

FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the print-friendly version of the *SQE Forum* to read on your monitor.

Highlights in this month's newsletter include information about a book that says **IQ's are for stupid people**, resources to **improve students' organizational skills**, new information on **whether students should repeat a year**, and a web-site that predicts **who will win the Ontario election**.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to others. We would like to extend our reach.

Regards, Malkin

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Although last month's survey provided too few respondents for the results to be statistically significant, we thought you'd be interested to know that about half of the respondents supported funding faith-based schools to some extent, a quarter disagreed because they don't agree with segregating children by religion, and the rest didn't support funding faith-based schools without funding for all private schools. Actual results are at <http://nupolls.com/result/35862>.

This month, we are asking for feedback about SQE's newsletter. Please visit <http://nupolls.com/result/35862/> to tell us what is important to you in our newsletter. We will print some of your comments in the next newsletter.

SQE ACTIVITIES

- SQE's video, *Charter Schools: Alberta's Best-Kept Secret*, is now available for viewing on YouTube in three parts.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjWpqmaiNoI

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhEvfbsFfoQ

www.youtube.com/watch?v=32sWH6NoB1s

- SQE recently published quick studies on the myths of Ontario education reform (www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/quickstudy1Sept-07.htm) and funding faith-based schools. (www.societyforqualityeducation.org/media/quickstudy1Sept-07.htm)
- The C.D. Howe Institute's report on school choice, *Breaking Down Monopolies: Expanding Choice and Competition in Education*, was published on October 4, and is available at www.cdhowe.org/pdf/backgrounder_105.pdf
- SQE's executive director, Doretta Wilson, recently made a presentation to the Toronto District School Board's School Community Safety Advisory Panel. SQE recommended that parents be empowered with school choice in order to get a safer environment for their children.

EVERYONE CAN BE WELL-ORGANIZED

Many students/people have the potential to do well in school/life but lose marks/effectiveness because of their lack of organization. Here is a list of web-sites with tips on ways to become better-organized.

Nice tip sheet for parents:

<http://www.parenting-ed.org/handout3/Parental%20Involvement/Organization%20Handout.pdf>

Tutorial for students:

<http://academic.scranton.edu/departement/ctle/tutorials/organizational/>

How parents can help:

www.hellofriend.org/parents/organizational.html

www.ldonline.org/article/108

Organization and memory strategies:

http://addadhd.suite101.com/article.cfm/teaching_the_adhd_child_part_11

Using a day planner:

www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/adhd-organizational-skills.shtml

Organizational skills for teens:

http://youthdevelopment.suite101.com/article.cfm/organizational_skills_for_teens

Need to de-clutter your OWN life? Humorous and practical advice abounds at this site:

<http://flylady.com/>

MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Here is some of the feedback we've received this month.

Comments on Funding Faith-Based Schools

- There is evidence from the US that people do not interact unless there is a common bond (e.g., military). This tells me that in Canada public schools are the key training ground for democracy. This is the highest value. The comment on creationism sealed it for me.
- The previous Conservative government destroyed the education system. I am for the total amalgamation of all school systems, providing comparative religion classes within this single system. Faith should be taught and funded by the churches.
- The vast majority (93%) of Ontario's faith-based schools have been fully funded for decades, with good results. Extending equal treatment to the small excluded minorities will be consistent with a beneficial trend to provide more choice in public education.
- Let parents vote with their funding on where to send their children to school - a voucher system would give more lower-to-middle class parents the option of private school for their children and help improve the public school system through competition.
- I have worked in many faith-based schools that have struggled to survive with low tuition, because they have met the needs of working class families, and can only say that it's time to stop the discrimination and injustice.

