

French immersion for 35 at Brisbane

by David Prout
There was nothing bashful about six-year-old Karen, sitting with her classmates at a round table in Brisbane Public School.
"J'ai un petit chien," she told the teacher, answering a question. (I have a small dog.)
"Voilà sept garçons," young Teri sang out. (There are seven boys.)
"Pierre et sa mere jouent du piano," said Tracey in a confident, small girl voice. (Pierre and his mother are playing the piano.)
These three youngsters, and 32 others, spend their entire school day in a French environment—talking, listening, laughing, doing arithmetic, reading, writing and singing.

New program
It's a new program initiated by the Wellington County Board of Education last fall. Three schools in the county were selected for French immersion classes and Brisbane was chosen in the eastern end.
Two teachers with French as their mother tongue were hired at Brisbane and classes were started at the kindergarten and Grade 1 levels.
Now parents in the county have a choice between all-English classes or all-French.

One a year
Providing the board of education agrees, the plan is to add one class a year as the original kindergarten and Grade 1 groups graduate to higher grades.
The children are expected to be bilingual by the end of Grade 3. From then on, they will receive half a day's instruction in English and half in French, covering all normal school subjects until they graduate from high school.

(For parents interested in the program, Brisbane is holding an information meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 26, at 8 p.m. in the school. Board of education staff will discuss the French project and a Toronto primary school principal, Ted Rutherford, who has been involved with language immersion classes for the last four years will speak.)

Quebec native
In the Grade 1 classroom at Brisbane, under Madame Murielle Lafreniere, a native of northern Quebec, the walls are covered with pictures of everyday objects, all with French names.
It's a total French atmosphere, down to the tape cassettes, books and simple sentences written on the blackboard.

The 20 youngsters sit at round tables in groups of five or six, rather than at desks. This is to keep the conversation going and build familiarity with the new language.

Double challenge
The French kindergarten class, under Mademoiselle

Edwine Theano, a native of Haiti, faces a double challenge. For these 15 youngsters, this is their first experience with school as well as their first exposure to a new language.

Switch
During recesses and at noon hour, most of the youngsters switch to English as they mix with the rest of the school population. But occasionally two classmates will speak French.

Because of their familiarity with their second language, the students sometimes think of the correct French word faster than its English equivalent.

Those students whose parents are bilingual often carry on the day's lessons at home, especially when there are older children in the family taking French at high school.

But for unilingual parents, the school has advised them to provide an English atmosphere at home, while the French atmosphere is provided at school.

Excited
The teachers at Brisbane, French and English alike, are excited by the new concept, says principal Bob Muir. And the children in all-English classes have shown a "very positive reaction" to the youngsters in the two French rooms.

With a new language to learn, the French students are expected to fall slightly behind the level reached in English classes. But this gap will soon narrow, according to Mr. Muir, and both French and English students will be at the same level by Grade 3.
From then on, the French students are expected to do as well, and in some cases better, than their English-language counterparts.

Since it is a new concept, the board of education is judging the course as it goes along.
But, says Mr. Muir, "I have every confidence that the program will be successful enough to warrant continuation."

Not enough
Normally, a student's first exposure to French comes in Grade 7, with a 20-minute class each day. But the exposure is not long enough to produce bilingual students.
And a youngster can pick up a second language much faster when he is five or six rather than when he is 11 or 12 and about to enter junior high school.

The parents of the Brisbane students are highly enthusiastic about the program. Most of them attend regular meetings at the school to keep in touch.

The reasons they give for enrolling their children in French immersion vary from family to family. Some see the value of being bilingual in a country with two official languages. Others have

spoken of the mental enrichment of the program, the provision of a learning challenge and the opening of more opportunities to the children in the future because they are bilingual.

Proud
The children themselves seem to be enjoying the experience, a bit surprised at their success in coping with a second language, but very proud of their ability.

Most of the parents, in a recent survey taken by the school, said they did not want their children in a totally French school but preferred the English-French mix that Brisbane has now.

