

Things that should be taught to our children

by MARK PAVILONS

We're all products of the education system. Some are recent graduates, others like us Boomers, are throw-backs to simpler times.

But we're all formed, molded and changed by those years in high school and post-secondary school.

Most of us remember those times, awkward moments and, yes, shenanigans, in high school.

Weird sentiments in our yearbooks stand as testaments to times enjoyed, but forgotten. I recommend dusting off those books and flipping through history if you get a chance. It's good for a laugh if nothing else.

In the 1980s, we had academics, but we also had shop class and yes, home ec. We even had the option of reversing these stereotypical classes. Kids learned some basic skills how to change a tire or a car's oil; how to fix a hole in your jeans; how to cook a simple meal.

Alas, all of these basic skills courses have fallen by the wayside, making room for more academic, more structured forms of learning.

Helping three children through the system has taught me a lot, let me tell you. I learned right along with them. And, I've discovered some disconcerting things.

One thing I just can't fathom is the sameness of it all. The course outlines, subjects and even assignments didn't change in the 10 years my kids were in high school. In fact, we can find all their essays and reports on their desktop and confirm the subjects are still the same.

There were reference articles that were decades old. Some are really bad quality photocopies, turned into PDFs. Why would anyone cite information from the early 2000s when so much has changed and come to light?

I hope it's not apathy or laziness on the part of the teachers or school boards. Some things do not stand the test of time, trust me.

As a writer by profession, I find it odd that students at all levels have to follow strict essay formats, citation methods and reference checks. Sure, I understand it's a way to get them to research, take notes and document information. But come on, who uses MLA or APA formats in the real world?

I discovered that our system, at any level, teaches kids how to present a written piece. It does not teach them how to write, or how to express themselves.

Perhaps what's needed is an introductory course in Grade 9 called 'Self Expression.' Revealing, exchanging and presenting ideas and opinions, not formats.

I will say my children did learn something from the Grade 12 psychology classes. It allowed them the freedom to think, ponder and debate. These are useful skills throughout life.

There are some very human things missing, not only from the curriculum but from anywhere in society.

While the system is now 'awoke,' it lacks some of the fundamentals.

We need to foster empathy in our kids. We all have it, but, as Maya Angelou noted, "we may not have enough courage to display it."

"Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action. It's the impetus for creating change," according to Max Carver.

He's quite right.

While we're exposed to more relevant issues, change has to first come from within.

Once more, our European counterparts are on the ball.

The Danish are the first to introduce "Empathy" as a school subject. The reason why the Danish have incorporated empathy into their standard national curriculum is that they've realized the importance of teaching children what it means to understand and share feelings.

Unlike children in the rest of the world, Danish children are also taught how to come to terms with the many different emotional states they'll encounter later in life, as well as to develop the ability to recognize and identify feelings people usually misinterpret.

They created the CAT-Kit program, which consists of various visual, interactive, and other customizable tools that teach kids how to communicate effectively with their peers, with adults, and with other authority figures.

Off-shoots of empathy are kindness and putting others ahead of oneself. Respect is another biggie.

Another "course"? I'd like to see it Self-Esteem 101. Nothing is more important than building a sense of self-confidence and self-worth.

Everything begins there. High self-esteem matters because it helps you develop coping skills, handle adversity, and puts the negative into perspective.

We should also teach our youngins to be honest and truthful.

This one value ensures that your children will possess all other values.

How about an "Introduction to Hard Work"? We're all about working smart, but there's a lot to be said about putting your nose to the grindstone and rolling up your sleeves. Hard work never hurt anyone, so the saying goes.

It's hard to explain to young people the value of time itself. But we older, "wise guys" know the value of every minute of every day. I would encourage everyone to stop and smell the coffee (it's more common than roses) each and every day.

Not being in the classroom today, I have no idea if youngsters have perfected the art of sharing. If not, they must.

Our system may be geared to performance, achievement and high academic grades. And yet, we know that humility is a key quality in life. Be humble.

Here's a list of other things that could and perhaps should be on the map: "physical and mental survival skills; interpersonal communication; basic finances; basic home repairs; logic and reasoning.

Sure, some of these things can only be learned through living life and the extended "school of hard knocks."

But the better prepared our children are, the better adults they will become.