Book Tips

- There's an excellent book on home-schooling called *The Well-Trained Mind: A guide to classical education at home* by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer. It has been a tremendous resource for me this summer as I worked with my children. Among other things, it lists a fantastic collection of books and audio recordings which can be used to supplement the education supplied by public schools. *Toronto, ON*
- One of my ex-students told me about *The Underground History of American Education: A schoolteacher's intimate investigation into the problem of modern schooling COMPLETE AND UNEXPURGATED!* The author approaches education from a more libertarian perspective (he's advocating for a private system). His ideas on the subject are very thought-provoking. *Toronto, ON*

Reading Progress Report

My grade 1 daughter and I have now been using the free SQE reading program *Stairway to Reading* for a month and I wanted to bring you up to date on our progress. We will start lesson 21 tomorrow, and Marie is doing extremely well. She's reading very comfortably at 2.8 grade level and we are into our second chapter book (a *Magic Tree House* since she likes those stories). I think she's jumped 7-9 months in reading level in one month. Also her decoding skills are getting very accurate and faster and she now instinctively will try 70-80% of the time to sound words out instead of guessing, and she sounds them out quickly and well. That part is extremely impressive, considering how strongly reluctant she was before. This month she's been diagnosed with ocular motor dysfunction (she already has accommodative esotropia and amblyopia). She has saccadic eye movements and focusing issues. I took Marie to the optometrist, as she had told me of "letters dancing/jumping" and I had also noticed constant lines/words skipping and breaks in her reading for no good reason (turns out she had lost her place and was looking for it). Last Friday, we received her new lenses with prisms added into them. The change there was immediate in coordination (she had a soccer practice and game) in her everyday life. I also had Marie read to see if I could see a difference. I did keep the index card on the line

though. She read exactly as before but so much faster that I had trouble keeping up with the index card. I had no idea she would ever be able to read so fast. *Plano, TX*

Educational Blogs

There are some great educational blogs (like www.d-edreckoning.blogspot.com, www.parentalcation.blogspot.com, and www.kitchentablemath.blogspot.com. These three are all good parent sites, very content-rich. Also, look at "Heroes are not Replicable" at www.marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/data_source/.

Funding Faith-Based Schools

I'm puzzled that few commentators on the "funding faith-based schools" proposal have pointed out that it's just a halfway implementation of the charter schools idea – which can SAVE more money than the faith-based option, as well as being fairer and avoiding the question "What is a religion?" After all, scientology was able to claim the privileges of a religion for quite a few years in the US. *St. Catharines, ON*

WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature the Illinois Loop (<http://www.illinoisloop.org/index.html>). This site is designed for parents who want to learn more about what's going on in their children's schools and what they can do about it. There is a great deal of information about practical matters like desk arrangements, math issues and battles, and semestered high schools, all presented in a very readable format. There are many personal stories, as well as a humour section. We especially like the math page – check out "Mindful of Symbols: Educational Ramifications" in the "Do Manipulatives Make Math Harder?" section – not quite halfway down the page.

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 at mdare@societyforqualityeducation.org.

This month, Aunt Malkin answers Heather's question about a teacher going on maternity leave and leaving her students high and dry....

QUESTION

My daughter's grade 6 teacher (who is a good sort) went on maternity leave on September 21. I don't understand why the teacher started the school year, as the whole thing is very disruptive to the students. Furthermore, I gather that the school administration has not yet interviewed any occasional teachers to fill the position – even though there's only a week to go until the teacher's departure. Please note that our principal won't even look me in the eye, let alone talk to me, while our school trustee is uninvolved and impossible to reach. Any suggestions for a plan of attack or do we have to just wait and see?

Signed, Heather in Mississauga

ANSWER

This is the answer I sent to Heather in early September. At the end of my answer, I reveal how it all turned out....

First of all, you should be aware that the reason your daughter's teacher opted to work for the first couple of weeks of the school year despite the disruption to the students can be found in her contract. In many school boards, including Peel, teachers have a contractual reason to work for a few days in each school year.

If you want to know where to point the finger, blame central planning, teachers' unions, school boards – all the unnecessary apparatus of big bureaucracies. If none of this existed and, like in the old days or at modern-day private and charter schools the principal was in charge of the school and could hire the staff, there would of course be no issue.

The reason that the school administration had not yet interviewed any occasional teachers was that no occasional teachers had yet applied for the position. The Peel board's "reorganization day" on September 17, when no students attend school so the board can move its teachers around and finalize all of its permanent positions, meant that all the unemployed teachers were waiting to see if they could snag a permanent job, as opposed to a one-year maternity leave position.

Once again, the culprit is the huge system with its myriad rules and regulations. The impersonality and randomness of the process is really nobody's fault – except existing governance arrangements that most people accept unquestioningly.

