

FROM THE EDITOR

In response to some readers' complaints about our new format, we have tried to create a version of this issue that is more like the old format. This is the print-friendly version for people who don't like to read the newsletter on their monitor.

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we polled you to find out whether you thought your children received a better education than you did yourself. The results are as follows: 8% thought their children had received a much better education; 8% thought their children had received a somewhat better education; 23% thought their children had received a somewhat worse education; and 62% thought their children had received a much worse education.

This month, we want to know what you think of your local school board. Please help us by visiting www.societyforqualityeducation.org/poll3.htm. After voting, you can tell us all about your local boards' most noteworthy activities by e-mailing mdare@sympatico.ca. We will print your comments in the mail bag section of the next newsletter.

EVERYONE CAN LEARN SCIENCE

By Franlie Allen

Here are some great web-sites for readers who are trying to nurture a love of science in kids of all ages.

http://www.singaporemath.com/Science_s/2.htm sells some great English-language science workbooks and other materials used in Singapore schools (and we all know how well their students do on international tests of student achievement).

<http://letstalkscience.ca> is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising science literacy. It provides interactive curriculum-specific resources and support for teachers.

<http://www.accessexcellence.org> is a site for health and bioscience teachers and learners hosted by the National Health Museum, Washington, DC.

<http://www.aquatic.uoguelph.ca> is an electronic resource allowing the exploration of habitats, animals and plants that comprise Canada's beautiful aquatic environments. Canada's Aquatic Environments was produced by the CyberNatural Software Group at the University of Guelph.

<http://www.creative-chemistry.org.uk/index.htm> was created by Nigel Saunders, Head of Chemistry Harrogate Granby High School, UK. It offers full-colour worksheets and teaching notes, question sheets, puzzles, quizzes, etc. for the study of chemistry.

<http://www.blackholegang.com/html/teacher.html> was created by teacher and author Stephen Kramer, and was designed as a resource for kid-friendly science on the web.

<http://www.tc.cornell.edu:80/Edu/MathSciGateway> is a hotlist of math and science web-sites and resources for K-12 students and educators.

www.2learn.ca/mapset/eazines/ScienceEazines.html offers links to excellent on-line educational e-zines for kids (and educators).

MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Here is some of the feedback we've received since our last newsletter.

Ontario's New Language Curriculum

Have you seen the revised elementary language curriculum? I'm a grade 5 teacher who finds the amount of stuff the government wants us to teach for language to be overwhelming. There's a new strand called "Media Literacy", and much of it seems more appropriate for high school. You should read some of these expectations – they are unreal! Besides this, they are trying to squeeze more time out of the instructional day than there actually is. If teachers have to teach all of this, there will be less time to focus on the rather essential subjects such as reading and writing. Speaking of squeezing time that is not there, they've also taken 20 minutes out of our day this year for daily physical activity. If they really want kids to learn all this stuff, they are going to have to keep them in school another hour a day. *Mississauga, ON*

Mandatory Graduation Goals

As a teacher, I can tell you dumbing down is happening far more than the public knows, just in time for the next election. Did you know that the Ontario Liberals are giving boards semi-mandatory goals as to the number of students they want to see graduating, and supporting their goals by an aggressive advertising campaign? By the way, given the number of different "second chance success" programs available, the term "graduation" can have a number of different meanings and standards. For example, it can be defined as success in life-skills and work-related co-op placements, as opposed to reading, writing and arithmetic. *Windsor, ON*

Public School Fees

As a Manitoban, I read with great interest the article regarding the outrageous fees being charged to BC parents by their public schools. I kept track of the financial requests from our children's two schools over the 2005-2006 school year, because I had found the financial burden onerous. Last year, we spent \$95 for school locker rental, and \$260 for graduation – plus clothing, extra tickets, and fundraisers to "keep the cost down" to \$260 per graduand. Though our minister of education has placed some parameters around school fees, those parameters are not enforced. I have found no public school division policy in Manitoba indicating a restriction on how much money can be requested from parents over the course of the school year. *Winnipeg, MB*

Funding Religious Education

Only three provinces – Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario – maintain a dual system (public and Catholic) and of these, Ontario alone provides no direct funding to registered private schools (religious or secular). I sympathize with the growing number who see Ontario's continued funding of one faith-based school system (Roman Catholic) to the exclusion of all other faith-based schools, as profoundly unfair, particularly in a multi-cultural society that professes to value diversity and in light of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) that re-affirms the principle of fairness. The charges opponents

typically bring against state aid to registered private schools – for example, that they are socially divisive, foster intolerance, practise indoctrination, and pose an economic drain on the public system – are arguably weak; and in the experiences of Alberta, Saskatchewan, as well as BC, Manitoba and Quebec which all provide various levels of direct funding to private schools, these charges have not been borne out. *Regina, SK*

Disconnect Between Elementary and Secondary

I have a friend who put her four home-schooled children back into the system for grades 3, 6, 8, and 10 respectively, after using a traditional method of teaching math (Abeka). The ones in grade 10 and 8 are getting math marks in the high 90s. The teachers are commenting on how well-grounded they are in the basics. The children in grades 3 and 6, however, are having problems, to the point that the school opted to test them to see how far below the grade standard they were. The standardized test showed them to be far above grade level. In talking to the special education teacher, my friend explained that every math question seems to come with a why question, and so she asked the special education teacher why math was being taught this way in the elementary grades but not at the high school level. That floored the special education teacher – she had no idea how math was being taught in the higher grades. I think this is one of the main problems in teaching math in Ontario. There is a disconnect between the two levels of schooling. The elementary panel has no idea what is required for secondary, and no one at the secondary level is providing feedback directly to the feeder schools about how students' preparation could be improved. *Crysler, ON*

The Good Old Days

When my children were in public school, there were no readers, no spellers, no grammar books, no reading aloud, and no memorizing of poetry. The teachers did not require the students to memorize their number facts. I still can't believe that parents put up with this nonsense. *Sarnia, ON*

The Bad Old Days

I received a poor education in during wartime and post-war Britain. This was due to a combination of circumstances, including the fact that many teachers were in the forces. Although my primary education was quite good in the narrow, traditional way, my secondary education was mediocre to poor. For one thing, I hit unlucky with a few crucial teachers, plus my father made a bad choice of school. And I was not a good student, avoiding as much work as possible. In contrast, my four children, generally speaking, hit lucky. We chose a Catholic school for them in Quebec for a few years – strict discipline, direct instruction. Two of them had a lull in elementary school when we moved to Ontario (they were way ahead and one skipped a grade). The high school teaching was generally sound at that time, roughly between 1975 and 1985; the slackness was only starting to creep in from the elementary level and there was still a majority of teachers taking academic success seriously. Three of my children also had first-rate extra-curricular experiences (my own were almost non-existent). *Port Hope, ON*

The Good New Days

My children are receiving an excellent education because they are home-schooled. How do I know? They have scored well on CAT3's and SSAT's. They also seem to have a greater love for learning.