Environment
They want their children to be bilingual but still be part of the English environment they live in.

Brisbane's Mr. Muir prefers it that way as well.

"The French students are not treated as elite children. They are part of the total school and everyone is treated the same. The only difference is the natural curiosity about what is happening in the French classrooms."

"In all, I'd say we've had a very positive reaction from all the children to the French classes."
Mr. Muir has already been contacted by the parents of 10 children interested in enrolling in the French kindergarten next fall.

It takes 20 youngsters to form a new class and warrant hiring another French teacher, but the principal sees no difficulty in reaching this number.

While the program is too new in Wellington County for a detailed evaluation, the experience of other schools who have tried French immersion in the early grades indicates that total immersion produces far better results than starting French at Grade 7.

Allenby Public School in Toronto has had French immersion for four years now. And although the children live in a totally English atmosphere outside of school, their tests have compared favorably to tests given to French immersion students in Ottawa, a bilingual atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the Brisbane students are being given regular tests with the results fed to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto to see how Wellington County children are measuring up to the new experience.



FRENCH ONLY for this grade one class at Brisbane school. The teachers is Madame Murielle Lafreniere, a native of northern Quebec. Students are expected to be bilingual by the end of grade three.

Free Press District Page

Ballinafad

Both husband, wife hospitalized in Guelph

by Mrs. Shortill Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Metcalfe and Miss Arlene Shortill attended the Star games at Maple Leaf Gardens on Friday. Georgetown High School students competed with very good performance.

Church service on Sunday was well attended. The Junior Choir, numbering 10 sang a number telling the story of the "five loaves and two fishes." The sermon had the theme of the practice of

"fasting during lent." Different implications concerning fasting are taken by various creeds. I carried home the idea that riding one's mind of all envious and odious thought would be as good an interpretation as any along these lines.

Bible study is being carried on each Tues. omitting this week and continuing next week at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Shortill.

The ladies held a successful quilt bee last Wednesday. Several warm quilts were made and will be available for needy ones. One is to be quilted some afternoon soon, so another day will be needed. All took lunch and a "chatter" pleasant time was spent, as well as a busy one.
We're sorry both Mr. and Mrs. Robt. McEnery are hospitalized in Guelph.
Mr. Victor Swindleburst returned home from Guelph after surgery.
Mr. Leo Jamieson is still in London Hospital receiving treatment.

Several of the Domtar "lay-offs" were able to return to work Monday.

The Community Centre News letter came out this week. For the sum of one dollar the letter will be sent each month. The committee wants the support of us all in their endeavours. They work hard to make the programs enjoyable and we commend them on their efforts.

Festival

On February 1, over 2300 young people from across Ontario attended the annual Junior Farmer Talent Festival at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto.

There were more than 200 entries in the various competitions.
George Henderson, County Director of Halton, and a resident of Acton supervised the choir and Talent Hunt competitions in the afternoon.

Read your Tax Guide. It's worth it.



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Your Tax Guide also includes an area of general information, a page or two of answers to some common questions, and solutions to problems you could encounter while working on your return.

