

True Merit

According to Benjamin Franklin, “The idea of what is true merit should also be often presented in youth, explained and impressed on their minds, as consisting in an inclination joined with an ability to serve mankind, one’s country, friends and family; which ability is to be acquired or greatly increased by true learning; and should indeed be the great aim and end of all learning.” Those words were written in *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, a pamphlet produced by Franklin in 1749. The manuscript detailed Franklin’s imaginative and intuitive vision of education for a Commonwealth that was ever changing. Similarly, today’s society remains ever changing. We now live in a world interconnected by technology, a world with endless knowledge at our fingertips, a world with communication faster than a blink of an eye. With such unceasing power and knowledge comes great accountability. True education remains vital to today’s youth, and Franklin’s words remain as relevant as they did in 1749.

Likewise to Franklin’s time, school today remains the keystone of modern education. When a student thinks of school, he or she may think of math or reading. He or she may think of science, or spelling, or history. But math doesn’t shape a leader. Virtue does. It isn’t spelling that makes a person’s legacy. Character does. And it isn’t enough to just give students knowledge. It is fundamental to teach them honesty. It is critical to teach them integrity. It is imperative to teach them morality. It is necessary to teach them merit.

According to *Princeton WordNet*, merit is defined as “any admirable quality or attribute.” Though this textbook definition appears pure and simple, true merit is much more complex. True merit encompasses virtue and character, honesty and integrity, morality and knowledge. True merit is not only possessing admirable qualities, but also having an *inclination* to use them to help others. True merit is lending a hand to your friends and family, voicing your opinion to better your country, and helping a neighbor in need. True merit is giving to another, not out of convenience, but out of the desire to serve mankind.

Unlike most educational subjects, merit cannot be taught through a book. It can’t be instilled through lecture, or crammed the night before a test. As stated by Benjamin Franklin, it must be “explained and impressed” on the minds of our youth and “acquired by true learning”—true merit must be learned by example. But in today’s culture, where is true merit? We live in a world of Bernie Madoffs, a world of Chris Browns, a world of drugs and drama, sexting and sneaking. We live in a world of bad influences.

Thus, shows the gravity of Franklin’s words. It’s up to the teachers, the parents, and the leaders of society to show true merit to today’s youth. It’s up to the Oprah Winfreys, the Bill Gates’, and the Nelson Mandelas to show the “ability to serve mankind, one’s country, [and one’s] friends and family.” It’s up to the soldiers, who sacrifice their lives for our country. It’s up to the heroes, who strive to keep one another safe and secure. Ultimately, it’s up to those who give of themselves for others, not out of selfish pride, but out of selfless love.

Where would we be without those who exude true merit? Where would we be if those who impacted history kept their knowledge and talents to themselves? Where would we be if the Sons of

Liberty never denounced the evils of tyranny? Where would we be if Sacagawea never guided Lewis and Clark? Where would we be if Jonas Salk never shared his vaccine for polio? Where would we be without true merit? Where *will* we be if we don't learn it?

Now, more than ever, Benjamin Franklin's words on education are pertinent to today's society. We live in a world full of technology, where education comes at the click of a mouse. But true education isn't how fast we can access knowledge. It's how we use it. True learning isn't how much we know. It's how much we help mankind. After all, isn't that the "great aim and end of all learning?"

Work Cited

"Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania, 1749." *University Archives and Records*

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