

[DONATE](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[UNSUBSCRIBE](#)

[CONTACT US](#)

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the second issue of our new web-friendly format. These pages contain just a short blurb about each topic. If you wish to read more of a particular item, just click on the title or the word “more” at the end. When you wish to return to this page, just X out of the new window or click the “back” button on your browser.

This is the fuller version of our newsletter – it includes all of our own content, but of course none of the content of the web-sites we link to. You are welcome to print out this version if you don’t like reading it on your computer monitor.

Please tell us how we can improve our newsletter by e-mailing Malkin Dare at mdare@sympatico.ca or telephoning her at 519-884-3166.

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we polled you to find out how accessible independent (private) schools are in your area. The results are as follows: within 1 kilometre – 19%; within 2 kilometres – 4%; within 5 kilometres – 26%; within 10 kilometres – 19%; and more than 10 kilometers distant – 33%.

This month, we want to know if you think your children received a better education than you did yourself. Please help us by registering your vote at <http://www.societyforqualityeducation.org/poll2.htm>. After voting, you can tell us more about your children’s education by e-mailing mdare@sympatico.ca. We will print your comments without attribution in the next newsletter.

ALL KIDS CAN LEARN MATH

Here is our list of web-based resources to help with math instruction.

Curriculum Materials

<http://www.jumpmath.org> (grades 3-6)

<http://saxonpublishers.harcourtachieve.com/en-US/saxonpublishers.htm>

<http://www.mathusee.com>

<http://www.singaporemath.com>

<http://www.citycreek.com> (math facts the fun way)

For kids: On-line practice and games, etc.

<http://www.mathmastery.com/cyberchallenge>

<http://oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/education/projects/webunits/math/sport.html>

(middle/secondary – extensions and applications for sports-minded students)

<http://www.gomath.com/game.html>

<http://www.funbrain.com>

<http://www.mathplayground.com>

<http://www.aaamath.com>

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/careers/aa/lessons/math.htm>

(middle/secondary – extensions and applications)

<http://math.rice.edu/~lanius/Lessons>

For Adults: Articles and resources of interest

<http://www.weaponsofmathdestruction.com> (check out the cartoons!)

<http://www.nychold.com>

<http://math-and-reading-help-for-kids.org/index.html>

http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/fall2005/bond.htm

(whole issue devoted to math)

<http://www.mathematicallycorrect.com>

MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Read some of the feedback we've received since our last newsletter – charter schools – medical training – testing – Asian private schools – IPRC's – and more.

Religious Private Schools

It's very unfortunate, but in my area the only private schools are religious ones. If it were our religion, it would be great! When we lived in Asia, I had the experience of sending my kids to private schools. They were wonderful schools – competition makes such a difference! If I had it to do over again, I would have convinced my husband to stay in Asia. Little did I know at the time how bad it is for children in Ontario! *Sarnia, ON*

Not Enough Canadian Medical School Places

Our eldest graduated with very high marks in health sciences from McMaster, but he had to go to Australia to continue his medical degree. There were ten times as many well-qualified applicants at all Ontario medical schools as there were spaces. There is a large contingent of Canadians in Australian universities for this reason. The only trouble is – it costs \$50,000 a year. *Brampton, ON*

Charter Schools Independent -- but NOT Private

I was struck by the interchangeability of the terms “independent” and “private” in your last newsletter. Although all private schools may be independent schools, all independent schools are not private. Charter public schools are certainly independent – but they are not private! *Kelowna, BC*

Media Bias

It's just great that SQE is getting information out to the media. I wish you could do something about the blatant lying about test scores – the public needs to know that our children aren't doing any better. I was speaking to a friend who has retired to BC. She was born in Europe and, for job reasons, lived for decades all over the world. Her take on Canadian media coverage is that it is so very left-leaning that one simply can't get at the facts. She was referring in particular to the last teachers' strike in BC. It is small wonder the public is so unaware of the extent of “dumbing down” that has been inflicted on the Ontario tests. *Sarnia, ON*

Spin Delays Honest Feedback and Prevents Improvement

Our local school board spins its poor test results by focusing on “continuous improvement”, as in “our schools are improving and that's what matters to us”. Another bogus – “look how hard we are working and look how much we care and look at everything we're doing for the kids, etc.” Later on, however, the kids are getting the feedback that counts – i.e., finding out what they actually can and can't do. Their parents often end up paying crippling university fees for courses their children can't succeed in – or courses that have to be dumbed down. Meanwhile, the corner-office folks keep repeating “everything for the best in the best of all possible worlds”, while the well-intentioned teachers just keep going around in circles. *Guelph, ON*

Much Special Education Money Wasted

In the initial stages, IPRC's can facilitate appropriate placement and intervention for children. However, after that the bureaucracy tends to take over. On numerous occasions, we have sat around a table with principals or vice-principals from our school and other schools, special education consultants, local special education resource teacher, and our child's teacher. All this just to determine whether we should continue the present arrangement! Now do the math for the salary costs to the taxpayer for each hour-long session. Fortunately, our school board has moved to a more sensible format for repeat business whereby we are allowed to complete a form that waives an IPRC meeting if we wish the placement to continue. Special education funding appears to be a bottomless pit of invisibility. For example, last year our school board gave laptops to several children in our school, along with eight hours per student of training. Unfortunately, no training or support ever materialized, nor any accounting for the earmarked funds. I am glad that people like you are shaking up the system. *Barrie, ON*

New SQE Forum Format

I must say that I really didn't like the last newsletter and new format. The style reminds me of modern-day teaching - give the students all sorts of references to look for information and leave it at that. I value the work you were doing as editor. You cut down my workload by previewing all the submitted articles and then printing only the most relevant.

