

Education Works!

We're asking the wrong question

By Tom Broussard

"What are you going to be when you grow up?"

High school education continues to focus on the question "What are you going to be when you grow up?" This approach served Maine well when the answer to that question didn't change as rapidly as it does today.

There was a time when a high school graduate could spend 35 years working in a mill or at a shipyard. They could raise a family, make a living wage, and learn a trade or a craft. Their job didn't change too much in 35 years.

Today the pace of technology has all but eliminated that scenario.

The pace of change

Accelerating technology alters several times the "what" that a person wants to do, even before they do it the first time. While all these changes in destination take place, we continue to ask the same question in our schools—*what do you want to be?* As if that question can be answered once and for all!

Furthermore the answer to that question continues to diminish in importance. A high school graduate today is likely to have 20 different jobs in 10 different careers in his lifetime. The "what" answer will change continuously.

Educational Catch 22

It is expected that fewer 21st century jobs will require a four-year college degree. However, employers are reporting that more jobs will require the kind of thinking skills that (it is thought) only colleges provide today. It is an

educational Catch 22. You don't need a four-year degree for many jobs but you do need the critical thinking skills that you are not getting in school.

Effective education needed for all

The solution to this apparent dichotomy is one simple word. Rather than organize (and divide) our educational system around the question of "what do you want to be?" we need to shift our focus to one of inclusion. The educational model of the future must provide effective training and education to all of our citizens in order to succeed in the 21st century.

Skills for all

We will not flourish as a state where the workers of tomorrow are separated by the rules of yesterday. All our students and workers need the skills that

employers say they only get today from the college graduates. Yet, not everyone goes to college.

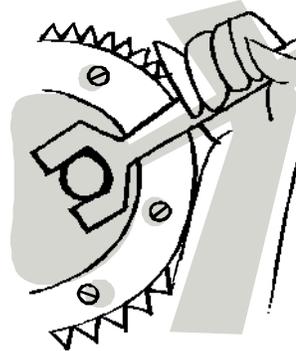
The question around which our schools must organize is the question that will help prepare all our students, children and citizens for success in

the 21st century. The question should no longer be "what do you want to be when you grow up?" but, *how*.

Universal question, universal answer

How do you want to be when you grow up? The answer to that question remains the same regardless of *what* you want to do. *What* you want to do will change many times.

Whether you are a programmer or a pipefitter, employers want people who work well on a team, who are critical thinkers, who take responsibility and who are effective communicators. They want employees with the capacity to learn *How and What*. All education must work!



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"I never did a day's work in my life. It was all fun."

- Thomas A. Edison

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