

There's time to recoup and enhance education

Now that North Farmington High is patched up and the school board has been re-elected, it's time to talk a little shop — educational shop.

Last week's board decision to turn its back on mandatory humanities is bad news for district students and this community.

The opposition argument boiled down to the misguided theory that the majority of students took some humanities anyway, so don't bother with the minority of kids who show little interest.

Heaped on top was the ridiculous little tidbit about government encroachment on freedom of choice — a mentality that belongs somewhere back in the 19th century.

Mandating humanities would open the door to that very important minority of students. Those are the kids who, more than likely, will terminate their formal education upon high school graduation.

Without humanities in high school, they may go through their entire lives lacking an appreciation of some of the finer aspects of life.

But the debate revealed some interesting feelings among educators, who turned out en masse to fend off humanities. They were reluctant to force education down the throats of students who are themselves frustrated.

One educator even referred to such classes as "Mickey Mouse."

Caving in to such frustrations, though, does countermand the mission of educators — to teach.

EDUCATORS ARE underestimating their own abilities and those of their students. Humanities do improve a person's mind and, hence, his life. Roman poet Ovid put it best:

"Note too that a faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character and permits it not to be cruel."

That sounds like pretty relevant advice considering the state of the world which all students, whether or not they go to college, will have to face.



Board President Michael Shpiece was correct when he said that mandatory humanities would "increase the challenge" of education, rather than foster failure, as some maintained.

But ironically, it was Shpiece's reluctance to compromise that ultimately led to failure.

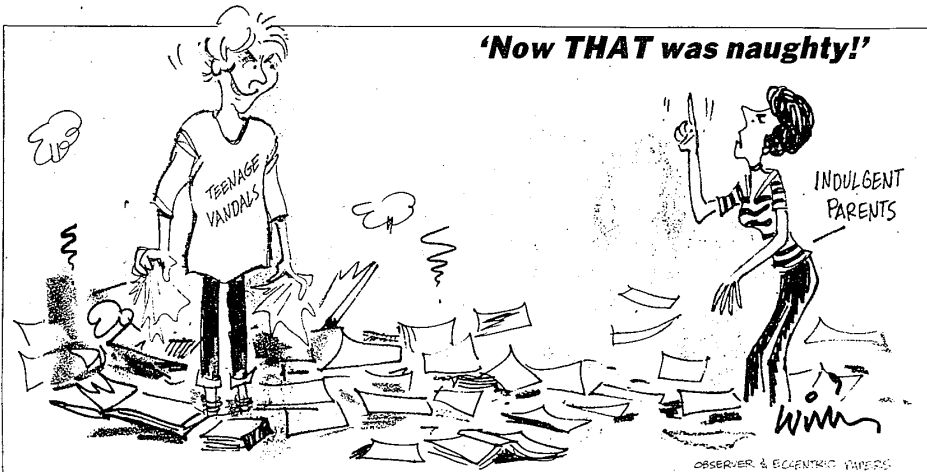
Trustee Emma Makinen's plan of either one year of humanities or practical arts was sufficient to get the ball rolling. Shpiece, who is considered something of a political wizard, was blinded by his own crystal ball.

He should have realized that such a controversial issue would have to be compromised to meet success. Half a loaf is better than none, and Farmington students have ended up with an empty breadbasket.

But there still is time to recoup and enhance Farmington students' education.

EITHER SHPIECE or Trustee Janice Rolnick could reintroduce the Makinen plan. Assuming that Mrs. Makinen and Trustee Helen Prutow would maintain their support, the proposal would easily pass.

This isn't any time to think about political face saving. The kids' education hangs in the balance.



'Now THAT was naughty!'



Tim Richard

There's not much to say

One of our trade journals told how a little Colorado weekly paper got into a peck of trouble.

The mom and pop owners decided one week not to publish. They just took a week off and maybe went somewhere warm.

I've lost the clipping and don't remember the name of the town. But if you know Colorado, you know the town had to be a remote spot in the Rockies or a wind-swept spot on the state's drab, brown eastern prairie. Either way, closing down for a week seemed to make sense.

