

Could schools of the past teach us something?

By Jerry Bowen

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This is the last in a series on the early rules of grammar school education. The subjects discussed were penmanship, bookkeeping and current events, as taken from the 1911 Solano County Course of Study. I'm not so sure that they are still pursued in depth in many of the schools of today to any degree.

The following is quoted from the 1911 course of study:

Penmanship

'While the writing of pupils throughout the county has shown decided improvement during the past few years, still much time and attention should be given this subject as a high standard of penmanship should be the earnest aim of every teacher.

"It is impossible to over-estimate the value of good penmanship. People are largely judged by the letters they write and many an applicant for a position has been turned down on account of his unsightly, illegible writing.

"The teacher must give this work her personal supervision. Attention should be called to all errors and no hasty or untidy copying should be permitted.

"Practice work should be carried on daily for a given period before writing in the copy books."

This may not seem to be an important subject today with the major use of computers in vogue.

But then again, how many people have suffered because of the poorly handwritten prescriptions by physicians? How many young adults today have absolutely no cursive penmanship skills?

Bookkeeping

"The only object of teaching Bookkeeping in the grades is to give the pupils some idea of keeping simple accounts.

"The work as outlined for the last two years (Grade 7 and 8) is not intended to make

expert bookkeepers of the pupils by any means.

“However, before graduating the pupils should have a general working knowledge of the requirements of ordinary business letters and papers, and should understand the nature of a debit and credit transaction.

“It is with these objects in view that the subject is assigned a place in this course of study.”

Current events

“One of the objects of public education is to give the pupil an intelligent interest in the more serious affairs of life; to fit the mind when mature to pass enlightened judgment on the great public questions that are constantly being agitated in a country such as ours.

“History is being made each day; geography is in a state of evolution.

“Boundaries are being changed by treaties of peace and arbitration; the relative strength of the world powers is constantly changing. Rivers are made navigable, harbors are deepened for commerce; deserts are changed to productive homesteads; cities are destroyed; governments rise and fall; great personalities of the world cease to exercise their potent influence on the world of affairs. These things are important phases of life and in them the child should be interested.”

In my own mind, this subject is of utmost importance in not only providing students with the ability to make good decisions in the their later lives, but to train them to casting their very important vote during elections.

The early schools made heavy use of newspapers and magazines and I still believe that newspapers are one of the best sources of educational materials.

They are more portable than computers, up to date and can be read anywhere with ease.

I always enjoy reading my daily news from cover to cover in the comfort of my favorite easy chair while I partake of the all-important first cup of coffee, and I don't have to worry about spilling that coffee into my laptop computer.

The important question here is, “Are our public grammar schools as good as they were a hundred years ago in preparing the child for high school and beyond, and have they been able to keep up with the modern-day learning needs?”

What do you think?

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