

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens.

Improving the linkages between education and workforce development is our goal.

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Education Works!

The Chicken & the Egg:

What role should K-12 education play in preparing students for the world of work?

by Tom Broussard

Apparently, there are at least two (somewhat opposing) camps when it comes to this subject. To oversimplify, one group believes in education as a tool for citizenship. The other thinks that the goal of education should be to help prepare students for the world of work.

These are hardly mutually exclusive goals. One group needn't try to convert the other. But something seems to keep folks from even talking about it.

There is discussion ongoing in the schools about the evolving nature of education and some progress is being made. But we must pick up the pace.

But must we pick sides?

This debate is not going to be resolved anytime soon. And

while it continues, people still go to work poorly qualified to do their job, keep their job or find a new job when the old one disappears. People need work *and* they need to think. Those aren't incompatible goals!

One loses, we all lose.

The rules are changing constantly. Without having the new rules explained, those losing



their jobs fall farther and farther behind. That not only hurts the individual but with such a severely constrained population, it actually hurts

the Maine economy as well.

Critical Mass

Setting aside the educational debate for one moment, let's look at one particularly unique attribute of Public schools. The K-12 Public school system is the last time we have such large numbers of people together in a learning environment. Once classes graduate, they scatter everywhere. Public school could be the last chance to explain these new and critical rules.

The rules of globalization

One of the first things to learn is that there are no rules! Well, that's not exactly true. There are actually lots of rules but if you don't learn the basic ones, the game (of life) has a way of preventing you from learning any of the others. And of course, (and this is part of the problem) they can't be high school seniors when they hear *THAT* for the first time.

The first rule is that all progress after high school requires you to be self-directed. This isn't something you have to learn as much as it is something you have *to be*.

Pay now or pay later

It is no accident that the average age of the students at the Technical Colleges is 27 years old. In many cases, those individuals have spent the ten years since high school learning the importance of education.

The Chicken or the Egg?

College graduates leave the state to find good paying jobs. Good jobs don't come to the state because they can't find good people. How do we resolve this paradox? Of course, it is in the nature of paradoxes that they are not to be solved as much as they are to be managed, improved upon, made the best of, etc.

In this case, there is much we can do to advance this paradox.

Career Prep doesn't just happen!

Our first line of defense is the Career Preparation portion of the Maine Learning Results. Never heard of it? That is part of the problem. The Maine Learning Results were published in 1997 as part of Maine's response to education reform. There is one section entitled "Career Preparation" and it has been struggling to achieve legitimacy.

When Career Preparation is "at the table" it is not considered an integral part of learning such as math, science and English but rather as one more outrider, one more program to be accommodated and grafted onto the basics.

Career Preparation was not intended to be a program equal to math, science or English. It is not a competing program.

We need education for the sake of our democracy. We also need education to prepare people for the world of work. A highly qualified workforce is the *sine qua non* of good jobs. On the other hand, good jobs are equally indispensable to the creation of a highly qualified workforce. So which comes first?

The relationship between basic educational subjects and career preparation is similarly paradoxical. We simply need both.

So what comes first, education or employment?

Maine must make tremendous progress in education and employment during the next decade. We certainly cannot afford progress in one at the expense of the other. But not to worry--we cannot even *make* progress on one without progress on the other. They are like the wings of a bird—they must be equally strong

Therein lies the rub. Progress in education and good jobs can only be accomplished by working together.

Career Prep isn't just another program. It is a belief system.

Implementation of the Career Prep portion of the Maine Learning Results can help build the bridges necessary to move our students from school to work.

In order to do this, schools and employers must build local, permanent relationships, possibly utilizing their local Workforce Investment Boards that encourage collaboration towards this end. Career Days are fun and often helpful. But they are not nearly enough.

Career Prep is also a promise, as its name implies, that our citizens will be prepared. We must begin building bridges to Career Prep *now*.