So, what to do?

Since the only approachable person in the entire scenario appears to be your daughter's teacher, your only option may be to try to work out something with her. As to what you can reasonably expect to achieve, I suspect the most you can ask for is a few days of hand-over, during which both teachers are together in the classroom to ensure a smooth transition. Of course, this would require extra funding, unless the present teacher would be willing to donate her time for the sake of the students (you never know). If not, you would have to throw yourself on the principal's mercy to find the money.

This solution assumes that a long-term occasional teacher has been hired by September 21. If this is not the case, and it begins to look as if your daughter's class will be subjected to a long parade of short-term teachers, you might want to consider your options.

In my book *How to Get the Right Education for your Child*, I discuss what alternatives parents have to unacceptable situations in the present school. These range from seeking a transfer to a different class, to another public school in the same board, to a public school in a different board, to a private school, or to home-schooling. I would be happy to discuss these options with you at greater length on request (or send you a copy of my book).

Post Script

Here's how it turned out. A long-term replacement teacher was hired just in time and duly started teaching on September 21, supported by an outline of the year's work prepared by the former teacher. Heather's daughter is very happy and excited about her new teacher and her classroom program. Heather looked the teacher up on the Ontario College of Teachers' web-site, finding that she had graduated this past spring from an impressive educational institution with a strong science background. And, at her request, I sent Heather a copy of my book.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Advancement

Promoting the end of social promotion

By Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters

Should the grade-level a student is in be based entirely on how old he is or at least partially on how skilled he is? This is the fundamental question underlying the debate over social promotion — the practice of moving students to the next grade regardless of whether they have acquired the minimal skills covered in the previous grade. Advocates of social promotion suggest that it is best to group students by age rather than by skill. Students who are held back a grade are separated from their age-peers and, the argument goes, this social disruption harms them academically. Opponents of social promotion favour requiring students to demonstrate minimal skills on a standardized test before they receive automatic promotion to the next grade.

Until now the bulk of the research favored social promotion. Most studies found that students who were retained tended to fare less well academically than demographically-similar students who were promoted. The problem with this previous research is that it was never entirely clear whether retained students did worse because they were retained or because whatever caused them to be retained led to worse outcomes. This is especially a problem because these previous studies examined retention based on educator discretion. If teachers decide that one student should be retained while another demographically similar student should be promoted, they probably know something about those students that suggests that the promoted student has better prospects than the retained student. When researchers match students on recorded demographic factors they cannot observe or control statistically for what a teacher saw that led that teacher to promote one student while retaining the other.

But in a new study we conducted for the Manhattan Institute that avoids the pitfalls of earlier research, we find that holding low-performing students back helps them academically. We examined a policy in Florida that required grade 3 students to perform at a certain level on the state's reading test to receive an automatic promotion to grade 4. Students who performed below the re-

quired level and repeated third grade made significantly greater academic progress than similar students who were promoted despite their lack of skills. The benefit of being retained grew so that by the end of the second year the retained students entered grade 5 knowing more than the promoted students did leaving grade 5 — this despite the fact that the retained students had not yet been exposed to the grade 5 material.

Of course, the key question is how do we know that we are comparing similar students when earlier researchers had so much difficulty making apple-to-apple comparisons? We are helped by the fact that retention decisions in Florida were based on the adoption of an objective test requirement rather than educator discretion. This allowed us to pursue two strategies for making apple-to-apple comparisons. First, we could compare the academic progress made by low-performing students the first year the requirement was adapted to the progress of similarly low-performing students the year before the policy was put in place. These two groups hardly differed except in the year in which they happened to be born. Whether students in these two cohorts were promoted or retained did not vary according to unrecorded qualities that informed a teacher's decision, but by whether they happened to be born in one year or another.

Second, we could compare the academic progress of students who were barely above the minimum test score (almost all of whom were promoted) to the progress of students who were barely below the required test score (most of whom were retained). Since there is some random error in testing, students barely above the testing threshold are hardly different in their academic ability from those barely below the threshold. The luck of answering one more question correctly might be all that distinguishes students in the two groups. So, the two groups would be very similar but one was likely to be retained while the other was not. Again, this allowed for a very nice apple-to-apple comparison.