Modern Pedagogy

Under the guise of making things “more interesting”, modern teachers have instead deprived students of the solid grounding that rote learning and memorization used to provide in most subjects. Take math for example. Without private Kumon Math lessons, my daughter would have been incompetent in math. Her school did not even drill the kids in the times tables, for heaven’s sake. Enormous amounts of time were wasted having children reinvent the wheel by “discovering” math concepts for themselves that had taken geniuses ages to discover. Instead of placing the students on the shoulders of these giants by teaching them their wonderful discoveries, our kids were left to wallow around in their own ignorance for far too long. Too much time is spent on social engineering and “save-the-world-feel-good projects”. The curriculum designers and teachers do not seem to grasp that school time is limited and knowledge infinite. According to Statistics Canada, 42% of the population is functionally-illiterate. This should be recognized as a national scandal. The public education system should be dismantled, or at least its gross incompetence exposed and more parents allowed to vote with their feet. Home-schooling, private, or charter schools – none can possibly do worse than the present system. *Toronto, ON*

New Brunswick Education

Having done most of my schooling in Ontario myself, I find the New Brunswick education system to be very behind for my grade 4 son. We were told at the last meeting of my Parent School Support Committee that 70% of the children entering kindergarten in New Brunswick are below provincial expectations. Educators are proud of the fact that by the end of that year only 60% are below expectations. Imagine! *Bathurst, NB*

The Demise of Public Education

High school in the 50’s was pretty good. At Humberstone Collegiate Institute, I learned my mathematics the old-fashioned way, not discovering stuff; yet when I came back to teaching in 1984 (26 years after high school and not having used math formally in all that time), it took me no time whatsoever to consolidate my calculus, which was by then being taught in grade 13. I think that the demise (if that’s the right word) of public education began when the local schoolhouse was merged with other schools into school boards. It got worse when the provincial government became more involved in the process and began deciding how money should be spent – rather than local people who were interested in educating their children properly. I believe that someone educated to a grade 8 level in the early 1900’s is equivalent to someone graduating from high school today. Remember when cashiers could actually give change without consulting a cash register? *Sandford, ON*

Talking to Other Parents

When my husband and I decided to bite the bullet and pay the money to send our son to a private school, it became a very sensitive topic with other parents. People tend to have very different opinions. For quite a few of them, it seems to be more important whether or not their child feels good about school and has fun. Many families have no choices other than the neighbourhood school; so they tend to rationalize that the school is really not that bad and that quite a few children do quite well regardless of teaching methods. Also, a lot of people have low expectations in terms of the skills and knowledge children can and should acquire – since most of today’s parents were taught via child-

centred methods themselves. Pretty much anyone under the age of 40 who went to a Canadian public school would probably have no idea what SQE is talking about. The only reason that my husband and I know any different is because we went to school in Romania. Unfortunately, the education in Romania is now deteriorating, because of corruption and because they are copying methods from the developed world. It's like reading an Orwell book, except you are in it! *Toronto, ON*

EDUCATION BLOGS

Education reform junkies should have no trouble getting their fix, given all the wonderful education blogs around. Here are a few to get you started.

<http://educationwonk.blogspot.com>

This blog reports on interesting education stories from all around the United States— from merit pay for Chicago administrators to Boston University students offering a scholarship for white students only to California parents who had to shower their autistic son's teachers with expensive presents in order to get proper schooling for him.

<http://d-edreckoning.blogspot.com>

This blog has a more philosophical bent, musing on such things as, for example, the unintended, but entirely predictable, consequences of social promotion: student apathy and misbehaviour, and the plight of students who have been flimflammed by teachers who cover up their own incompetence by awarding high marks.

<http://instructivist.blogspot.com>

This blog leans to the satirical side of things. In one case, it zeroes in on the topic of “time-consuming and often pointless projects that not only devour students' time but also rob parents of whatever free time they have”. Then, it riffs on this theme, musing on late-night trips to the hardware store for glue guns and pipe cleaners; Mount Olympuses built out of Cocoa Puffs; and wrecked marriages,

<http://schoolnerdblog.blogspot.com>

This blog is written by a non-believer currently attending a graduate school of education. She has some amusing (and scary) things to say about such things as the social justice assignments, portfolios, and busy work she has to cope with.

<http://www.edspresso.com>

This blog bills itself as “your daily addiction for breaking news, commentary and debate on education reform”. It's one-stop shopping for anyone who wants to keep abreast of the education scene in the US. It includes an opinion piece by Malkin Dare called “Choosing Better Schools”.

FEATURE ARTICLES

A Way to Rescue Poor Kids

By Dave Ziffer

Imagine for a moment that we have a cheap cure for cancer. Now imagine the medical establishment is doing everything possible to discredit the cure and prevent its use, so doctors who treat (but don't cure) cancer can keep their jobs. Imagine millions of patients continuing to suffer and die because nobody—including most doctors—knows about the cure.

This is a picture of something that's really happening in education. But to understand our almost-unknown educational "cure," you have to know about Project Follow Through (PFT). PFT was the world's largest-ever education research project, conducted between 1967 and 1977 by the U.S. Department of Education. Its results indicate there is a replicable, systematic curriculum that dramatically improves the quality of education in poor urban schools – one that can raise poor urban students' test scores to suburban levels.

But almost no schools are using this curriculum, because our educational establishment has effectively suppressed information about it.

Maintaining Gains

PFT's purpose was to maintain the gains made by low-income Head Start students after preschool. Rather than simply funding methods that weren't proven to work, the U.S. Department of Education commendably decided to research which curricula and classroom techniques are effective in improving student performance.

PFT researchers selected 180 low-income urban and rural school districts nationwide in which elementary school performance was at approximately the 20th percentile. Nine different educational models were each allocated to some schools in approximately 20 districts, with the remaining schools functioning as controls.

Students were pre-tested to determine initial performance differences between PFT-model schools and control schools, so the final analysis could compensate for initial variances. At the conclusion of the project, two independent agencies were hired to collect and analyze the data. The results were shocking – but to understand why, you have to understand our education establishment.

Opposing Views

There are two opposing views regarding best classroom practices. In the early 1900s, the prevailing idea was that teachers should thoroughly teach basic skills, which would then serve as the foundation for future learning. But since the 1930s, an alternate view called "constructivism" has dominated. Constructivists believe teachers should "facilitate" children as they pursue their own learning. By the late 1960s, constructivism was a "given" in North American teachers' colleges.

