

Total Immersion — the Acton alternative

Having an open house for parent and public viewing of student work is not uncommon in any school. However when the Down-to-Earth group had their open house last Tuesday, April 25, it was not the average open house.

The Down-to-Earth bunch are a group of 20 students and their advisor, Paul Tamblyn, who are spending one semester out of the four walls of Acton high taking an alternative program of learning.

The course, known as Total Immersion, began last year in Acton with students taking the second semester, February to June, outside of school on the property of Keith Black. The students take four courses during the semester and are granted four grade twelve credits for successful completion of the courses. The courses available are physical and outdoor education, environmental studies, social science and life styles, space, man and technology and creative writing and expression.

These courses may sound familiar in title to many of those offered in school, however the emphasis at Total Immersion is not on learning and writing a test or assignment, but on learning and actually doing.

Some of the special activities done by the present Total Immersion group fall into all these different categories, and were the subjects of their open house display.

The group took a visit to the sugar bush of Eldon Comfort where they were able to see a full scale sugar bush in operation. Following this experience the students tapped their own trees for sap and made their own maple syrup.

A maple syrup testing display was set up at the open house. A very impressive structure at the open house was a solar hot air unit primarily built by Ron Kirkwood, a student in the course. The heater works on a simple principle, however Ron says it was difficult to construct and took quite a length of time to complete.

The box is filled with rows of pop cans forming a pipe and covered in black tape. The unit has a plastic window with a side vent to take in the cold air, heat it through the cans and come out the top of the unit as hot air. Ron designed this plan himself learning from trial and error.

Other activities related to the subject of energy include a visit by M.P.P. Julian Reed, who has a water generator in his own home in Norval.

Another important part of the course is the section on pioneer lifestyles. Many of the activities at the Total Immersion site are similar in method to those of the pioneers. The construction of a log cabin, eventually to be the Tamblyns' new home, is part of their course. The students are each responsible for peeling, fitting and setting one log for the new home. Learning their own mental and physical ability is part of winter camping unit. They learn the proper precautions to take and test their own endurance against nature. Now the students are busy planning a fitness program to fit their own needs, also as part of the preparation before their eight day canoe trip in May.

The students have constructed their own snowshoes and canoe paddles for both the winter camping earlier in the year and the canoe trip coming up.

Service projects are another important part of the Total Immersion program. Learning to do something for someone else and getting nothing in return, except self-satisfaction, is important for this close-knit group who are working together to make their own and others' lives happier. Service projects range from volunteering help at one of the local nursery schools to helping a farmer with spring crops or other chores around the farm.

The land where the Total Immersion program is held is owned by Keith Black, a teacher at the high school as well as a farmer. Mr. Black lends the land to the group rent-free, however in return the students pay their board by working on the farm, planting crops preparing the fields and doing other jobs that are always popping up on a farm.

A few of the other programs enjoyed by the students are sheep shearing, carding and spinning wool fibres, photography, wildlife identification and observation, recycling, building igloos, care of farm animals and working with one another.

Dr. Tamblyn, teacher advisor, stresses the key point for the Total Immersion, students is to learn to work together with the others on the program and to develop and maintain relationships. Dr. Tamblyn said things don't always run smoothly and there are difficult times, however they can't leave the class when the bell rings and forget about it. There are no bells for this group.

With the hard outdoor conditions and the closeness of the group occasionally members of the group start feeling down. Approximately every two or three weeks the group holds a Valentine's day. At this informal session

every member of the group says something meaningful and positive about every other member. "When you leave the Valentine's day you feel really good about yourself and about being with all these other wonderful people."

There are many things to be learned in school and many things to be learned outside the four walls of the classroom. Total Immersion is to allow students to learn in a different way rather than the traditional school system. The emphasis at Total Immersion is independent learning and personal growth.



KAREN van der Eyken demonstrates lacing a homemade snowshoe at the down-to-earth open house last Tuesday. Students in the course spend one semester learning and actually doing the skills they are taught.



VALERIE GRAHAM and Steve Campbell gave visitors a taste of their homemade bread at the Total Immersion open house. The students offered visitors samples and were taking orders for loaves.



BRUCE SWIFT and Kathryn Beaton demonstrate canoeing to members of the Total Immersion group at Fairy Lake Tuesday morning. The emphasis in working together and teaching each other is important to the group.



NANCY SHOEMAKER practices her paddle strokes at Fairy Lake Tuesday morning. Nancy is one of twenty students taking the Total Immersion course this semester. Canoeing is one of many activities enjoyed by the group.



CLIFF BRITTON samples the Total Immersion students' maple syrup at the group's open house last Tuesday. The students had previously visited a professional sugar bush and since have preserved their own syrup.

MP favors penalty

Tory Candidate in Halton Otto Jelinek asked the House of Commons to reinstate the death penalty last week. But the call was never voted upon as it did not have the unanimous consent of the House.

Jelinek cited the murder of an RCMP officer in Saskatchewan as the reason for calling for the re-instatement of the death penalty.

His motion, seconded by Allan Lawrence, called for the re-instatement of the death penalty prior to the issuing of the writ for an election and falling that, he wanted to put the question on the ballot for a national referendum.

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