Whichever way we looked at it, the result was the same: retained low-performing students made significantly greater academic progress than promoted low-performing students. Of course, this study does not definitively prove that test-based retention is beneficial. For one thing, researchers using similar methods analyzing a similar program

in Chicago found that retained students fared no better or slightly worse than promoted students. There are important differences between how test-based promotion was implemented in Florida and Chicago that could explain these different results.

The point is that we have strong evidence from Florida that test-based promotion requirements can significantly enhance the achievement of low performing students. If those positive results continue and can be replicated in New York or Texas, where similar programs also exist, we may have to rethink the widespread idea that students have to be grouped in grade-levels by age rather than by skill level. Perhaps more students will benefit by being taught at a level appropriate to their skills. And perhaps school systems will be motivated to ensure that students acquire the required skills if they can't simply pass students along regardless of their achievement.

(Jay P. Greene is endowed chair of education reform at the University of Arkansas and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, where Marcus A. Winters is a senior research associate. They are authors of the book Education Myths. Reprinted with permission from National Review Online, September 13, 2006)

Where Have All the Engineers Gone?

Technical thinkers are the leaders of tomorrow and Canada isn't producing enough of them
By Gwyn Morgan

It's back-to-school weekend. Parents across our very fortunate country are readying their kids for another step in the educational journey that will ultimately determine their future. Collectively, the course choices made by this crop of students will also determine the future of our country.

Unfortunately for both the individual student and the future economic success of our country, too few are choosing a robust suite of math and science courses. For students, this means a myriad of challenging and fulfilling careers are already being closed off by choices made in the very first year of high school. For our country, it means falling behind in the technological edge that is key to maintaining our privileged living standards.

When research and applied science leadership moves from Canada to China or India, the good jobs follow. While all scientific professions are important to Canada's future, the most often quoted measure of technical competitiveness is new engineering graduates. By this measure, Asian countries are beating the West hands down, and quality is generally very high.

Canadian business leaders are understandably calling for more focus on productivity, a term that some wrongly interpret as a call for working harder and longer. I think a better term is working smarter. And it has to start with workers capable of delivering what is needed to succeed, personally and for the Canadian economy.

As someone who chose to study engineering in university and built a career in the technology-intensive energy industry, I know the potential of an engineering degree. Technical projects are interesting and challenging, and technical success often leads to leadership opportunities. A significant portion of chief executive officers are engineers, partly the result of the disciplined, logical thinking necessary to work in the applied sciences.

In my new role as non-executive board chairman of Montreal-based SNC-Lavalin, Canada's largest engineering firm, I see a broad array of fascinating projects being done all around the globe. Canadian engineers are truly world class, but not enough new graduates are entering the profession to make up for those who are retiring.

The sciences offer a plethora of great careers in virtually every field. So, why is it that, at a time when technology pervades every aspect of modern life, so many kids go through the school system and their entire lives as scientific illiterates?

That's not true, you say – "My kid is a technology whiz ... you should see what she can do on the computer or PlayStation."

Well, race car drivers are pretty darned good at using another technically-complex product, but they couldn't design one. It's not about knowing how to use technical products, it's about knowing how to create them. It's also about the satisfaction of going through life with at least a basic understanding of the technologies you use every day. If technical careers are so fulfilling and financially rewarding, then why aren't more high school kids choosing the math and science courses

needed for technical professions such as engineering?

Perhaps the biggest reason is poor science teaching. The world around us is fascinating. Science offers the chance to look behind and under the surface at what makes the natural world the wonder that it is, and how applied science combines ancient and modern knowledge to create the man-made wonders we use every day. Science teachers need both knowledge and personal fascination if they hope to turn out students who see the advantage of enrolling in the more challenging math and science courses. Speaking of math and science courses, while there's been a big increase in women entering post-secondary science and engineering faculties, they are still under-represented. It's taken a long time to overcome the totally-erroneous mindset that boys are better at math and science. Basic and applied science offers wonderful career opportunities for women.