PFT reflected that dominance. Of PFT's nine curriculum models, five were firmly constructivist and three were indeterminate. Only one model – Direct Instruction (DI) – firmly embraced the idea of teaching basic skills.

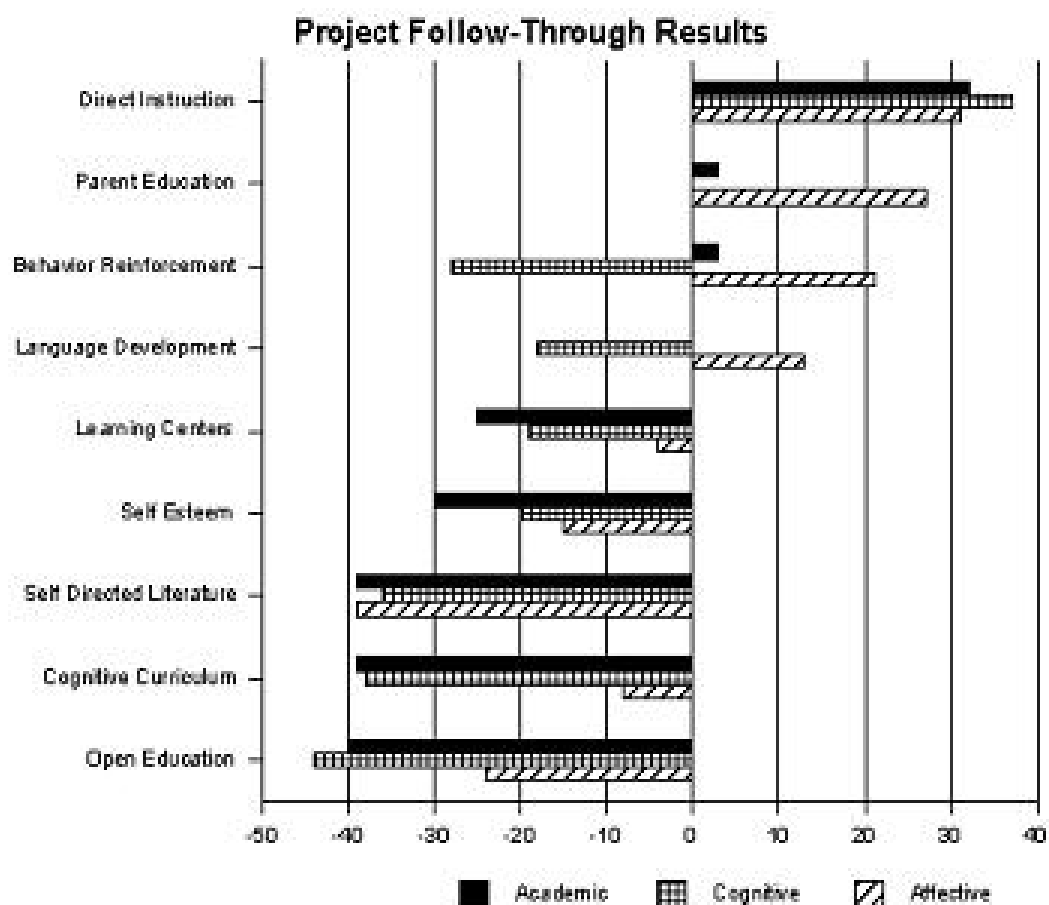
Reducing Performance

Nobody was more surprised than the constructivist curriculum authors when PFT demonstrated two things. First, the basic-skills-oriented DI far outperformed both the control groups and the other models.

Second, the five constructivist-style curricula actually reduced school performance in districts that were already among the lowest performers. DI even outperformed the constructivist models in areas in which they were supposed to excel.

Three tests of success were employed: academic (students' ability to answer questions correctly), cognitive (students' ability to reason for themselves), and affective (students' feelings about themselves).

With names like Cognitive Curriculum and Self-Esteem, the constructivist curricula were supposed to boost higher-order thinking and self-opinion. According to PFT, they actually reduced both.



Note: A missing bar denotes a value of zero.

Hoarding Funds

With an orthodox ideology and billions of dollars' worth of future revenues to defend, the constructivists responded quickly. The Ford Foundation (one financier of constructivist programs) commissioned an unofficial second evaluation, which used abnormal analysis methods to minimize the enormous performance differences.

That evaluation further sought to discredit PFT by claiming its purpose should not have been to compare models but to study how each of the models works (as if any of the constructivist models had actually worked). Other attackers sought to confuse readers with irrelevant statements, attacking PFT and DI because DI didn't agree with the attackers' own preconceived constructivist notions. One critique, for example, said PFT was invalid because the PFT tests were "more appropriate for middle-class populations" – as if it were inappropriate to expect low-income students to do well.

Maintaining the Status Quo

The purpose of these attacks was to prevent a mutiny among the constructivist academics running most university education departments, and to retain control of the purse strings at foundations and in the federal government. The propaganda barrage was successful. The PFT constructivists retained the lion's share of the remaining \$500 million the Department of Education distributed to PFT from 1978 to 1995 – which in part explains why today's classrooms are awash in constructivism.

Since PFT's conclusion, DI has been successfully implemented in many districts, but such uses often end quickly under disturbing circumstances. For example, one Rock-Society for Quality Education, December 2006, Page 7

ford, Illinois elementary school using DI from 2001 to 2003 was showing extraordinary results until a new superintendent was hired. Over parents' objections, the DI program was removed, the principal demoted, and her integrity impugned, ironically because of her apparent success.

The claim was typical: The DI results were so good they had to be the result of cheating. Similar stories have played out in other districts. DI is so un-PC that pro-DI teachers and principals literally risk their careers if they implement it.

Silent Treatment

After the initial barrage of attacks, the constructivists adopted a new strategy: silence. The best news about failure is no news and, unlike their curricula, the constructivists' political strategy works.

You can gauge the success of the campaign of silence for yourself: Ask any teacher or administrator you know about Project Follow Through, the world's largest education research project, and you'll most likely get a blank stare.

Engineering Defeat

Since public schools generally do not fear losing funds due to school failure or parental dissatisfaction, teachers and administrators are free to choose whatever curricula and methods they prefer. This is convenient for constructivist curriculum authors, who are generally also professors at influential teachers' colleges. Constructivist orthodoxy is so dominant today it is almost impossible to get a teaching degree at most schools without openly subscribing to it.

