

The Salem Leader
Educationally Speaking
March 19, 2007
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Useless Knowledge

This Saturday on March 24th I will be teaching a free course at the Community Learning Center over the basics of using the Internet. The class is only three hours and is a one-time gig. Anyone interested in enrolling should contact the Learning Center at 883-6989. In preparing for this class I've learned that preparing for a class is not easy. However, it could be that this is my first time teaching a class and the perfectionist in me demands too high of an expectation.

I know that teachers across the nation spend countless hours preparing lesson plans and learning more about their trade, topic or course. However, I can't really justify why they spend so many hours on teaching things no one will ever care about. I've spent a lot of time on my lesson plan but only because the people coming to my course actually want to be there. I love teachers, the world can't have too many of them – it's just what they're teaching that is the problem.

A good example to illustrate my point is the new game show on Fox, "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?" The show pits adult contestants against themselves in answering questions that come straight out of fifth grade textbooks. Fifth grade students are standing by on the show to help answer the questions if the adult needs assistance up to three times. Questions range from topics like "What is the Ursa Major?" (The Big Dipper) and "What bone in the human body is the largest?" (The femur). Questions like this prove that the problem with our schools is that children are learning too much useless knowledge.

Additionally, IU Researchers recently released the findings of a study of high school students and learned that high school students are bored to tears in the classroom. With questions like these being raised, I can see why.

That's why I've devised my own curriculum. First, I believe teachers should be using current events in their lesson plans, and I mean real events – like nation-dividing issues such as civil rights – not "what do you think of the discovery of a bunch of bones?" Questions involving bones would just end up asking what the largest bone is. I can't imagine this knowledge to be useful unless I'm in a dinosaur museum and someone starts attacking me. Then I would know to yell, "Quick! Someone grab a femur and start whacking!"

Other examples of good lesson material include geometry – but not the traditional kind with squares and triangles. I think geometry teachers need to be teaching students what angle to tilt the couch so they can get it through the front door. Or how to tell when there isn't enough space for you to parallel park.

English teachers could teach students how to detect lies and bull-crap. This would be a great skill for students that they'll really need later in life. Trust me, I wish I would have had years of instruction on when someone was lying to me over what the gerund phrase is in some random sentence about a dog named Spot.

Art teachers could instruct students that the more attractive you are the more you will succeed in life. Gym teachers could teach students similarly – that the fatter you are the less likely you are to get that job as an astronaut and that you can't escape your weight problem by going into zero-gravity. Science teachers should teach how to melt down credit card plastic. Soon these kids are going to be inundated with junk mail and credit card offers and it'd be much better to know how to melt them down to prevent identity fraud. That and you can't possibly rip those things in half. Spanish and French teachers should be teaching how to fill out a tax return because that, too, is a foreign language.

However, schools do teach our students that forming alliances is good. The ones that don't form pacts quickly are likely to suffer for the rest of their lives as everyone else conspires around them.

I can't imagine that any of the kids on "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader" has a good career plan. They're evidently sitting around eating too many Cheetos while memorizing the names of bones and constellations. That can't be in their best interest.

If I were totally in charge of school curriculum I'd focus on these areas: risk assessment, public speaking, fashion sense, managing your own body, bull-crap detection and CPR in case I ever needed CPR. Oh, and sarcasm, that way people can understand my columns better.

I would incorporate this material into my course Saturday at the Learning Center. However, it's a free course and information this vital can't just be given away for nothing. That, too, is an important lesson – nothing good is ever free and everyone is out to get your money.