A related impediment is poor career counseling. For example, most school career counselors are woefully uninformed on what engineers and scientists actually do and the amazing variety of career opportunities. Students tend to gravitate toward careers that they see and hear a lot about. That's why law and medicine are so popular. Television hits such as *Law & Order* and *ER* actually have a career choice impact. Perhaps what we need is a suspense drama featuring engineers dealing with a collapsing dam, stress cracking in a jumbo jet wing, a medical equipment crisis or a plot to destroy the Internet.

There is no doubt that science has had by far the largest impact on advancing the human condition. Science has developed cures or prevention of many diseases, provided safe drinking water, allowed amazing levels of global transportation, created the electronic communication revolution and facilitated exploration of space. It has also developed consumer products of all kinds, including the equipment needed to keep our beer and ice cream cold on a steamy summer afternoon. Now, that is important!

Science and technology is Canada's future and, hopefully, the future of increasing numbers of young Canadians.

(Reprinted with permission from The Globe and Mail, September 3, 2007)

Thank Heaven for Religious Schools They keep our public system honest By Christy Clark

The premier of Ontario could be having a tough time right now. He's in the middle of a hotly contested election and his opponents believe they have lots to complain about. He signed a pledge saying he wouldn't raise taxes. He spent millions advertising his promise. Then he introduced a hefty new health tax.

But no one's talking about taxes in Ontario. They're talking about education — in particular, the Conservatives' promise to extend public funding to religious schools. Although Catholic schools already receive 100% of their funding from the province, Dalton McGuinty opposes extending funding to other types of religious schools. He argues it'll hurt the system by taking money from public schools.

In B.C., all religious schools that meet provincial criteria have been 50% government-funded since 1977, when Bill Vander Zalm was education minister. I remember my father, a public-school teacher and sworn enemy of Social Credit, telling me the decision would spell doom for public education in our province.

Boy, did he turn out to be wrong. Extending public funding to religious and other independent schools has turned out to be one of our system's great strengths. Those schools provide parents with choice in a province where public schools have long resisted differentiating themselves from one another.

The B.C. public-education system is one of the best in the world. But offering essentially the same programs at every single school doesn't provide much choice for those kids who don't fit the mould. And it doesn't work for families for whom religion is an important part of schooling. There are those who say that allowing religion a place in state-funded schools messes with the separation of church and state. But who says the state has primary responsibility for educating my children?

It has an obligation to ensure that a high-quality education is available to every child. But it shouldn't be the sole discretion of the state to decide how that education should be delivered. I'm a parent; that's my job.

And it's hypocrisy to complain, as many critics of religious education routinely do, that faith-based schools preach a biased world view. So do public schools. It's called secularism, and a good number of parents don't subscribe to that world view.

They care so much about that issue they're willing to pay for their kid's education twice — first through their taxes that go to fund public schools, then to cover the costs of a religious education that is only half-funded by government.

And thank goodness they do, because religious and other independent schools inject an element of competition into the system that wouldn't otherwise be there. No institution improves when it has a monopoly. Schools are no exception. Knowing that parents can vote with their feet and get their kids an education elsewhere is part of what keeps public schools honest. *(Reprinted with permission from The Province, September 23, 2007. Ms Clark was recently the British Columbia Minister of Education.)*

WHAT'S NEW?

Education at a Glance – 2007

Every year, the OECD provides a rich, comparable and up-to-date array of indicators on the performance of education systems. The report includes indicators on a very wide range of outcomes, from comparisons of students' performance in key subject areas to the impact of education on earnings and on adults' chances of employment.

www.oecd.org/document/30/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_39251550_1_1_1_1,00.html

Teachers' Unions for Democracy?

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association has offered to pay their teachers release time money for up to 20 days during the current election campaign, provided that those teachers work full-time for a candidate targeted by the union. There is a strong hint that the candidate is likely to belong to the Liberal Party.

www.oecta.on.ca/pdfs/election07agenda.pdf, go to Casebook Diary, page 2)

Some Students Just Don't Listen!

The Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network reports that many classrooms have such poor acoustics that the children can't hear what the teacher is saying – seriously affecting their learning. Teachers often end up straining their voices in an effort to make themselves heard.