Each year, teachers' colleges crank out thousands of teachers and administrators determined to stamp out successful non-constructivist programs, such as DI, in an effort to ensure the continued flow of billions of dollars of grant money and curriculum sales into programs that are proven failures. PFT's enduring lesson is that people are powerless against the entrenched interests of the education monopoly. Despite our intent to wage a "war on poverty," we have for decades unwittingly financed the engineers of our own defeat.

The only force capable of overcoming our educational dictatorship is the free market. If schools were forced to compete, and if parents were free to choose, entrenched academics would have little say in what gets implemented in our schools – and we wouldn't be spending billions of dollars funding research that teachers and administrators have been trained to ignore.

(Mr. Ziffer (daveziffer@projectpro.com) is a school choice activist who operated a Direct Instruction-based after-school reading program from 1997 through 2002. He has no current financial interest in Direct Instruction. Reprinted with permission from the Oct. 06 issue of "School Reform News", published by the Heartland Institute)

McGuinty Education Report Card

When they ran for office back in 2003, the Ontario Liberals made 25 education promises. Since the premier regards education as so important he wants to be known as the "education premier", and since the Liberals will be seeking re-election next summer, this seems a good time to issue a report card on the Liberals' progress in keeping their education promises.

Promise	Grade	Comments
We will build a strong public education system that supports student success and raises student achievement.	C	We weren't sure how to assess whether the Ontario education system has become better at supporting student achievement, and so we awarded this grade solely on the basis of results on the provincial tests. On the one hand, scores have improved by approximately six percentage points over the last three years, but on the other hand, the tests have become much easier.
We will promote excellence in learning for all Ontario students and cancel tax breaks for exclusive private schools.	A+	The McGuinty team is definitely promoting the concept of excellence in learning for all students. As well, it did keep its promise of cancelling tax breaks for exclusive private schools. It also cancelled tax breaks for non-exclusive private schools, and furthermore, it did so retroactively and as one of its very first acts.
We will bring peace and stability to our schools.	A	We decided to define peace and stability as freedom from teachers' strikes. It seems likely that there will be no teachers' strikes for the next three years, due to the huge salary increases conceded by the government in return for a four-year contract.
Our Excellence for All Plan guarantees that within our first mandate, 75% of our students meet or exceed the provincial standard on province-wide tests.	F	With approximately 63% of students currently meeting or exceeding the standard (an increase of about six percentage points since the Liberals took office), there is no chance that this promise can be kept – no matter how much more the tests are dumbed down.
We will put in place a real cap of 20 students per class in the all-important early grades.	C	In 2006, approximately half of Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes were at or under the government's planned cap of 20 students or fewer.
We will make reading, writing and math mandatory in each teaching day.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will give teachers the tools and the training for excellence.	F	It is still either very difficult or impossible for teachers to receive training in research-based methods. There are few, if any, research-based textbooks on the Trillium List, the government's list of approved texts.
We will make high quality childcare and education available for our younger learners.	F	In awarding this grade, we chose to define "high quality" to mean research-based, especially programs known to improve the academic prospects of lower socio-economic students. In any case, we are not aware of any initiatives to increase the amount of childcare of any kind, high quality or otherwise, in Ontario.
We will enhance the quality of childcare in Ontario by raising professional standards and ensuring they are met.		We decided not to award a grade for this promise, since we didn't understand it. In any case, we are not aware of any initiatives in this area.

We will help the children who need the most help – those with special needs.	F	It's just about unanimous in Ontario that special-needs students are still being badly short-changed.
We will create a meaningful high school diploma program that combines academic achievement and work preparation for students in danger of dropping out.	B	There are pilot programs in 27 school boards whereby students can earn up to two high school credits for such things as building homes with Habitat for Humanity. There are also 159 Student Success Lighthouse projects designed to offer "increased support, extra guidance, and unique learning opportunities".
We will make learning mandatory to age 18.	B	A new law requires students to stay in school until age 18. We awarded a B instead of an A for this promise because there are no consequences for students who leave school before age 18 – except for the tiny percentage of students who end up in truancy court.
We will make sure schools are safe so students can concentrate on learning.	D	The Liberals have funded a number of bullying prevention programs, but it is not clear that anything has changed as a result.
We will help our schools develop good citizens through character education.	D	The Liberals have announced \$2 million in funding "to support character building in schools and inspire students to become caring and contributing citizens".
We believe learning goes beyond the basics (and must include music, art, drama, sports and extra-curricular activities).		We decided not to award a grade for this, since it isn't exactly a promise. However, we are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will create a Lighthouse program so successful school programs can be shared.	C	The Liberals are in the very early stages of a project called Schools on the Move. So far, twenty-three schools have been identified that have showed substantial gains over the past three years, but there hasn't been any sharing yet.
We will not allow any school to fail our kids ... We will monitor school performance to be sure they are making the grade ...	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will offer public school choice, so parents can decide which public school is right for their children.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.

We will treat our teachers with the professional respect they deserve.		We decided not to award a grade for this promise, since we didn't know how to evaluate its fulfillment. We are not aware of any initiatives in this area, unless the Liberals are referring to their cancellation of mandatory professional development for teachers.
We will turn the Ontario College of Teachers into a professional body that sets the highest standards for the profession and earns the respect of teachers and parents.	F	The only action in this area of which we are aware is an increase in the percentage of union representatives on the college, such that the teachers' unions are now in control of the Ontario College of Teachers.
We will not let schools fail because of a flawed funding formula. We will create a fair model to reflect the local needs of diverse communities.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
We will ensure that school boards provide strong local accountability and decision-making.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
We will ensure there is transparency in public education.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
An Ontario Liberal government will ensure that three-year funding can actually be achieved.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
We will establish an independent Curriculum Council to plan and prepare for curriculum changes.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area

What Your Profs Really Think

Off the record, they say many of their students are unprepared to learn.

By Kate Fillion

First, the bad news. Your writing, basic computational skills, and critical thinking abilities are—there's no way to sugar-coat this—abysmal. Math profs grumble about students who pull out a calculator to get the answer to 3×7 . English profs complain about students who can't compose an outline for a four-page paper.

Some say the problem is the high school curriculum, with its emphasis on creativity rather than knowledge. Others, the ones who know Latin, anyway, blame modern society *in toto*. "Video games, TV, the Internet, cell-phones—any kid who's spending several hours a day on those might have been using that time a generation ago to read. They may actually be dumber as a result," muses one philosophy professor at the University of Toronto.

“Evolution doesn’t work that quickly,” contends a science prof at the same institution (for reasons that will become obvious if they are not already, almost all the professors interviewed for this article insisted on anonymity). “The problem is that it’s far too easy to get into university today. We’re seeing students who never would’ve been admitted 20 or 30 years ago, and we’re spending a huge amount of time providing remedial education to them at the expense of the more talented ones.

