

"Preparation for Further Preparation"

Grant Venn

"PREPARATION for further preparation" implies that there is a pattern of elementary and secondary education that will fit every young person. It might also imply that a next step in either education or employment is relatively stable and that we can predict the future with a high degree of certainty. Apparently these conditions do not now exist and it is less than likely that they will in the future. What does this mean for education?

It would seem that changes now confronting us must be thought about in terms of certain new relationships that have developed between man, education, and society. Essentially, for the first time in man's history, education is the link between an individual and society; and for the first time this is true for every individual.

Education, instead of a selection agency, must become an including agency; multiple options and approaches must be developed because certain basic changes have occurred in this technological age. These changes must be understood if we are to look at education as more than simply preparation. I would list the basic understandings that have evolved as follows:

1. The nation today believes in the dignity of every individual, the worth of every person, and the right of every person to receive from society and to contribute to society.
2. A life devoted to learning is not better than one devoted to the use of learning for enhancing the quality of our society.
3. The separation of education from society as a basis for preparation for further schooling or for functioning in society does not make sense now or in the future.
4. It is necessary that all persons today have a level of education and skill which allows them to continue to learn.
5. Much of today's work is more cognitive and challenging than is some of our education.
6. Preparation for further schooling has always been accepted; it is now equally necessary to prepare for future adult and work roles.

7. Technology for the first time has created a situation in which our nation's wealth is the people; their minds, their skills, and the ability to adapt and learn have become our true wealth. Muscle power, natural resources, and property contribute very little to enhancing the quality of our culture.

The answer to our problems in education must lie in more direct and closer relationships between educational institutions and the changes and problems of society. Historically, the schools have had an unstated assignment—to select those who should continue formal schooling. This was once necessary because the role of most adults was unskilled work. The schools have done this remarkably well.

“Quality” as Measure

Too often “quality” of an educational institution is still considered to be the selective process by which the student body is determined. Can we afford to continue this myth?

- Can a measure of quality be established, based on how well the institution serves those most in need of education?
- Can accreditation be based on how well the school succeeds in reaching its goals rather than how much it is like another school?
- Can educational quality be defined in terms of how well individual differences and unique talents are developed rather than how well each student becomes like all others?
- Can quality be defined in terms of one's behavior and contributions after he leaves school, rather than what he does while in school?
- Can quality be defined by other means than levels of education or course content?
- Can quality be defined in terms of individual achievement rather than group averages?
- Can status for an educational institution be gained by how well it meets unfulfilled needs rather than how much it is like recognized institutions?

We have surely learned in the past few years that simply providing a person with knowledge and facts is not adequate nor is simply providing a person with job skills adequate—these become obsolete and inadequate.

Technological change has, very suddenly, thrown up a dramatic challenge to this nation's political, economic, social, and educational institutions. Though the full scope of this challenge may not be comprehended for years to come, its dimensions are now clear enough to call for a massive response on the part of American education. All levels of education must move quickly to assume greater responsibilities for preparing youth and adults for entry into the changed and changing world of technological work. Unless far more and far better education on the semiprofessional, technical, and skilled levels is soon made available to greater numbers of citizens, the national economy and social structure will suffer irreparable harm.

There can be no doubt that damage has been done to the social order, especially with the disenchantment of youth with the relevance of their education. This is the time for those who have spent long years in preparing to be prepared, as well as those who have been selected out, to find new options within the post-secondary institutions. Both groups are now finding difficulty in achieving a role as adults. We have a surplus in certain professions and a shortage of highly skilled and technical personnel.

It would appear that education today must do several things, particularly at the post-secondary level for the high school graduate and adult, and at the high school level for those who enter directly into an adult role.

First: We must broaden the options for learning by providing work experience for all youths as part of their education, in close cooperation with industry and business.

Second: We must provide specific skills, knowledge, and theory as it is needed, not only in a sequential pattern for those who are preparing for further preparation.

Third: Every educational institution must help provide transition to a next step for every individual it accepts as a student.

Fourth: Continuing education and skill upgrading must be available to everyone.

Fifth: The community college and high school should operate throughout the calendar year with the added time devoted primarily to career planning, occupational preparation, and youth involvement in adult roles in society.

Sixth: We must develop a method for measuring what is learned, rather than courses completed, as a basis for acceptance into a course or program.

Last, we must take the lead in trying new approaches to learning outside the four walls of the school, first because such approaches can work better in many cases, but most of all because we need the contact and ideas from a part of society with which we have had little dialogue in the past. This is essential to education's future as well as the nation's future.

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