

# Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

## Documents Online

**Title:** "What Branch of Study is Most Important in the Education of a Young Lady," by Ellen Lyon

**Date:** circa 1840

**Location:** I-Original-undated-16

### Contact:

Archives & Special Collections  
Waidner-Spahr Library  
Dickinson College  
P.O. Box 1773  
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

[archives@dickinson.edu](mailto:archives@dickinson.edu)

What branch of Study is of most importance  
in the Education of a young Lady.

Within a few years female education has received  
more attention, and has undergone a material  
change. Woman is found to have a mind  
as well as man. Those studies which were thought  
too intricate and too subtle for any but the heads  
of mankind, are now open to all. There is now  
less distinction of demonstration. Woman is not  
to take an active part in the affairs of the world  
though she is still on the other hand confined to the  
domestic sphere. The knowledge they are to possess  
is somewhat different. In politics and all that  
relates to the professions, they are not expected  
to be deep, this is also the case with regard to  
some of the sciences. But they should have such  
an acquaintance with the usages of polite liter-  
ature, as will prevent all deficiency in speak-  
ing and writing. Of all the languages  
French I think is the most important.  
We can scarcely pick up a late work without  
meeting with some French sentences. It is  
comprised in a finished education; and though  
we may not be able to converse in French,

we should know so much of it as will enable us to read and translate. It would certainly be desirable to understand the Italian and Spanish languages, especially if we intend visiting the countries in which they are spoken. There are many excellent writings in these idioms and a translated work is never equal to the original. - The Latin ought to be known and I think deserve attention, and for those who have leisure it would perhaps be well to study both the Greek and Latin languages; but let them take care in the mean time that no important branch of English Education or any domestic duty be neglected.

A young lady is expected also to have an acquaintance with the French, Italian, History, Astronomy, Botany, Philosophy and Chemistry. Of these the last two are the most important. Philosophy explains many in nature which to one unacquainted with it are mysterious; and the <sup>best</sup> ~~language~~ <sup>method</sup> sometimes is found to make the best discourse. But it is the practical part of the sciences which we are to know. - History is one of the most interesting and instructive studies I know. We are at the same time entertained and improved by the relation of facts which have taken place

years before. There is scarcely any History but  
from which we may draw some useful lesson.  
It shows the evil effects of vice and the  
superiority of virtue. History affords a  
fund of knowledge from which we may  
take topics of conversation, and facts and  
illustrations for writing. Geography and  
chronology form a part of History, for  
of what value would be our knowledge  
of actions and men, unless they were associ-  
ated in our minds, with place and date.

Letter writing is the peculiar province  
of a young lady. She should aim at express-  
ing herself with ease and elegance. Her  
writing should be never so attended to, that  
she takes the beam out of time. I have  
heard it remarked that the character of a  
person could often be told from their hand  
writing. - - -

But works of morality and religion  
it is these which will be found to be of permanent  
utility, and it is these which will continue  
the most to our happiness in after years.

Thine  
John Jay

20/1/18

What branch of study is of most importance in the education of a young lady.

Within a few years female education has received more attention and has undergone a material change. Woman is found to have a mind as well as man. Those studies which were thought too intricate and too subtle for any but the lords of creation, are now open to all. There is however some line of demarkation. Woman is not to take an active part in the affairs of the world, though she is not on the other hand confined to the domestic sphere. The knowledge they are to possess is somewhat different. In politics and all that relates to the professions, they are not expected to be deep, this is also the case with regard to some of the sciences. But they should have such an acquaintance with the circle of polite literature, as will prevent all deficiency in speaking and writing. Of all the languages French I think is the most important. We can scarcely pick up a late work without meeting with some French sentence. It is comprised in a finished education; and though we may not be able to converse in French, we should know as much of it as will enable us to read and translate. It would certainly be advisable to understand the Italian and Spanish languages, especially if we intend visiting the countries in which they are spoken. There are many exceptional writings in these idioms and a translated work is never equal to the original. The Latin next to the French would I think demand attention, and for those who have leisure it

would perhaps be well to study both this and the Greek language; but let them take care in the mean time that no important branch of English education, or any domestic duty be neglected.

A young lady is expected also to have an acquaintance with the sciences, Natural History, Astronomy, Botany, Philosophy and chemistry. Of these the last two are the most important. Philosophy explains many in nature which to one unacquainted with it are mysteries; and the lady chemist may sometimes be found to make the best housewife. But it is the practical part of the Sciences which we are to know. History is one of the most interesting and instructive studies I know. We are at the same time interested and improved by the relation of facts which have taken place years before. There is scarcely any History but from which we may make some useful lesson. It shows the evil effects of vice and the superiority of virtue. History affords a fund of knowledge from which we may take topics of conversation, and facts and illustrations for writings. Geography and Chronology form a part of History for of what value would be our knowledge of actions and events unless they were associated in our minds with places and dates.

Letter writing is the peculiar province of a young lady. She should aim at expressing herself with care and elegance. The hand writing should be much attended to (first take the beam out of thine own eye) I have heard it remarked that the character of a person could often be told from their handwriting. - - -

But works of morality and religion are paramount to all. It is these which will be found to be of most practical utility, and it is these which will contribute most to our happiness in after years.

Ellen Lyon