Having to run around the Internet looking for the referenced articles will, I believe, make your newsletter less effective. Your readers would have to be very motivated in order to get information. Flipping through your old newsletter was easier and more efficient. *Toronto*

CANADIAN SCHOOL RANKINGS WEB-SITE

Schools vary enormously in their effectiveness. Instead of automatically sending their kids to their neighbourhood school, parents should first investigate its effectiveness. Most Canadian public and some independent schools are ranked at <http://www.fraserinstitute.ca/reportcards/index.asp?snav=rc>.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Those Clever Alberta Red-Necks

This *Economist* article states that “over the past 30 years Alberta has quietly built the finest public education system in Canada”, while “elsewhere in Canada, especially British Columbia and Ontario, dissatisfaction with public-school standards is increasingly driving parents to pack their children off to private schools.” http://economist.com/world/la/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7945805

But What if They Can't Read?

This American Federation of Teachers article criticizes the common practice of setting aside a chunk of time every day for children to read silently, the goal being to improve reading fluency. But struggling readers need “modeling, repeated reading, and feedback”, not benign neglect. And even when it comes to good readers, teachers should beware of overdoing silent reading – since reading fluency is only one of the key components of reading. http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer06/fluency.htm

An Ill Wind

Hurricane Katrina may have been an ill wind, but it is now blowing lots of good for the children of New Orleans. Prior to Katrina, the city's public schools were already drowning. Because the New Orleans Public School Board was unable to move fast enough to re-open many schools, dozens of charter schools have sprung up to fill the vacuum. The public school board now operates only four schools. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/3853057.html>

[Contracting for Better Education](#)

The author is a Canadian who lives in New Zealand. He suggests that Canadian policy-makers consider alternative delivery mechanisms like those widely used in other parts of the world. One example is contracts with private schools to enroll students at public expense where there is a shortage of space at public schools. In the Philippines, there are nearly 400,000 students in such a program. <http://www.fraserinstitute.ca/admin/books/chapterfiles/Sep06ffLarocque.pdf>

[Math for Dummies](#)

Almost everyone knows that Singapore students do exceptionally well in math. But few people realize that math is taught in English in Singapore and that their textbooks and workbooks are available for use in Canadian schools. These materials feature the sequential mastery of skills that build on previously-acquired skills. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/3853357.html>

[Reading for Their Lives](#)

Despite the horrible consequences of not learning to read in grade 1, more than a third of Canadian children are being allowed to reach the end of grade 1 without learning to read properly. Even though almost all children can become good readers if they are taught properly, most grade 1 teachers are not using best practices.

Children who can't read by the end of grade 1 are statistically very unlikely ever to become good readers. As such, they are more likely to drop out of school before graduation and much less likely to attend university. They are also much more apt to turn to crime and drug abuse and, in the case of the girls, become single parents. All of this in turn affects such things as their future earnings and how long they will live.

Despite these well-known and uncontested facts, year after year more than a third of Canadian children are being allowed to reach the end of grade 1 without learning to read properly.

If more than a third of seven-year-old Canadian children were on the verge of starvation, there would be a public outcry. Yet most people appear to be okay with the intellectual starvation of hundreds of thousands of children every year.

It must be that everyone thinks that a third of all kids are *unable* to learn to read. But this is completely wrong.

In fact, virtually everyone is capable of becoming a good reader. Here is a quote from well-known educator and professor of special education at the University of Oregon, Siegfried Engelmann. "During the years I have worked with kids and teachers, I have never seen a kid with an IQ of over 80 that could not be taught to read in a timely manner (one school year), and I have worked directly or indirectly (as a trainer) with thousands of them."

Professor Engelmann famously offered \$US1000 to anyone who could produce a student whom he couldn't teach to read in one year. He still has his money.

If Professor Engelmann is right that all children can be taught to read by the end of grade 1 at the latest, then why are so many students falling by the wayside? The answer can essentially be found in the difference between the way that Professor Engelmann teaches children to read and the way most Canadian schools teach.

Professor Engelmann maintains that good teaching is a matter of clarity and precision and careful sequencing and practice and feedback. He has developed a teaching approach based on direct instruction. Direct instruction programs break learning down into tiny steps and ensure that no student goes on to the next step in the sequence until he or she has mastered the present one.

