

## *The drill with workforce training*

**A**t the beginning of World War II, the American military suddenly needed millions of skilled technicians and managers. It didn't have the luxury of selecting well-educated civilians to learn the necessary skills in a traditional academic setting. Instead, it had to take mostly undereducated raw recruits who'd only worked at unskilled Depression jobs (if that).

They turned farm boys and street-corner malingers into highly sophisticated radar operators, field medics, navigators and engine specialists. In a mere 90 days or so, they gave the brighter ones the equivalent of West Point or Annapolis educations so they could function as field managers for combat troops or warship crews.

Today, Massachusetts and the nation are facing the longest period of high unemployment since the Depression. But even now, many jobs in such fields as science, technology and health care go unfilled. Perhaps the techniques used by the military during World War II can offer guidance as we seek to address these modern challenges.

The military succeeded by adopting radical new "immersion techniques" for teaching complicated skills as quickly as possible. At their core were down-to-earth training films and other audiovisual tools and manuals written in a clear, simple style.

In Massachusetts, regional vocational-technical schools, which utilize similar techniques, have seen their MCAS scores rise by more than 40 percent in less than

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a decade. Massachusetts voc-techs also currently have more than 2,500 students on waiting lists to get in. That fact suggests that government must also use present and future demand data to guide education investment toward areas that will help to rebuild our economy and satisfy the people it serves.

It's clear that as our population ages and technological advances continue, the need for skilled health care workers won't abate. Data also indicate likely growth in areas like energy, the environment and information technology.

And while our current and future workforce will surely have to be skilled, we're not just talking about doctors, engineers and scientists. We'll need nurses, emergency medical technicians, skilled craftspeople and people to work in growing environmental fields.

By combining lessons from the past with future trends, we can make education investments that will yield both the workforce that will help us emerge from the current economic downturn and one that will satisfy coming economic needs.

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