

Article

By Dennis F. Tupman

## HI-TECH CEO'S SAY VALUE OF LIBERAL ARTS INCREASING

As we know there is almost a societal hysteria at the moment about the necessity to have our children versed in all aspects of the computer in order to be with it in the job market.

I am not suggesting that using and understanding hi-tech and computers are not important. I am, however, calling for a more balanced approach to implementation of technical studies than what I perceive is happening in many instances. Research has shown a lot of what we are doing in computer studies, especially at the lower grades, is not useful, particularly when it is done at the expense of more hands on activity such as the arts.

As a result of this preoccupation with things hi-tech, the liberal arts, the fine arts, and the humanities – and even the sciences (not to mention Technical and Domestic Studies) - have taken a hit in many of our programs and districts. Capital funding and even use of school discretionary staffing time have been directed in increasingly large measure toward hi-tech learning outcomes. Ministries of Ed have often called the shots on this focus. For over a decade now many school board capital budgets have been almost exclusively dedicated to purchase of the latest model of computer and related software. And we know of the rapid obsolescence of these items.

In all this hype there seems a need for curricular balance. Help is on the way....

There was released recently a statement (April, 2000) from a think tank involving 30 top Canadian hi tech CEO's. They were calling for a more balanced approach in schools and universities that enhance the role of the liberal arts, the arts, and humanities and even the pure sciences, as well as dealing with tech studies. This is the kind of education and training these CEO's want in their prospective employees, it is reported in this statement.

The cry for balance in education from this high-tech interest group bears reprinting. They are not alone. As early as 1997, Neil Postman, eminent media commentator and critic, also rang alarm bells about the degree to which we have marginalized the arts, the liberal arts and humanities, and even the sciences in our attempt to cope with the high-tech juggernaut. At a recent media conference, Postman said, "I thought that television would be the last great technology that people would go into with their eyes closed. Now you have the computer."

Clifford Stoll, a Silicon Valley insider, states in his book called "Silicon Snake Oil", that in the high tech industry there is a need for creativity, inferential and divergent thinking, and emotional intelligence, and other personal qualities, all of which are cultivated in the arts.

So we as arts educators are receiving a lot of affirmation from many quarters. It is incumbent, however, that we view critically what we are doing, that we are reflecting on our practice and connecting with the mainstream of education. The eminent Canadian educational leaders, Michael Fullan and David Hargreaves, urge us to reflect on ourselves and our practice.

One caution. Let us make sure that our arts courses focus on the essentials – the basics – of the respective art and not on the trivial. Courses that are more entertaining than rigorous, more immediately gratifying than providing sequenced instruction in the essentials of the respective art, will ultimately shortchange our kids.

To receive this statement directly from these CEO's click on this web site:

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Dennis F. Tupman, April 24, 2000 [dtupman@bcinternet.net](mailto:dtupman@bcinternet.net). I would appreciate hearing from you.