More Canadians attend university than ever before: in 2005, the number of full-time students climbed beyond 806,000—an increase of nearly 150,000 in just four years. “Many of them have little interest in learning,” says a social sciences professor at the University of Winnipeg. “They’re here because their parents believe a degree is a prerequisite for a good job.” Accommodating all these bodies requires dumbing down course content, according to many professors. Some even admit to helping students write papers because, as the Winnipeg prof puts it, “someone has to show them how to write a sentence, and if I didn’t, they could not complete the work. Unfortunately, we’re not allowed to fail the entire class.”

But despite the chorus of complaints, it’s impossible to prove whether today’s students are, in fact, less well-prepared than their parents were. There’s no Canadian equivalent to the SAT, nor is a longitudinal survey of scores on proficiency tests possible, because “we simply haven’t had standardized testing of post-secondary students across the country or even across provinces” says Paul Cappon, president of the Canadian Council on Learning. However, he points out that annual testing of 14- and 16-year-olds indicates “very stable trends, not much change at all over the past 10 or 15 years” in terms of achievement in reading, writing, math and science. And in recent international tests, Canadian high school students rank significantly above average.

Nevertheless, professors maintain that the current crop of students has a markedly more utilitarian attitude toward education. “I am no longer a teacher. I have become a service provider, and education is a consumer purchase,” reports one professor at Ryerson University. “I am expected to be available in person and online when students need me, and they have little interest in or understanding of, let alone respect for, my scholarly research obligations, for example.”

This sense of entitlement has little to do with learning and everything to do with outcomes. “If they don’t get an A, they ask how they ‘lost’ marks, as though an A is an inalienable right, not something you earn by exceeding expectations,” says one member of the health sciences faculty at Queen’s University. Even more annoying, at least from the profs’ perspective: many students feel quite free to blame the teacher when they bomb a course. This unwillingness to take personal responsibility is particularly galling because profs are, by and large, convinced the problem has little to do with them. “We don’t get any training in teaching or organizational skills,” concedes one U of T humanities professor. “But after a student gets a bad mark and denounces my teaching ability, he’ll often go on to say that really, he would’ve done very well indeed if only I’d had the decency to post my lecture notes on the Internet. Well, the only reason student wants your notes is so he can skip class more often.”

Weeping and harassment via email are, it appears, now standard tactics when seeking better marks. One math prof reported that a student had a full-blown tantrum and threw herself on the floor of his office when he refused to raise her grade. An English prof spoke wearily of “constant email harassment from kids who want to go to law

school, and view their low marks as a problem you need to solve for them.” A criminology prof noted that, not infrequently, such emails have return addresses like sexy-girl@hotmail.com or drunkjock@sympatico.ca, and open with a formal salutation along the lines of “hiya”.

“Since the time of Plato, professors have probably bitched about their students,” says Dr. Ed Barbeau, a math professor who recently retired from the University of Toronto. “The problem I see today, that I believe is new, is that if you really probe, you realize many of them don’t have a firm idea of anything. There’s no bedrock of knowledge.” And yet more than ever before, students are worried about their grades, not least because so many of them are hell-bent on grad school.

Now for the good news, at least for students. Universities are desperate to attract and retain more funding sources (read: you), which creates pressure on professors to inflate grades. All professors, even the self-proclaimed tough markers, said that it is now surprisingly easy to get A’s. For starters, go to class—yes, they do notice when you’re not there—and make a point of debating, disagreeing and otherwise demonstrating that you can think critically. Several profs confided that participation will result in more generous and lenient marking, and that they are sticklers only with students they think are lazy or rude. Feign interest, if necessary: one professor pointed out that many students appear to believe they are watching TV instead of a lecture, and to be under the misimpression that the lecturer cannot see them slumped over the desk, sighing and rolling their eyes. A modicum of professionalism—meeting deadlines, refraining from the urge to blurt out personal information or turn up to class dressed like a pole dancer—is always appreciated. Oh, and one last thing: ask for help before you fail the exam or essay. You might be surprised what your prof has to teach you.

(Reprinted with permission from Maclean’s Magazine, November 13, 2006)

Student Retention

In its November 13, 2006 issue, Maclean’s calculated the percentage of first-year students who return in second year, either full-time or part-time. It also measures the percentage of full-time undergraduates who completed their degree within one year of the expected graduation date. We have reprinted these data below, but added a fourth column, the result of multiplying the second column by the third column – to yield the percentage of first-year students who complete their degree within one year of the expected graduation date.

University	Frosh Return	Sophs Graduate	Frosh Graduate
Western	96.5%	92.8%	89.55%
Queen's	96.6%	91.4%	88.29%
Toronto	95.3%	91.3%	87.01%
McGill	93.1%	92.7%	86.30%
Ottawa	93.3%	91.4%	85.28%
Saint Mary's	91.2%	91.6%	83.54%
Montreal	90.8%	92.0%	83.54%
McMaster	93.7%	88.2%	82.64%
Sherbrooke	95.3%	86.7%	82.63%
Guelph	91.1%	89.5%	81.53%
Lakehead	90.3%	88.0%	79.46%
UBC	90.2%	86.9%	78.38%
Waterloo	90.9%	86.2%	78.36%
Ryerson	90.9%	84.6%	76.90%

Dalhousie	85.4%	89.5%	76.43%
Wilfrid Laurier	89.6%	85.2%	76.34%
York	89.7%	85.0%	76.25%
Manitoba	84.1%	90.5%	76.11%
Laval	94.7%	79.2%	75.00%
Simon Fraser	85.1%	87.7%	74.63%
Windsor	93.0%	80.1%	74.49%
Trent	93.2%	79.6%	74.19%
Acadia	82.7%	89.7%	74.18%
New Brunswick	87.2%	83.9%	73.16%
Brock	89.3%	81.4%	72.69%
Victoria	85.3%	85.1%	72.59%
Saskatchewan	82.2%	87.8%	72.17%
Bishop's	88.1%	81.5%	71.80%
Alberta	85.6%	83.7%	71.65%
Nipissing	86.0%	83.2%	71.55%
Calgary	86.1%	80.5%	69.31%
Carleton	87.2%	79.1%	68.98%
UPEI	82.9%	82.6%	68.48%
Cape Breton	84.0%	80.2%	67.37%
St. Francis Xavier	87.0%	77.2%	67.16%
Laurentian	89.4%	75.1%	67.14%
Concordia	85.3%	74.6%	63.63%
Memorial	84.7%	73.5%	62.25%
Mount Saint Vincent	74.4%	83.5%	62.12%
Mount Allison	83.4%	74.1%	61.80%
Regina	74.6%	80.1%	59.75%
St. Thomas	73.4%	77.9%	57.18%
UNBC	72.6%	78.3%	56.85%
Moncton	80.6%	67.5%	54.41%
Winnipeg	79.8%	60.6%	48.36%
Brandon	71.2%	63.1%	44.93%

Bury Our Heads in the Sand? Not Good Enough!