But not to the Colorado Press Association, and not to the state government.

First, the paper was kicked out of the press association for a year, which meant it lost a lot of advertising contacts and news backgrounds.

Second, the paper was prevented from bidding on governmental legal advertising for a year. It could accept such ads but couldn't go hunting for them.

It seems that continuous production, barring a strike or an act of God, is a rigid necessity in some hidebound minds. Something is supposed to emanate from typewriter and press, whether there is anything to say or not.

Personally, I admire folks who can just chuck it for a week and retreat to someplace warm.

JACK HAWTHORNE, who has disappeared into the bowels of the Oakland County legal system as a court administrator or something, used to be a first-rate newspaper reporter though he was famed for verbosity.

One day he walked into the newsroom from a county board meeting. "What happened, Jack?" the city editor asked.

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not one damned thing," Hawthorne replied.

"Hold it down to 25 inches," the city editor said.

YEARS AGO there was a columnist who was having difficulty getting inspired to write about something. He thought and thought, but no ideas came.

Finally he decided to force the issue. He typed the word "The . . ." and went for a walk in the park for an hour.

Returning to his desk without a single flash of inspiration, he proceeded to complete his sentence as follows: ". . . hell with it."

DID YOU EVER wonder why, no matter what Steve (Crackerbarrel) Barnaby, Hank (Eccentricities) Hogan and I have to say, the columns always run 11-13 inches?

Whether we are angry, sad, whimsical, profound or steaming, our columns run the same length.

There's nothing either artificial or magical about it. It just seems to be a natural length. Write more, and you get off the topic. Write less, and you leave out an essential point.

For much the same reasons, short stories are about 4,500 words in length. Mozart's later concertos run 20-25 minutes, the majority of Beethoven's symphonies run about 40 minutes, Shakespeare's plays run two to three hours, Verdi's operas run three to four hours.

Mahler used to write some extremely long symphonies, and Wagner some extremely long operas, but few persons except die-hard listeners to them.

Hogan on leave

Hank Hogan has filed to run for an Oakland County commissioner's seat. His authorship of the Eccentricities column will be discontinued while he is legally a candidate.

Please, no 'to-be-assembled' toys

One thing I've learned over the years is that I'm not a mechanic.

I can use a screwdriver, a hammer or a pair of pliers for a simple operation. Just don't come up with a complicated project like putting something together.

My mechanical ability is limited to putting air in the tires of a car or bicycle (but don't ask me how many pounds) or replacing a lost screw.

What really convinced me of my mechanical inabilities is children's toys.

Whoever invented the knocked-down toy must have gotten some fiendish glee out of writing the directions. I've often thought that perhaps the person who wrote the directions was a someone who helped design the "easy to do" income tax forms.

My daughter Cathy expressed my feelings about all this when she said, "I'm OK until I open the carton and see a sheet that says directions, then I panic."

THE FIRST REAL exposure of my lack of knowledge in this field came years ago when my children were young.

Invariably, one or two of our daughters wanted a toy for either Christmas or their birthday that had to be assembled.

I spent many Christmas Eves struggling half the night to get a toy ready to put under the tree. I've thought many times if there is really a Santa Claus, why didn't he do this job?

There were some birthdays when I'd sweat blood trying to put a doll buggy or doll house together. My wife could have the birthday cake whipped up, baked and trimmed before I got to step 3 in the directions for putting the toy together.

WHEN OUR daughters grew up, I assumed my days as an inadequate mechanic were over. No so.



Maurie Walker

Along come grandchildren and we had to buy these to-be-assembled toys again.

You'd think that after all these years of advanced science, life would have become simpler. Nothing has changed except now many of the toys are plastic instead of metal which makes the danger of breaking something even more of a possibility.

It's the same old story. Outside the carton in bold letters is the wording, "Easy to assemble. All that is needed is a screwdriver."

I've heard that song before. Tear open the carton. There are all the pieces plus the traditional bag of nuts and bolts.

