

My Thoughts On Education

If you have read my column through the years, you know I feel our current educational system is flawed. I constantly read and study educational issues, and today's column reflects some of my latest thoughts.

Unfortunately, the biggest problem I see with education is the fact it has not changed very much since I was in school back in the 1960's. The curriculum still consists of the four major food groups: English, math, science, and social studies. Students are still required to spend countless hours memorizing useless facts of trivia, most of which will be of no benefit to them in life. The only exception might be if they are selected to be on *Jeopardy* or some other trivia based game show.

Education is basically formatted to serve about 60-70% of students, with the remainder falling by the wayside. Despite all of the various programs and so

called improvements, the drop out rate is not that much different today than it was thirty years ago. The current educational format in most schools is one in which a student is given a text book, the teacher lectures about the content, then the student is given a test. If the student continually passes these tests, they are labeled successful. However, if they continually make failing grades, they tend at some point to become disinterested, are labeled "dumb" or "stupid" by the other students, and end up dropping out. Most any teacher will also tell you those are the same students who are most likely to then be a behavior problem in the classroom.

Would you as an adult like to be forced by law to be required to sit in an environment all day long, year after year, where you were made to feel demeaned and stupid?

Traditional education requires a student to be proficient in the four main sub-

jects to be deemed successful. I agree, a student should be taught to read, write, and do basic math, but beyond that? Think about adult life. Some of the best and most talented mechanics I know have rather poor language and writing skills. Yet, I've seen them learn to use a computer to diagnose difficult problems on cars. Why? Because that is what they are interested in. On the other hand, I have known doctors and engineers, who could not perform even the simplest mechanical task. Why? That is not their interest, or their talent.

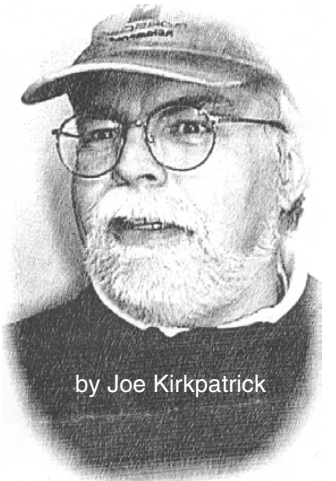
My point? An old saying, "different strokes for different folks is what makes the world go round" does not apply only to adults. As any parent of two or more should know, children are not all made alike. Yet in our educational system, all children are expected to perform adequately on all subjects, or be termed a failure.

What is the solution? The

divorce rate is 50%, and 25% or more of new births are to single moms, so added parental involvement is not an option. Even in a home with both parents present, usually both parents work, and children are left largely on their own. Teachers, on the other hand, are already overworked, and usually underpaid, and they cannot be expected to raise these children who are in their classes. Since today's children "raise" themselves to a point, spending many hours in front of a television or playing games on the computer, education needs to be tailored more toward a "self taught" mentality. A system where more curriculum is based on a computer game format, with the student having to master a skill before being able to advance to a higher "level" of the game. It's also time for educators to realize it is not possible for all students to master all subjects, and they should be allowed to concentrate on their

strengths, rather than dwelling on their weaknesses. Only an average of 10-12% of students will ever graduate from college, so students in the higher elementary grades should be allowed at least some involvement in those programs. If a student reaches high school and still is having trouble with the basics, they should be main streamed into a Vo-tech program, and upon graduating in that program, their diploma should be no different than any other student. A high school diploma should be just like college: It should be based on a student becoming very well trained in a subject of their interest. The drop out rate in Vo-tech programs is much lower, by the way, than in the more traditional high school programs. Seems if students are in a program they actually have an interest in, they are much more likely to stay in it.

Colleges as well should drop basic course require-



by Joe Kirkpatrick

ments, and allow students to jump right into the field of their interest. Worried about them not knowing basic math, good English writing skills, and trivial facts? This is today - that is what computers are for.

Any comments? Contact Joe Kirkpatrick at: tristateim@aol.com

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