By Darlene Garnier

Canada is a country comprised of ten provinces and three territories and as many education systems—each unique. There is no national educational system which provides a mechanism for comparing apples to apples or student achievement across the expansive country. Or is there?

How is quality education measured around the world? Possibly, the most consistent and effective instruments involve various forms of standardized testing. They can be used to compare apples to apples.

There are three nationally- and internationally-recognized student achievement assessments which provide data on how well each province is measuring up. They reveal how well each province's students are faring compared to students in all provinces, Canada as a whole, and numerous countries at an international level. In 2003, the Canadian Education Statistics Council carried out a Pan Canadian Study based on three recent assessments targeting 13- to 16-year-olds: TIMSS 1999, PISA 2000, and SAIP 1999.

How are Canadian students performing? Or should the question be—how effective are the education systems in each province that ensure their students have access to quality education? Across the subject areas—reading, mathematics, and science—Alberta

students outperformed students from all other provinces. Not only did they reach this champion ranking, they outperformed students from almost all other countries in the world. For more specific data, refer to the ranking charts at the end of this report.

Many of us have read recent reports that in terms of student achievement Canada is doing relatively well. It's pleasing to know that we have an effective education system. However, what would the results be if we deleted each of the province's results in turn from the national and international analysis? Alberta is number one nationally and at or near the top internationally, while provinces such as Prince Edward Island demonstrate results consistent with 25% of the lowest-performing countries in the world. The majority of the provinces perform at about the same level as the Canadian average or much lower. Thus, what if Alberta's results were taken out of the Canadian performance? What would Canada's standing be internationally?

Alberta is the exception. Why the difference? One might argue Alberta's wealthy economy plays a significant role. That argument holds little water when one takes into consideration student achievement results ten years ago when Alberta was considered, if it was even considered, a have-not, economically-disadvantaged, western province. Student achievement results were still exemplary. It also holds little water when the results reveal that achievement spans all socio-economic levels in Alberta.

Does Alberta spend more on K-12 education? Not according to the national statistics. So what is it? Is it the strong, prairie work ethic? Is it because Alberta offers more publicly funded school choices than any other Canadian province? Is it because parents might play a significant role in their children's education? Is it because of strong, school-level leadership? Is it because of demanding accountability plans, a history of standardized testing, or excellent teachers—or is it simply because of pride in being labeled the champion province? Do the children live up to this label as well?

The possibilities are endless. It would be a breakthrough to isolate the elements that have created champions in education in Alberta and replicate those fundamentals across the country. My direct communications from all provincial ministers of education indicate that all of them think they are doing things right. I propose they are not all doing things right, and in an effort to maintain the pretence, some provinces are systematically overstating their performance, hurting students and communities, and undermining the potential of effective schooling and educational policy.

As long as other provinces are in denial about their students' achievement and lack of education strategies that might assist in pulling up their results, there's little reason to expect a turnaround in underachieving provinces. The end result is that children from provinces other than Alberta are at a disadvantage—today, tomorrow, and for the rest of their lives.

Provincial leaders, communities, and parents have an important obligation to ensure schoolchildren receive a world-class education. How is this achieved? Perhaps, one of the first responsibilities involves setting high educational standards. Provinces should be compelled to develop public policy strategies to eliminate provincial systemic inequities in education and to redesign their public education systems based on universal access to high quality instruction, public choice, high academic standards, and accountability for results. If it's working in one province, it appears there's little reason not to replicate it. Provinces in Canada, other than Alberta, are missing the goalpost.

Reading Literacy Combined Scale as Assessed on PISA 2000

PROVINCE	RANKING WITHIN CANADA	RANKING AMONG 32 COUNTRIES
Alberta	Significantly above Canada	#1
British Columbia Quebec Canada Ontario Manitoba Saskatchewan	Average about the same as Canada	#3 #4 #2 #5 #6 #7
Nova Scotia Prince Edward Island Nfld & Labrador New Brunswick	Average lower than Canada	#14 #15 #16 #24

Reading Literacy Combined Scale as Assessed on PISA 2003

PROVINCE	RANKING WITHIN CANADA	RANKING AMONG 41 COUNTRIES
Alberta	Significantly above Canada	1 (tied with Finland)
British Columbia Ontario Canada	Average about the same as Canada	3 (similar to Korea) 5 3
Quebec Nfld & Labrador Manitoba Nova Scotia Saskatchewan New Brunswick Prince Edward Island	Average lower than Canada	7 11 12 15 17 20 28

PISA MATHEMATICS – 2003 – 15-Year-Old Students

PROV	SPACE & SHAPE		CHANGE & RELATIONSHIPS		QUANTITY		UNCERTAINTY		COMBINED	
	NAT	INT	NAT	INT	NAT	INT	NAT	INT	NAT	INT
Nfld & Lab	7	27	6	17	7	34	6	14	6	18
PEI	10	34	10	29	10	33	10	25	10	30
Nova Scotia	8	28	8	21	8	27	7	17	8	21
New Bruns	9	29	9	23	9	29	9	21	9	24
Quebec	2	10	3	8	3	9	3	6	3	7
Ontario	5	20	4	11	4	15	4	8	4	11
Manitoba	4	18	5	13	5	16	5	10	5	13
Sask	6	24	7	18	6	23	8	18	7	19
Alberta	1	7	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	2
BC	4	14	2	4	2	6	2	3	2	5

Mathematics Problem Solving (SAIP2001) – Ranking Within Canada

PROVINCE	13-Year-Old Students	16-Year-Old Students
Alberta	1	1
Quebec	2	NA
Ontario	3	3
Canada		
Yukon	4	10
British Columbia	5	6
Manitoba	6	2
Saskatchewan	7	5
New Brunswick	8	4
Nfld & Labrador	9	9
Prince Edward Island	10	8
Nova Scotia	11	7
Northwest Territories	12	11
Nunavut	13	12

Estimated Average Performance in Science (PISA)

PROVINCE	2000	2003
Alberta	1	1
Quebec	2	3
British Columbia	3	2
Manitoba	4	6
Ontario	5	4
Saskatchewan	5	7
Nfld & Labrador	6	5
Nova Scotia	6	8
Prince Edward Island	7	10
New Brunswick	8	9

(Dr. Garnier is the Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Canadian Charter Schools Centre. She has a doctorate in educational administration, a master's of education degree, and a bachelor of education degree from the University of Alberta. Dr. Garnier has several years experience as a high school teacher and teacher/administrator at the post secondary level and is the former principal of an elementary charter public school in Calgary and a conventional public high school in Bonnyville, Alberta. She has written curriculum for Alberta Learning, was Coordinator of Practical Arts & Technologies for the Government of the Northwest Territories, and a central office administrator for an Alberta school district.)