Then, as in past years, there is that old demon, the instruction sheet.

BUT I ASSUME the manufacturer company knows what it is doing. The instructions are all numbered — step one, step two, etc. That sounds simple enough.

Another instruction to read the "rules." One rule is: "Be sure to read the entire instructions before assembling."

Now this is enough to make me want to take the toy back to the store and try later to tell the child that they just didn't have the toy in stock.

The instructions say to check the supply of nuts, bolts, screws and whatever else is necessary to

make certain they are all there. Again I had that feeling of something has to be missing.

Back to the "simple" step-by-step instructions: "Take two 1 1/4 inch bolts, put them into section A. Attach a lock bolt, but don't tighten too much until you go to step 2."

Nothing was said about having to measure each nut and screw.

Step 2: "Take one 1 1/4 inch screw, be sure it is the flat head screw. Located the third hole in part B. Make certain the first and second holes line up with part C."

THIS USUALLY takes a great deal of time since the holes miss lining up by about a fraction of an inch. That is until I discover I've got the pieces upside down and backward.

You get the picture.

I'm just not a mechanic, but somehow finally get the toy together. And when I do, I step back and admire the finished job as though I had just assembled a jet engine.

One would think that after all these years of being a toy assembler for our four daughters, I'd have learned a few tricks of the trade.

It doesn't mean a thing. Putting toys together for the grandchildren is just as complicated as in the past. Times really don't change. Toy manufacturers are still testing our mechanical ability.

BUT THERE IS something that makes all my frustration of putting toys together worth while. I miss the labor of love when our daughters grew up.

I know that the next birthday is just a few weeks away. Wonder what that project will be? Better dunk off the screwdriver, pliers, maybe the hammer.

Better yet, since the birthday is for a grandson, I just might get him a baseball glove.

Some unsung heroes of modern society

According to an old saying, folks laughed at the man who made the first umbrella.

Nowhere in the pages of history is his name mentioned. Neither is there a date given when this first protection against the rain and sun made its debut.

So, naturally, the inventor of the umbrella must be listed as an unsung hero.

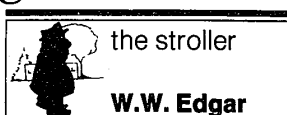
The Stroller never has seen the official list. He doesn't even know where it is kept. But wherever it is, he would like add a few names.

HEADING THE LIST of unsung heroes would be the man who invented indoor plumbing.

Next he would offer the man who gave us the zipper for our modern wearing apparel.

And, third, he would like to honor the man who conceived the idea of calling the slit in front of men's trousers a "fly."

While The Stroller would like to pay the highest tribute to the man who gave us indoor plumbing — with its water faucets, levers, bathtubs and basins, the honor would go much further.



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

You see, indoor plumbing shoved the time-honored "out house" into the limbo of forgotten things for the present generation.

And unless you were around when these little buildings with the star and crescent on the door were in vogue, you can't realize what a chore it was in the wee hours of the morning to jump out of bed, stomp through the snow and brave the icy winds to get there and answer nature's call.

It was even worse when one of your grandparents had a call from nature and needed help. You had to bundle up "Grandpa" in a shawl and take him by the arm to the little building where Mother always

planted her sweet peas each spring because she claimed the ground was richer. What was worse, you had to stand outside and wait while Grandpa shuddered while sitting on the cold seat.

So, you can imagine what a comfort it was when indoor plumbing eliminated the Saturday night bath in a wooden tub in the kitchen.

IT WAS MUCH the same with the zipper. When it came into being, many older men were afraid to use it instead of buttons on their trousers. They feared bodily harm if the zipper were pulled too quickly.

Unfortunately, the name of the inventor never has been known. So, he rightfully belongs on the list of unsung heroes.

THEN THERE WAS the fellow who first called the slit in the front of men's trousers a "fly."

In books of odd information at the public library and in dictionaries, the "fly" is explained as a fold in the front of men's trousers. But nowhere is the name of the inventor mentioned.