

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the printer-friendly version of the *SQE Forum* to download and read like a newspaper.

We would like to increase our ability to reach out to the parents of children who are struggling at school. If you know of parents like this – or teachers who would be receptive to research-based information about good teaching methods – please forward this newsletter to them.

Another way you can help is by making a financial contribution. You can do this securely on-line by visiting [www.canadahelps.org/DonationDetails.aspx](http://www.canadahelps.org/DonationDetails.aspx). Or you can send a cheque to Society for Quality Education, 57 Twyford Road, Toronto, ON M9A 1W5. We will immediately send you out a tax receipt – along with our heartfelt thanks.

Regards, Malkin

## IN THIS ISSUE

- **Mail Bag** (letters about reading, math, help for parents, and more)
- **SQE Activities** (shocking revelations about well-paid Ontario educators)
- **Ask Aunt Malkin** (about whether kids should take a gap year)
- **Food for Thought** (an unusual suspect in the crime of poverty)

- **What's New?** (the scoop on the latest educational happenings)
- **The Educational Morass** (the reason nothing ever changes)
- **And now for something completely different** (fun geography practice)

## MAIL BAG

### **Poor Mathematics Outcomes**

I am a mechanical engineer who works in the automobile manufacturing industry. Most Canadians realize that this sector is in trouble, especially in Ontario, but in my opinion they don't realize that the main reason is Canada's lack of intellectual capital. Successful industries need a large pool of well-educated designers and engineers. The "guess and check" approach learned in schools and used by most Canadian graduates is a disaster in the automotive industry. (The designers guess and the customers check.) Their poor-quality cars are most likely to be recalled in the first years because of design errors.

Oakville, ON

### **Help for Parents of Kids Struggling in school**

I found Malkin's book *How to get the right education for your child* very informative. I think she is dead on about why it is so difficult to get a proper education in Ontario public schools. I have recommended this book to everyone in my support group and my clients too.

Kingston, ON

## **National Mathematics Panel**

The National Mathematics Panel recently reported on best practices in teaching and learning mathematics

([www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-factsheet.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-factsheet.html)).

Many of their conclusions are sensible and correct, but they were in error when they said that there isn't much to choose between teacher-centred instruction and child-centred instruction when it comes to normal children. A careful analysis of their own research yields eight positive effects and ten negative effects for the child-centred approach, versus 17 positive effects and two negative effects for the teacher-centred approach. The teacher-centred approach is clearly the better one for all children.

*Quebec, QB*

## **Poor Math Skills**

I share your information with the concerned parents at my after-school "old-fashioned" math skills program. Over the past 15 years, I have continued to see a decline in the math content of the elementary curriculum. Parents bring their children to my centre to ensure they have a foundation in arithmetic/numeracy for high school and beyond.

*Sarnia, ON*

## **Poor Reading Skills**

From my experience, mostly with teaching Gr. 4 - 7 students over many years in elementary schools as a teacher, administrator and Learning Assistance Teacher, I have learned that boys who experience difficulty with reading tend to act out their frustrations and become disruptive in the classroom, which then interferes with other students' learning. Every year becomes harder if their reading delays are not addressed. Boys with below minimal reading skills frequently become behavior problems until they are kicked out of or drop out of school.

*Vancouver, BC*

## **SQE ACTIVITIES**

- Visit [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=10590453966](https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=10590453966) to join the Facebook group "Friends of the Society for Quality Education".
- Visit [www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/sunshine.pdf](http://www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/sunshine.pdf) to be shocked and appalled by our quick study on the huge increase in the number of Ontario educators who earn more than \$100,000 – at a time when enrolment is actually declining.
- Visit [www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/quickstudyApr-08.htm](http://www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/quickstudyApr-08.htm) to read our quick study on the nature of appropriate homework – and its benefits.
- Visit [www.societyforqualityeducation.org/newsletter/archives/reading.pdf](http://www.societyforqualityeducation.org/newsletter/archives/reading.pdf) to learn whether your elementary-age child is reading at grade level.

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT** **An Unusual Suspect**

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Writing about a recent report that the gap between Canada's rich and poor is widening, a *Toronto Star* columnist blamed the usual suspects – the decline of the unions, corporate greed, and the government's failure to protect middle-class jobs. We would like to suggest an unusual suspect – namely, the non-traditional approach used in most modern public schools.

Everyone knows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to do worse in school – they get worse marks, take less demanding courses, drop out of school, and so forth. As a result, they tend to get low-level jobs that pay low wages.

A tidal wave of mainstream, uncontested research has found that modern teaching methods are poison for disadvantaged students – even though these same methods often work

well for students from enriched homes who arrive at school with rich vocabularies and a good fund of general knowledge. These advantaged children are also far more likely to receive help from their parents or tutors as they go along – help that is extremely important, since modern methods leave learning gaps.

Modern methods are like the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead – when she was good, she was very, very good and, when she was bad, she was horrid. Today's public schools increase the learning differences among children and, the higher the grade, the greater the spreading out effect. Today, a typical grade 8 class has children achieving along a continuum from grade 2 to grade 10 or even higher.

