and homes all need installation and maintenance. Where are our trained Bermudians?

We keep hearing that we cannot use all those trained people. That is untrue! As we train our “sons of the soil” and they graduate to higher levels of expertise, they will require trainees to fill their positions. Some will reach the level and move into teaching. It is not the case that we need “50” plumbers we may need 50 plumbers, but we also need someone to teach them.

We need a superintendent that can organize the plumbers and someone to order the materials, someone to study drawings and make a list of materials, someone to study new construction or renovation and put in bids for the new work and someone to manage the

company of plumbers; each of those jobs requires expertise in plumbing, and have you tried to get a plumber in a hurry lately??

It is a matter of knowing a lot more than just how many plumbers we need, the expertise and experience varies to the number of years and the training that has been supplied. A master plumber can lay-out and manage a large hotel renovation whereas a “plumber” could not. The same applies to the electrical and mechanical trades; we could probably train most of our males in Bermuda and have them in upward mobility in the jobs, satisfied and earning better wages. It is the same amount of money going out when one considers importing guest workers, the cost involved in the housing subsidies, and the continual work permit debacle, and the benefits of training our own would be all this money stays right here in Bermuda.

Currently we train our plumbers with a two year certificate course which is totally inadequate for the needs of Bermuda and her population.

Our hospital, hotels, schools, gas company, electric supply company, airport, bus garage, marine and ports, dockyard infrastructure, office buildings, and domestic dwellings require highly trained technicians. Where are they being trained?

The examples given are simplified to illustrate the point. In reality the seriousness of our situation will shortly become very public; the lack of technical expertise in political circles is unreal. There is the problem, you don’t know what you don’t know until you know what you don’t know!!!

Our students in high school especially males are failing, why are they failing? In the past twelve years my research shows me that we are doing things all wrong, we are not turning our students “ON” to learning and careers we have turned them “OFF”, by the time students reach high school they are completely turned off to the “pipeline” education we are trying push them through, no innovation, no practical stimuli, and the wrong approach. Boys need males to be their role models and there are few males in teaching that are role models in Bermuda.

Discipline has completely failed and could be restored, and the written word is mightier than the sword. So it does not need to be capital punishment although for some infractions it is swift and forgotten, expulsion is also not a real option although necessary at times. It is better for students to see the benefits of changing their behaviour than to continue behavioural patterns that inevitably destroy our society. This means parents and industry and teachers must work “in sync” to achieve the end result that is desired.

It takes a village to raise a child!!!

So what should we do? The ideas that have worked in a lot of other places and one which we would like to try is one of looking where we want to be at the end of high school

What do we want our students to know at the end of high school?

Where do we want our students to be at the end of high school?

The “we” means industry, parents, students and teachers in fact Bermuda.

What is the objective of high school?

We believe it is:

To provide a comprehensive education that prepares students to compete in the workplace with the basic tools to build a successful career in a subject they have chosen and about which they have the basic knowledge required to progress in that field and become all that they can be.

In this case it is to provide a comprehensive education that prepares students with the basic principles of mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering.

To prepare students for their future after high school, and give them the choice of trade or college.

To furnish every student with a career path in their chosen field, an international qualification and a choice of practical or theoretical career.

We have asked industry how they would like students to be prepared, and if they would assist in the process, and all questioned have a positive answer, so why are we waiting? We presently gathering momentum, gaining ally's and getting the message out there, but the prevention is a building independent and in trust for future generations of Bermudians, if we rent a building it can be closed if we are allocated a government building history could repeat itself, so to ensure that it is not a one man show or the building cannot be lost it must be independent and self financing.

So why do we need technical education for our students?

Because without it Bermuda will not be able to maintain the standard of living that they have achieved and cherish

Because we don't want to build any more jails on this Island

Because our students are capable of achieving the desired result with our help and guidance.

Because we can no longer continue to lose generation after generation of students to crime and gangs

Because their behaviour is their way of crying out for help

C. V. Palmer I.Eng.MIET.CHM.FMA.MBIFM.MBA