

## High School Shop class

While visiting my English nephew's high school in small town Tring, north of London, I saw shop classes full of hand-tools, modern power-tools, low and hi-tech milling machines, plastics molders and computerized mini-lathes. Meanwhile here in BC although there are little gems of shop class scattered around the province, their funds are being eroded and siphoned away as if it's that last thing our kids need to learn.

Since the mid-1980s, education journals touted preparing kids for the computerized high tech world as we headed further away from the industrial society. We shifted funding towards computer literacy and away from shop classes. We created a generation of kids with heads full of facts for SAT regurgitation, who can't hammer a nail or do anything useful with their hands away from the computer keyboard.

We've come to rely heavily on the hand-skills of the Asians. The problem with this is that the Asians are in Asia and of no use to us when our Transit buses need fixing, our porch deck needs replacing, our bathroom plumbing is due for an overhaul or the washing machine starts making that funny squeaking noise.

We've lost touch with our stuff. What ordinary people- your grandfolks once made, we now buy; what they once fixed we have repaired, or more commonly just replace. When it comes to hand skills - we've become insanely stupider. Until recently we expected appliances and power tools to come with a blown-up parts diagram and schematics but now they arrive with esoteric fasteners for a tool we don't even own as if we dare not even think of exploring a possible simple repair.\* "And did you want the extended warranty with that?" is a huge money maker for Future type shops. Thankfully for the few remaining handy-folk, repair manuals are usually available on-line somewhere.

We've forgotten that productive labour is the foundation of all prosperity and encourage our kids to go for the moneyed, Wall street - meta-work, trafficking in surplus dollars skimmed from other people's actual hard work. With the collapse of Wall Street, Bay Street, and London's Square Mile - knowledge workers will become permanently redundant and it becomes mandatory to teach more students to learn to make a useful living with their hands.

Technical school enrollment today includes a fast growing population of four-year knowledge degree

students who are returning to learn marketable trade skills. Here in B.C. for the most part BCIT and certified community college grads find jobs while more and more University grads are unemployed. My own son spent time in engineering at U-Vic before switching to BCIT & VVI to become Red-Seal certified as a fire-protection (sprinkler) system technician entailing- basic blue print reading, pipe fitting, electricals, and many other hand-skills as well as a good whack of brain work. My daughter's partner, a top academic student, chose BCIT to become a top-notch Coast Mountain mechanic.

There is nothing wrong with an adequate number of young people studying to be a neurosurgeon, engineer, teacher, concert pianist or computer programmer if that is their true interest, bent, and talent BUT there is great harm in not encouraging our kids to learn hand skills and enter the skilled labor trade professions.

### A Case in Point

I am very proud that one of my own students, Bree Weir, chose to teach Shop over any of the many other career choices she would have excelled at. Bree was brilliantly creative in every area of computers from desktop publishing and website development to animation. She was our Yearbook editor and school website steward. Bree played most sports and mentored classmates in every area of study. She was also a star tech-ed student at Citadel Middle School run by the great Ian Wakeling. Bree would have reached the top of any profession she chose- from law to surgery, from mechanics to engineering but she chose BCIT and UBC Education in her father's footsteps, Burnaby South shop teacher Glyn, to assure us there will be someone in future to repair our stuff.

I strongly encourage more parents to see the light, We'll always need electricians, plumbers and house framers, welders, mechanics and pipe-fitters. How many office worker, paper pushers will we need now that the phony Wall Street world is gone?

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\*Some concepts gleaned from *Shop class as Soulcraft* - Matthew B. Crawford, 2009 which I highly recommend as mandatory reading for the BC Minister of Education and all School Trustees.