Advantaged parents have always been able to ensure that their own children get a good education – either by working the system to get good service for their children (for example, by moving to the catchment area of a good school or arranging for their children to be placed in gifted classes) or by teaching their children at home or enrolling them in private schools.

Public education was not invented for advantaged kids – they have never needed it – but rather for the children of the poor, and in the beginning public schools did a great job of providing poor kids with equal opportunity. Unfortunately, the advent of modern teaching methods has meant that these very children have become public schools' worst victims.

There is no mystery about the best way to provide disadvantaged children with an education that will allow them to succeed in life. It has been done successfully in the past, and it is still being done today at a few lighthouse schools, for example the KIPP schools ([www.kipp.org](http://www.kipp.org)) in the US.

The only mystery is why most educators refuse to use traditional teaching methods with disadvantaged students. Until this mystery can be solved, the gap between rich and poor is likely to remain as wide as ever.

## ASK AUNT MALKIN

*A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has lots of advice. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin, call her at 519-884-3166 or e-mail*

*[mdare@societyforqualityeducation.org](mailto:mdare@societyforqualityeducation.org).*

### Question

My 17-year-old son is graduating from high school this June, and he is thinking he might like to take a year off from school to work. My son says he needs a break and will go on to university the following year. I am quite upset and worried, wondering whether I should try to talk him out of this plan. I'm afraid he will end up not going to university.

Laura, Oakville

### Answer

I'm afraid I don't know of any research on the advisability of taking a gap year or how many students never resume their studies. I don't have strong feelings one way or the other.

To me the crucial question is not whether or not your son should take a gap year – but rather whether you should be trying to influence his decision. If you do manage to talk him out of taking a gap year, there is always the risk that he will not put much effort into studies he's not sure he wants. And, needless to say, you won't be able to stand over him to make sure he does his homework!

My advice is to let your son make this decision on his own. He has had the benefit of 17-plus years of your careful nurturing and teaching, and now you have to trust that you've done a good job. Sure, he will make mistakes – who of us hasn't? – but he will learn and recover and be the better for it.

### Aftermath

After a lot of discussion, and the careful weighing of pros and cons, Laura's son decided not to take a gap year, and to attend university in the fall after all. Laura is of course delighted that he came to this decision.

## WHAT'S NEW?

### Ontario's Unhealthy Education System

Ontario's unpopular health care surcharge turns out to have been imposed to pay for increased education costs, not health care costs. According to Gerard Kennedy, then Ontario Minister of Education, "The premier of the province took a real big hit because he had to raise a health tax to do that (invest in education)."

<http://torontosun.com/News/Canada/2006/03/13/pf-1485429.html> (payment required to see the full article)

### No Substituting for Teachers

Although it won't come as a surprise to most people, it's now official that the more a regular classroom teacher is away, the less his or her students learn. And, of course, teacher absences affect school board budgets as well, as it is expensive to pay for substitute teachers.

<http://k12plus.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/6/>

### It's Your Turn to Speak

CBC is taking an in-depth look at education across Canada, surveying parents and teachers – from outdated teaching styles to crumbling infrastructure. The results of this survey will be compiled into an education series to be aired on CBC television and radio in the fall. [www.cbc.ca/news/schoolreports/](http://www.cbc.ca/news/schoolreports/)

### Shopping for a University?

The Ontario Ministry of Education makes available key performance indicators for every Ontario university. You may find the loan default rates of particular interest.

[http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not\\_secure/Plan\\_grademprates\\_urlsuniv\\_1234.htm](http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not_secure/Plan_grademprates_urlsuniv_1234.htm)

### The Coming Skill Shortage Crisis

The Certified General Accountants Association of Canada is so concerned about the threat posed to Canada's future by shortfalls in workers' skills and learning that they have organized public policy fora around Canada, culminating in a national conference on May 28.

[www.cga.org/Canada/100/ca\\_summit.htm](http://www.cga.org/Canada/100/ca_summit.htm)

## BOOK REVIEW

### The Educational Morass: Overcoming the Stalemate in American Education

By Myron Lieberman

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*Dr. Lieberman is a former union leader, and his writing style is direct, candid, and incisive. His book tries to get at the root cause of the failure of virtually all efforts to reform public education. The excerpt elaborates on Lieberman's thesis that education is in gridlock because no one is in charge.*

#### Excerpt (pp xiii-xiv)

"Education is a morass because several groups have veto power, but no interest group, or coalition of interest groups, controls all of the factors essential to effect either a major reform or a different system. Public education is a highly decentralized public service, buffeted by national, state, and local interests and reported by media that are not up to the task of describing the situation realistically. Understandably, given my outlook, the following pages are highly critical of both liberal and conservative leaders and the think tanks in the business of public enlightenment and those in positions of leadership in public education. Educational literature is replete with scholarly discussions of 'accountability', but the discussions stop well short of identifying anyone who should be held accountable for the educational morass in which we find ourselves."

## AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Here's a fun activity that provides practice in learning where things are in the world, as well as a few extras like national flags and photos of important landmarks.

[www.travelpod.com/traveler-ig](http://www.travelpod.com/traveler-ig)