Mission Possible by Malkin Dare

In this article, I propose a very simple and doable action for ordinary people who want to improve their public schools. The chain of logic is a bit long though, so please bear with me.

The first link in the chain is that **public schools, due to their monopolistic status, are very resistant to change.** To date, strenuous efforts – including more spending, increased testing, smaller class sizes, mandatory school councils, standardized report cards, longer school years, and new curricula – have resulted in little, if any, improvement. Re-

cent research and the experience in other jurisdictions suggest that increased competition is the only force sufficiently galvanizing to overcome schools' reluctance to change.

The second link is that **the best way to introduce competition into public schools is to make it possible for more families to choose their children's schools**. At present, most children are assigned to a neighbourhood school that is almost indistinguishable from other neighbourhood schools. Relatively few families have the resources to choose better schools, such as independent or home schools. As a result, neighbourhood schools are able to keep most of their students (and the associated funding) regardless of their level of service. When, however, parents are able to choose better schools for their children, neighbourhood schools are forced to offer a competitive service lest they lose students.

The third link is that **provincial legislation is required before it will be possible for enough families to choose a school other than the assigned neighbourhood school**. Such legislation might:

- Bring in open enrollment (that is, parents can choose any public school in their area);
- Permit charter schools, tuition-free public schools operated independently of the local school board, usually with differentiated curricula and educational philosophies;
- Promote magnet schools, public schools offering a specialized curriculum, often with high academic standards, to a student body representing a cross-section of the community;
- Eliminate school boards, since they stifle the development of specialized schools; and
- Grant tax credits for independent school tuition and home school expenses.

The fourth link is that **provincial politicians are not as free to pass this kind of legislation as one might imagine**. Voters have a comfort zone when it comes to public policy, and any politician who strays very far from the public's current comfort zone is unlikely to be elected. Right now in Ontario, for example, the public's comfort zone probably embraces open enrollment, magnet schools, means-tested tuition tax credits, and possibly the elimination of school boards. Consequently, some political parties might endorse these measures during the next election campaign; however, no political party is likely to promise, for example, charter schools – since they are not yet supported by the public

The fifth link is that **before fundamental public policy changes can be made, the public's comfort zone must shift**. If, for example, public opinion shifts to supporting charter schools, then some political parties might pick up on this trend and promise to pass charter school legislation if elected. The stronger the public's backing is, the stronger the political support.

The sixth and final link is that **public opinion is formed as the result of ordinary people talking to each other as they react to events**. This is where you come in. To continue with my charter school example, you could help shift public opinion by talking to your friends and neighbours about charter schools and how we need them. For instance, when you hear someone complain about his child's public school, you can say what a shame it is that Ontario doesn't have them yet. Then you explain what charter schools are and why we need them.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to tell people about the benefits of more school choice of any kind. Most people will respond positively if you emphasize that parents should have the right to control their children's education and that personalized educational options will actually strengthen public schools. More information about the advantages of school choice, including lots of myth-busters, is available at www.societyforqualityeducation.org/school_choice.html. If you are willing to make this modest contribution to school improvement and would like some more pointers, please call me at 519-884-3166.

(Mrs. Dare is the president of the Society for Quality Education.)

The Other Milton Friedman **By Cal Thomas**

The death last week of Milton Friedman, "the grandmaster of free-market economic theory," as The New York Times accurately labeled him, ended a great life. But there was another Milton Friedman many obituary writers overlooked, or mentioned only in passing, that may offer him an even greater legacy than his economic theories about limited government.

In the last 10 years of his 94-year life, Friedman and his wife, Rose, dedicated themselves to school choice. They viewed school choice as a companion to economic freedom. Through the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation they enthusiastically promoted school choice as a means of liberating the poor from failing government schools. Failing schools produced failing students, they reasoned, depriving children of the tools they would need to attain economic independence. Friedman first proposed school vouchers in 1955, but it wasn't until 1996 that he and Rose started their foundation to take advantage of the growing interest in school choice.

Friedman did not fit the stereotype of an economic conservative. He was genuinely interested in helping the poor by giving them a choice of schools that would offer them the best opportunity to escape poverty's cycle. He noted a 1999 National Opinion Poll conducted for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in which 60 percent of minorities support vouchers and a whopping 87 percent of African-American parents ages 26 to 35 and 66.4 percent of blacks ages 18 to 25 favor them.

The main opponents of school choice are the teachers' unions and white liberal politicians who receive their campaign contributions. They mostly send their children and grandchildren to private schools, while condemning minority children to poorly-performing government schools. How's that for "compassion" and a commitment to helping the poor? The poor are helped to escape poverty when they get a good education. Failure to give them what has been called "the last civil right" practically ensures they will remain poor.

The Friedman Foundation's Web site answers virtually every objection to school choice. First, it really is a choice. Universal vouchers would allow all parents to direct funds set aside by the government for education to the school they believe will best serve their child, whether the school is public or private, religious or secular. This separates the government operation of schools from the government financing of them.

Only those who could demonstrate economic need would be eligible for the vouchers, except for parents whose children attend public schools identified as failing. In such circumstances, all parents would be offered vouchers.

Won't school choice hurt public schools by depriving them of needed funds? No, says Friedman. "Public schools pay attention when school choice is on the table." He cites Florida as an example, noting that after a school choice program began, "schools identified as failing are already publicizing their efforts to improve by hiring more teachers, increasing funds for after-school tutoring and lowering class sizes. One superintendent, Earl Lennard, even vowed to take a 5 percent pay cut if his county's schools received a failing grade." In other words, competition works in free markets and in school choice. In Florida, Cleveland and Milwaukee, public schools have received more aid from the state and federal government for their public schools since voucher programs were implemented.

School choice works for the benefit of students, who ought to be the focus of education. Research shows that prior to receiving a voucher, the majority of participating students score well below the national average on standardized tests. Statisticians and educational researchers from Harvard and the University of Houston conducted a re-analysis of the raw data compiled in an earlier study of the Milwaukee school choice program. They found that choice students benefit academically from the program, showing significant gains in both reading and mathematics by their fourth year of participation. And, according to John F. Witte, Troy D. Sterr and Christopher A. Thorn, who conducted the initial Milwaukee study, "the parents of 'choice' kids are virtually unanimous in their opinion of the program: they love it. Parents are not only far more satisfied with their freely chosen private schools than they were with their former public schools; they participate more actively in their children's education now that they've made the move."

