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“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle, Philosopher

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!

Ignorance is a Monarch's Best Friend

By Tom Broussard

Humor is the best teacher

Sometimes your best thoughts come from cartoons...at least mine do. Just today I read the Wizard of Id and it gave me the idea for this article.



A reporter is speaking with the King and he asks him what the King is going to do about the schools— apparently they are not in good shape. The King responds that he isn't going to do anything and when the reporter asks why not, the King replies, “*Ignorance is a monarch's best friend.*”

The King has no clothes

We often make use of the old adage of the King's seemingly beautiful and yet invisible, new clothes when addressing delicate issues with people in power. Not wanting to disappoint the King, no one wants to point out that the King is not wearing any clothes until a child with no sense of political correctness blurts it out. He is naked after all.

Today in many ways, cartoonists play the role of the child when no one else can (or is in a position to) say what must be said.

Public education in the Kingdom of Id

Education in the Kingdom of Id bears a striking resemblance to public education in the U.S. The manner in which we educate ourselves about the world of work is in a particularly dreadful state.

Education & Income

Don't get me wrong, on any given day, we can all be naked on one issue or another. But in the case of public education, we seem to have a real blind spot.

We can't believe our eyes even when confronted with the relationship between educational achievement and wages. It would seem that the additional million dollars a college graduate makes over a lifetime would provide sufficient motivation but apparently not enough.

Beyond educational aspirations

Much has been said about the barriers to education. The conclusion? “We're not that bad. Stop picking on us. Stop being so negative.” So, let's concede the point regarding *educational* aspirations. Everybody wants to get more education and there are lots of good reasons why they can't. OK. Fine. Let's get beyond *education*.

How about *learning* and *learning* aspirations? Are there any real reasons why learning can't continue even when education cannot? After all, education alone is not really the goal—learning is. In this day and age, technology can provide learning on demand. That is the real problem—demand for *learning* has been dragged under in the same discussion of the barriers to *education*—as if they were the same thing. In this century learning is like breathing and cannot stop. How long can you hold *your* breath?

Career Preparation & the World of Work

Preparing our current students for the world of work is a case in point. For all the emphasis on how important it is that our students be critical thinkers and life long learners, the connection between school and work is still not being drawn. Students are being prepared for the world of tomorrow using yesterday's tools. Career preparation has been characterized as an educational *program* (and hence vulnerable to budget cuts) when it is really a belief system and as vital as the air we breath.

Critical Thinking 101

Most high schools do not have school-wide career preparation activities of any kind. Those that do have them typically offer them for vocational or otherwise non-college bound students.

As a consequence, the system fails twice. The college bound students are not provided any form of career preparation instruction. It is considered

unnecessary because *they are going to college, not to work.*

Of the approximately 60% plus of high school students that go on to college fully half of them do not complete their degree in four years. That means that the half that doesn't get a college degree comes home with some of the debts from college but very little of the benefits.

These same students didn't receive any world of work training because they were "going to college." Now they find themselves "going to work."

The remaining students that do receive some career preparation are already branded as under-performing, low capacity students. Those students receive some exposure to the world of work but they are not taught critical thinking skills because *they are going to work, not to college.* Today, everyone must be a critical thinker! This should be the new definition of career preparation.

Careers are dead

For all the talk about school reform, schools still think (and are built to preserve the thinking) that they are preparing their students for one career—period. Teachers are not teaching their students to prepare for a lifetime of careers. To act as if graduates were joining a stable, unchanging workforce is almost criminal.

A little Ignorance can go a long way

Why is it good for the monarch to have ignorant subjects? We may not have monarchs in the U.S. but we do have captains of

industry. We have the CEOs of ENRON, Arthur Anderson, Global Crossing, Adelphia, Haliburton and many, many more.

Modern workers are footloose enough (so think their employers) without teaching them how to think critically. We want them to think for themselves, but only up to a point. Too many questions and they may leave even faster than they are already. Not surprisingly, employers are concerned that highly trained employees will leave. In this regard, maybe just a *little* ignorance can go a long way.

A Little Monarch in all of us

When is the last time you observed (or maybe even participated in) keeping someone just a little bit ignorant? When is the last time you were told, "You don't need to know that."?

Learning How to Learn

In today's global economy, high performance rests on the difference between being told what to know and *wanting* to know something. Schools still emphasize things to learn, rather than how to learn things. Conversely, businesses want their employees to know how to learn...but only up to a point.

Employees and employers alike must come to understand that they are dependent on each other, not just for their mutual employment but for their employability and profitability as well. If it ever did, ignorance doesn't look good on anyone anymore.