(www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20071002.NOISY02/TPStory/Environment)

BOOK REVIEWS

School Choice: the findings

By Herbert J. Walberg

This book reviews the latest evidence on school choice. The author considers four forms of choice (charter schools, vouchers, private schools, and competition) in terms of five desired outcomes (academic achievement, achievement gains over time, cost efficiency, parental satisfaction, and civic values). “The evidence supports every single one of the 20 possible choice effects, and the evidence is conclusive rather than suggestive for 14.” The excerpt discusses why parental satisfaction is an important and desirable outcome.

Excerpt (pages 91-93)

“It is doubtful that an ‘expert’ can do a better job of choosing a school for a child than can a well-informed parent. In their book *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control*, Coons and Sugarman write that the current system of assigning most students to public schools is based on the notion that ‘local government agents make better school assignments for individual children they have never met than would the family, even were the family to be supported by professional counseling.’ They also point out that ‘the question is not whether the judgment of the isolated and unassisted family is superior to the professional cadre of a school or a district. It is rather, when all available knowledge, personal and professional, about the particular school is assembled, to whom shall society commit the final choice.’

“When parents are allowed to choose, survey research summarized by Andrew Coulson shows that parents place a high value on academic achievement. ‘Topping the list of responses in all polls of independent-school parents is academic quality,’ he reports. For example, the U.S. De-

partment of Education-sponsored National Household Survey in 1993 showed that parents who chose independent schools for their children most frequently named a ‘better academic environment’ as the primary consideration in their choice.

“Parents are also likely to choose wisely. In 2001, Caroline Hoxby reported comparisons of parents’ ratings of their child’s public school with the school’s value-added achievement (defined as the difference between a student’s 10th and 8th grade scores in reading and math). She found that only 15% of parents were ‘highly satisfied’ with their schools if they were in the lowest quartile of gains, showing that parents were aware and upset that their children’s schools were academically failing. Some 44% of parents with children in schools in the highest quartile reported being ‘highly satisfied’.

“Parents may not always make the right choices. As Milton and Rose Friedman write, ‘No doubt, some parents lack interest in their children’s schooling or the capacity and desire to choose wisely. However, they are in a small minority. In any event, our present system unfortunately does little to help their children.’”

IQ: A smart history of a failed idea

By Stephen Murdoch

This book explores how and why IQ tests were created and how they have been widely used and misused over the past century. Although IQ tests were a great improvement over previous methods of sorting human beings (such as skull measuring), it is not anywhere near as reliable or important as we have been led to believe. The author is pleased that IQ tests are no longer quite as high-stakes as they used to be (low test scores could mean a death sentence in Nazi Germany, for example), but he is concerned that they can nevertheless be quite influential. The excerpt discusses the worldwide rise in IQ scores, and the implications of such a rapid rise.

Excerpt (pages 177-180)

“In the 1980s, a New Zealand political scientist named James Flynn discovered that throughout the developed world, IQ scores were rising every year, creating vast point spreads between one generation and the next. Flynn put out an all-points bulletin to fellow academics in various countries to send him large numbers of peo-

ple's scores from as far back as possible to the present. Initially, he was able to gather scores from 14 countries that had been testing men, often in the military, since the 1940s and 1950s with the same intelligence tests. By the last 1990s, Flynn had data from 20 countries. Since the subjects, despite the passage of time, had taken the same tests, Flynn could quite easily compare the scores of two or more generations.

"Flynn was particularly interested in a test called Ravens Progressive Matrices, upon which the WAIS-III Matrix subtest is based. Ravens, created in the 1930s, has pretty much kept to the same 60 questions over the years, making it ideal for comparing IQ scores of different generations. As Flynn puts it, the content of Ravens is 'culture-reduced', avoiding words or symbols one would find in schools, in the workplace, or anywhere else in the culture. Psychologists believe the matrices test 'fluid' intelligence – that is, on-the-spot reasoning and problem-solving, as opposed to the acquired knowledge of 'crystallized' intelligence that, for instance, a vocabulary test measures. Many psychologists also believe that Ravens are the purest measure of *g* [general intelligence]; so many experts, before Flynn's studies, assumed that Ravens scores would remain constant between generations. A generation can't become radically innately smarter than the immediately-preceding one, can it?