Most Canadian educators find Professor Engelmann's approach too impersonal and teacher-directed. They tend to believe that good teachers are charismatic and spontaneous, that children learn best when they are highly motivated and engaged, and that methodical teaching approaches will stifle children's natural creativity and ability to solve problems. However, there is no evidence for their beliefs.

At Kobi Nazrul, a British school in the slums of London, England, the teachers use meticulous, fast-paced, and precise instruction, through carefully organized, highly- engaging activities that leave nothing to chance, no room for confusion. These teachers monitor their students' progress carefully and intervene immediately as soon as a student starts to fall behind. The intervention includes a great deal of extra practice and feedback, but no "special programs" or ability grouping.

Kobi Nazrul students are not easy to teach. Only a few of the mostly African and South Asian students at this school speak English at home. Well over half qualify for free meals. If the children at Kobi Nazrul can be taught to read and write, then surely Canadian children can too. Every child at this school can read English with enthusiasm and understanding by the age of seven. Year after year. Every child.

This should be the birthright of every single Canadian seven-year-old as well.

(The author, Malkin Dare is a former teacher. She currently tutors struggling readers in Waterloo, Ontario.)

WHAT'S NEW

[Do Private Schools Result in More Racial Segregation?](#)

The answer is a resounding NO, according to a recent survey of the research on segregation in American public and private schools. It turns out that "private schools have a much greater potential to desegregate students because they break down geographic barriers, drawing students together across neighbourhood boundaries." <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/segregation.pdf>

[Free School Lockers in BC](#)

The BC Supreme Court has ordered a stop to the widespread practice of charging user fees in the province's public schools. Prior to the ruling, BC parents were paying out an estimated \$15 million in fees. For example, the North Vancouver school district charged a \$40 - \$60 student fee, which included the use of a locker, and a graduation fee (up to \$45). In Alberta, the Calgary Board of Education forwards the names of non-paying parents to a collection agency.
http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20061002/bc_school_fees_061002/20061002?hub=Canada

[Flunking Can Be Good for Kids](#)

A number of states and school districts, including Florida, Texas, Chicago, and New York City, have tried to curtail social promotion by requiring students to pass standardized tests before they can be promoted to the next grade. A new study of Florida students finds that retained Florida students made significant reading gains relative to the control group of socially-promoted students.
http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/cr_49.pdf

[Sensational New Secrets of Successful Schools](#)

The Holy Roman Empire was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire. Likewise, the success of two Baltimore schools turns out to be due to non-secrets that are neither sensational nor new. The Abell Foundation reports that these schools succeed because, for example, they focus heavily on outcomes; have a longer school day; follow clear and powerful visions; their principals have authority to make staffing and curriculum decisions. Nothing new here – except that so few public schools take advantage of this knowledge!
http://www.abell.org/pubsitems/ed_failing_middle_906.pdf

[Preschoolers on Ritalin](#)

In response to an attempt by the drug industry to expand Ritalin use to younger children, the National Institute of Mental Health looked into its safety for children under six years old. It found that preschoolers are more likely than older children to develop side effects, and close monitoring is advised.
http://www.medbroadcast.com/channel_health_news_details.asp?news_id=10923&rss=67&rid=999999&channel_id=1050&rot=3&rating=5

[Kids who are Confident About Their Math Ability – Shouldn't Be](#)

“Happiness is over-rated”, according to the author of a Brookings Institution study on the relationship between students' confidence in their math ability and test scores. It turns out that the countries with the best math scores have the least confident math students.
http://brookings.edu/gs/brown/bc_report/2006/2006report.htm

SQE ACTIVITIES

[SQE in the Media](#)

Doretta Wilson taped a PODcast interview which will air some time in late November on TVO's new web-site for parents. A PODcast is an audio broadcast that people can listen to on their computers or download onto their digital audio players (for example, iPods). To access the interview, go to <http://www.tvoparents.com> and find the PODcast link (not until after November 13).

[Donate](#)

Because the Society for Quality Education receives no government funding, our existence is completely dependent upon our supporters' financial assistance. This year, our principal donor drastically reduced our funding because of shortfalls in their investment revenues, and we need to find additional funding in order to carry on our day-to-day operations.

If you can make a contribution, we would be very grateful. Either visit www.societyforqualityeducation.org/donate.html to make a donation with your credit card, or send your cheque to Society for Quality Education, 57 Twyford Road, Toronto, ON Canada M9A 1W5. Thank you for your continuing support.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Because we education reformers tend to be too serious, we're providing a link to the education humour page of the Illinois loop. Visit <http://www.illinoisloop.org/humor.html> for a bit of relief from all this anguish.

[DONATE](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[UNSUBSCRIBE](#)

[CONTACT US](#)

The Society for Quality Education is non-profit, non-partisan, and non-sectarian. Our charitable number is 85857 5087 RR001. Views on different aspects of education are many and varied. This publication contains opinions and theories from a variety of sources. The SQE executive does not necessarily subscribe to or advocate all or any of such opinions or theories, and readers are invited to reach their own conclusions.