If school choice becomes the norm in America, it will be Milton Friedman's real legacy and every poor child who is liberated from a failed government school will owe him a lasting debt of gratitude.

(Mr. Thomas is America's most widely syndicated op-ed columnist and co-author of Blinded by Might. Copyright 2006, Tribune Media Services. Used with permission)

WHAT'S NEW?

Two Taj Mahals for the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

In September 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education released the results of an investigation into a **\$22 million construction cost overrun and questionable corporate card expenses** at the Windsor-Essex Catholic School Board. The overrun was attributed to many factors, including the addition of a synthetic track and a theatre-style cafetorium in both schools. The final tally for the two schools was almost \$80 million.

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/06.10/WECDsBe.pdf

In Memoriam – Milton Friedman

Milton Friedman, 1912-2006, was a Nobel-prize-winning economist who advocated laissez-faire capitalism. Here is what he had to say about public education. "If you look at the role of government in education, there are three different levels. 1. There is the level of **compulsion**: the government says every child must go to school until such and such an age. That is the equivalent of saying if you are going to drive a car, you must have a licence. 2. The second stage is **funding**: not only do we require you to have an education, but the government is willing to pay for that schooling. That would be equivalent to saying the government is willing to pay for your car that you drive. 3. The third level is **operation**: that would be the equivalent of the government manufacturing your

automobile or, to put it in a different image, consider food stamps today. Food stamps are funds provided by the government, but if food relief were to be run like the schools, the government would say everybody has to use these food stamps at a government grocery store and each person with food stamps is assigned to a particular grocery store. Do you think the groceries would be very good?"

All Kids Reading All The Time

The link leads to a BBC broadcast on the use of phonics in West Dunbartonshire, the second-most deprived part of Scotland. Their expectation this year is that they will have **no 11-year-old children unable to read at grade level**. The reading program is Jolly Phonics. http://news.bbc.co.uk/nolavconsole/ukfs_news/hi/newsid_6170000/newsid_6178900/nb_wm_6178986.stm

Hope for the Neediest Children

A recent Fordham Foundation analysis of how well the various states are educating their neediest children shows that some states have made significant gains over the last 10-15 years—California, Delaware, Florida, New York, Massachusetts, and Texas. These states are “national leaders in education reform, indicating **that solid standards, tough accountability, and greater school choice can yield better classroom results**”. www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=363

No-Excuses Schools

The annual Garfield Weston Award for Academic Achievement in Excess of Expectations “recognizes schools that ensure students succeed regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds”. This award **challenges the notion that schools in rich neighbourhoods always do better academically than schools in lower-income neighbourhoods**. www.fraserinstitute.ca/shared/readmore.asp?sNav=nr&id=756

BOOK REVIEW

***Let's Kill Dick and Jane: How the Open Court Publishing Company Fought the Culture of American Education* (St. Augustine's Press, 2006, 161 pages)
by Harold Henderson**

Educational reforms come and go, yet public schools stay the same. Their culture is pervasive and almost invisible, as water is to a fish. Nothing much is going to change until this culture changes, and no one reform can unlock it. Quite the opposite: its anti-intellectual, activity-oriented bias turns reforms that sound good on the 10 pm news into more routines for the 9 am class. For 34 years, from 1962 to 1996, the Open Court Publishing Company sold elementary math and reading textbooks that tried to combat the culture and bring about real school reform. The story of Open Court, as told in this book, help make this culture visible.

Excerpt (pp. 52-55)

“In November 1969, (the Open Court) company issued a formal guarantee. Schools buying Open Court's first-grade textbooks would receive refunds if the books didn't produce the promised results—10% per month of reading proficiency not gained, as shown on standardized tests of the school's choosing....

“Blouke expected guarantees to spread through the textbook industry. ‘Over a period of time, those who don't meet the claims of their guarantee are going to fall by the wayside,’ he told *Reading Newsreport* in April 1970. ‘As school boards increasingly demand publisher's accountability, those that hesitate to stand squarely behind their programs with legitimate guarantees will be conspicuous.’....

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“Open Court’s greater willingness to challenge the education establishment did not save its guarantee from a similar oblivion. General manager Carroll recalls that the guarantee did succeed in ‘grabbing attention’. And the program continued to produce the expected results. The company never had to pay a claim for non-performance, and in the fall of 1972 its guarantee was extended to second grade. But only a handful of small publishers, and no major ones, followed the company’s lead. Any initial impact on Open Court sales did not last.

“‘Our salesmen tell us that the concept of a guarantee by a publisher is counter productive,’ Blouke eventually acknowledged. Teachers and supervisors were said to be ‘offended’ or ‘frightened’ by it. Their response is not as odd as it may seem. If textbooks were to be judged by results, could educators themselves be far behind? The very idea was alien to the education culture. Most educators were comfortable measuring accomplishment by the number of hours or days of school sessions, the number or percentage of students graduated, the number of courses offered—bureaucratic indicators of processes completed, not performance indicators of learning achieved.

“Open Court’s guarantee remained on the books as late as 1975, but it was rarely publicized. It was the most straightforward example in Open Court’s history of Blouke’s initial engineering-style approach to changing the schools—don’t argue, show results, and rake in the sales. But it barely rose to the level of failure. It came and went, leaving few traces in the sales charts or corporate folklore, because what appealed to engineers did not appeal to educators. ‘Something is rotten in the heart of education,’ Blouke reflected, ‘if education is operated solely for the benefit of educators.’ Evidently it would take more than information and promises to turn the culture around.”

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Donations to think tanks like ours are a smart way to leverage charitable donations, since changes in public opinion ultimately result in changes to how governments spend billions of dollars every year. Because we have charitable status, we can issue you a tax receipt. And your donation will have twice the impact, since we have an anonymous donor who has pledged to match whatever funds we manage to raise before the new year. You can make an on-line donation at www.societyforqualityeducation.org/donate.html, or send a cheque to the Society for Quality Education, 57 Twyford Road, Toronto, ON Canada M9A 1W5. Thank you for your continuing support.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Canadian students who think one of their teachers/professors is out to lunch may feel less alone after a visit to these web-sites where students rate their teachers. The site www.ratemyteachers.ca is for secondary school teachers, while the Canadian professors are at www.ratemyprofessors.ca. Clicking on the individual’s name brings up all the raters’ comments, some of which are hilarious: “She hates you already.” “Emotional scarring may fade away, but that big fat F on your transcript won’t.” “Evil computer science teaching robot who crushes humans for pleasure.” And lots more.

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