"They couldn't have been more wrong. Every year, Ravens scores are increasing worldwide. As an illustration, the Dutch military had been giving all of its 18-year-old recruits the same reduced Ravens, just 40 of 60 questions, since 1945. Over the years, the percentage of men who were able to answer more than 24 of the 40 questions correctly increased staggeringly. In 1952, just 31% of the men did so, but by 1962 it was up to 46%. In 1972, 63% of the men could answer more than 24 correctly, and by 1981-82, 82% got them right, representing an average gain of more than 20 IQ points over 30 years. These findings were corroborated to varying degrees in every other country from which Flynn collected data.

"Understandably, Flynn's studies have caused considerable consternation and debate within psychology. Ever since the tool was invented, psychologists have believed that they can explain people's ability to understand the world

around them by administering IQ tests. Arthur Jensen, a famous University of California psychologist, has said that someone with an IQ of 75 can enjoy baseball but not properly understand the game's rules, the details of how the league works, or even how many players are on a team. But Flynn's findings make it difficult to extrapolate from what an IQ score tells you about people's mental abilities.

"Take a woman with an IQ of 110 who taught for 30 years in the Netherlands,' Flynn wrote. 'In 1952, she was brighter than 75% of her senior students; by 1967, they were her equals; by 1982, 75% of them were brighter than she was. Has that really been the career experience of Dutch teachers?'

"The results of two other studies involving Ravens have allowed researchers to compare how well people born in 1877 performed to adults' scores today. In 1942, British adults ranging from ages 25 to 65 took Ravens, and a study of the same age group, on the same test, was conducted in 1992. The more recent generations scored significantly higher than the preceding generations, with the result that 25-year-olds in 1992 appear to be surprisingly smarter than their Victorian counterparts. Flynn calculated that by today's standards, at least 70% of late-tenth-century Britons would have an IQ of less than 75. If IQ tests measure intelligence in absolute terms, how did anybody get anything done in the 19th century?

"How reasonable is it to assume that 70% of late-19th-century Britons could not, even if it were their chief interest, understand the rules of cricket?' Flynn asked. 'The military data, which are of impeccable quality, pose the same question. Can we assume that in 1952, almost 40% of Dutch men lacked the capacity to understand soccer, their most-favoured national sport?'

"Interestingly, scores from education-reliant tests such as the Stanford-Binet and Wechsler exams also have risen throughout the world, to the tune of about 9 to 18 points per generation, depending on the country. But in general, the more education-dependent an exam or subtest, the less it has risen, if at all. For instance, people do not appear to be improving on the Wechsler subtests of arithmetic and vocabulary. (Germans, for some reason, are an exception to this; they are busy learning new words at a surprising rate.)

“No one knows for sure why IQ scores are going up. Is it universal education, the advent of video games, test-taking savvy, improved diets, or some combination of factors? The debates rage in academia. One thing is clear, though: it’s not a quick and radical change to the gene pool.

“‘Massive IQ gains cannot be due to genetic factors,’ Flynn wrote. ‘Reproductive differentials between social classes would have to be impossibly-large to raise the mean IQ even one point in a single generation.’

“Large inter-generational IQ gains are a pretty serious blow to psychologists who believe that their tests measure intelligence, innate or not. Is the present batch of 30-year-olds that much smarter than their parents? There has been no great surge in the number of patents registered or in academic achievement, Flynn has noted; people are pretty much plodding along – efficiently, inefficiently, as smart or as dumb as they used to be. Rising IQ scores provide strong evidence that despite many psychologists’ claims, IQ tests measure knowledge and ‘abstract problem-solving abilities’.

“As Flynn remarked, ‘Psychologists should stop saying that IQ tests measure intelli-

gence. They should say that IQ tests measure abstract problem-solving ability (APSA), a term that accurately conveys our ignorance. We know people solve problems on IQ tests; we suspect those problems are so detached, or so abstracted from reality, that the ability to solve them can diverge over time from the real-world problem-solving ability called intelligence; thus far we know little else.’”

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

With an election looming in Ontario, we thought our readers might like to see what the pundits are saying. Visit www.electionprediction.org/2007_on/index.html for the overall predictions. Finer-grained analysis is available by clicking on geographical regions and individual ridings.

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