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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the short version of the *SQE Forum* to read on your monitor. To read the full version on your monitor, click [here](#). To download the print-friendly version, click [here](#).

Any financial contribution you can make to defray our newsletter costs would be gratefully received. You can [donate](#) here. We are pleased to be able to issue tax receipts.

Regards, Malkin

## IN THIS ISSUE

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- Mail Bag (our readers' usual informative and enjoyable letters)
- Web-site of the Month (a link to current Ontario school rankings)
- Ask Aunt Malkin (about kids who misread small words)
- A world first for Scotland (all their kids learn to read)
- Education and Indoctrination in the Muslim World (madrassas)
- Divided by Unison (the paradox of amalgamated school boards)
- What's New? (breaking news from the education wars)
- The best of the OQE Forum (gentle satire on staff meetings)
- Amy's game (the sad story of an autistic child)
- Super Crunchers (a look at how decisions will be made in the future)
- And now for something completely different (precipitous information)

## EVERYONE CAN LEARN TO DRAW

Drawing trains the skill of observation, awareness of relationships of parts to wholes, of spatial relationships and effects of light and shading. Children's drawing often parallels their cognitive development. It makes sense to foster thinking through drawing, which can be fun, challenging and a source of satisfaction and creative expression. [more](#)

## MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Click [here](#) to read some of the feedback we've received this month. [more](#)

## WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature this year's value-added analysis of every Ontario public school on the basis of its students' performance on the provincial tests as published by the CD Howe Institute. Dr. David Johnson, the author of the CD Howe report, was recently awarded the prestigious Canadian Fulbright Scholarship Award to continue his work on the economics of education. [http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/ebrief\\_39scoresupdate2007.pdf](http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/ebrief_39scoresupdate2007.pdf))

## ASK AUNT MALKIN

A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has all kinds of advice to offer. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin, call her at 519-884-3166 or [e-mail](#) her. This month, Aunt Malkin answers Dominique's question about her daughter's reading problem. [more](#)

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### A World First for Scotland

By Tom Burkard

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Dunbartonshire, a very poor Scottish school board announced this year that all of its 11-year-olds entered high school with a reading age of at least nine and a half. A student with a reading age of nine and a half should be able to read a sentence like "Civil servants occupy powerful positions in governing the country's affairs." If Dunbartonshire can teach all its children to read this well, then so can every Ontario school board. [more](#)

### Education and Indoctrination in the Muslim World

By Andrew Coulson

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Militant Islamic schools in dozens of less-developed nations appeal to poor parents because they charge no fees and sometimes even provide free room and board. It may seem obvious that the solution is to increase the accessibility of government schools. However, this leads to a number of other problems, prompting the author to describe a better solution – one that is already working in Pakistan's city of Quetta. [more](#)

### Divided by Unison

By John LaPlante

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Which is more important – community building or educational choice? A controversy in one city in south-central Kansas raises this important question about the definition of a community, and its relationship to education. [more](#)

## WHAT'S NEW?

### Learning Disabilities Can be Prevented

The report of the Second Annual Ontario Research Symposium includes an excellent paper (#2) entitled “Narrowing Achievement Gaps for Children with Special Education Needs”. Among other things, the paper states that “up to 70% of later diagnosed LDs can be prevented with a combination of early screening, progress monitoring, and teaching that is responsive to early emerging learning problems”. [more](#)

### An Ounce of Prevention

Following on from the above item comes news from BC where a UBC researcher has shown that at-risk children can close the gap if they are taught to read by means of a program called “Firm Foundations” (systematic phonics). [more](#) (pp 20-23)

### **Phonics Phobia**

The Toronto District School Board has rejected Remediation Plus, a systematic phonics (Orton-Gillingham) program, on the basis of its “lack of connection to Ministry of Education expectations and its lack of emphasis on reading within a context”.

### Should Children be Drugged?

The Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD suggests that drugs such as Ritalin and Concerta have no long-term benefits and could in fact be stunting children’s development. [more](#)

### Undereducated Educators

A study by Arthur Levine, who recently left the presidency of the prestigious Teachers’ College at Columbia University, reports that American colleges of education are giving PhDs to researchers who aren't qualified to hold a PhD. These people, in turn, are providing the research on which public school policy decisions and teacher training is based. [more](#)

### Competition Works

This 40-minute John Stossel video takes an irreverent look at the American education system, showing what a difference competition makes. The video includes a very interesting section on Belgian schools. [more](#)

### Performance Grouping Works

A Montgomery, Alabama school is having remarkable success in lifting its poor and minority students out of the achievement gap. Among other things, it appears that the school’s success is due to its practice of grouping its students according to their math and language ability for more than half of the instructional day. [more](#)

## THE BEST OF THE OQE FORUM

In the place of our poll, this new feature will showcase one article per issue from the archives. To start us off, here's a little humour from the September 1999 issue on the subject of staff meetings – told from the point of view of a lowly teacher. [more](#)

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Amy's Game:** *The concealed structure of education*

By Roger F. Bass

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This book documents the underlying reasons why some children are so damaged by their schools. Among other things, the author touches on inadequate teacher training, the expensive fads that endlessly cycle through, the poor quality of much educational research, and the problems with testing. The author is so blunt that his book is painful to read, and few will believe what he says – even though most of it is completely accurate. The [excerpt](#) shows why he is so angry.

**Super Crunchers:** *Why thinking-by-numbers is the new way to be smart*

By Ian Ayres

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Written in a lively and engaging way, this book discusses the confrontation between the traditional approach to decision-making (using personal experience and intuition) and the modern approach (analyzing huge data banks). “Data-driven decision making is not revolutionizing just baseball and business; it’s changing the way that education policy, health care reimbursements, even tax regulations are crafted.” The [excerpt](#) follows up on a description of Direct Instruction, a scripted approach to teaching which is stunningly successful, especially with disadvantaged students, but which unfortunately is anathema to the education establishment.

## AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Let's say you're thinking of going for a stroll around the neighbourhood, but you're worried it might begin to rain. If you live in Canada, you can now find out almost for certain if precipitation is in your near future. By visiting [http://www.weatheroffice.gc.ca/radar/index\\_e.html](http://www.weatheroffice.gc.ca/radar/index_e.html) and following the bread crumbs, you can view a radar image that shows whether it's already raining or snowing in the area where your weather comes from. This web-site also allows you to see precipitation patterns three hours ago and then “play” their progress in 20-minute increments, allowing you to be sure which way the wind is blowing.

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