

# **The Big Kindergarten Test**

## **By John Bachmann**

The very positive recent developments in curriculum and testing will result in maximum benefit to Ontario students only if teachers cooperate with the new ministry agenda. Fortunately, there are signs that teachers, while not happy with the pace of change on the issues, are generally ready to deal professionally with these new challenges.

Underlying the instructional concerns, however, are issues related to the reallocation of resources within the system. On these issues, as formulated primarily in Bill 104, The Fewer School boards Act, the teacher unions are far more intransigent. They have even gone to far as to set up ostensible “parent groups” to do their bidding, sometimes quite effectively, in the media.

If teacher unions think that they can muster significant support for their wage and working conditions demands from a public still suffering from downsizing shell-shock, then they are in for a very large surprise. Now is the time for teachers to assert their position as professionals and leave behind the shackles of an antiquated labour-versus-management mindset. And the place to begin this transformation is kindergarten.

Simply put, we do not need a fully-qualified teacher in every kindergarten “classroom.” Properly-trained child care workers can provide five-year-olds with appropriate care and stimulation. Given even a little training in reading instruction, for example, these workers can teach reading readiness. Non-teacher stay-at-home moms and dads have been doing this effectively for years.

It's time for teachers to admit that they have priced themselves out of some situations (this isn't unique to teachers — when was the last time a dentist cleaned your teeth?) and accept working with paraprofessionals and community volunteers. The acceptance of differentiated staffing in kindergarten and other areas will send a signal to the public that teachers are truly more concerned about the welfare of their charges than about their own pay-cheques and perks.