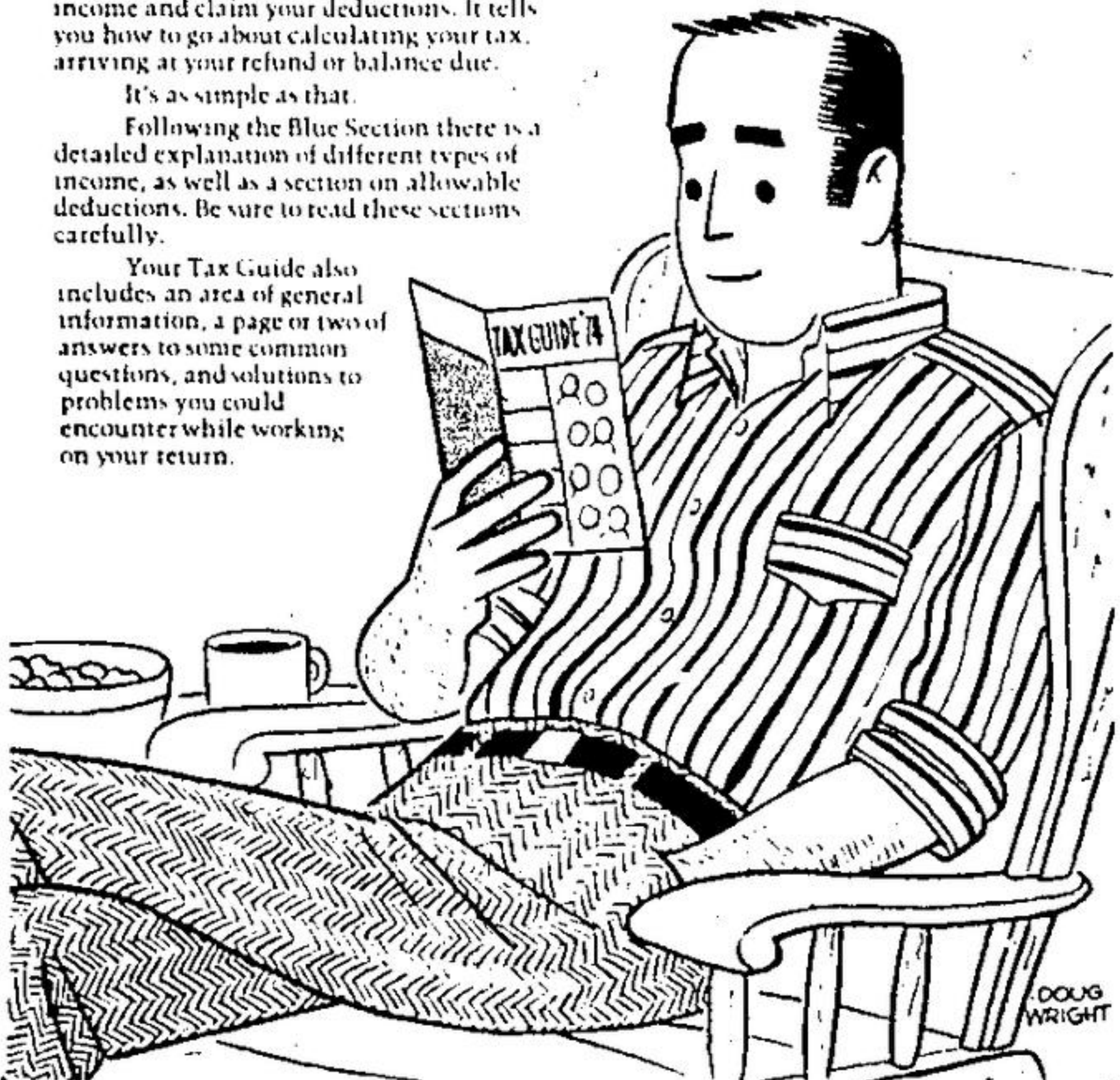
If you decide you do need more help, you'll find District Taxation Office addresses and phone numbers listed on the back cover of the Guide. There you'll find all the assistance you'll need.

So, you see, your Tax Guide will probably be your best friend come income tax time. Read it thoroughly and follow it carefully. You'll find it will make your job a lot easier.

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No course in Halton

The Halton County Board of Education recently turned down a request for French immersion teaching in public schools.

Board member Tom Watson, attributed the refusal to the high cost of such a program, as well as a low demand for it. He said that less than 60 students showed an interest in French immersion.

Another reason for turning down the request is the lack of teachers available.

Mr. Watson also said that people would not be willing to pay the increased tax for such a small minority. He said the school board will continue to give the best possible education to the children.

Diversion not open

Despite appearances, the third line diversion by Indusmin Quarry is not yet open to the public. There are still legal details to be completed.

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