

EDUCATION ANSWERS

This is the third part of the series with questions directed to the Halton County Board of Education assistant superintendent E. S. Lavender.

QUESTION

Mr. Price mentioned that "children are not interested — they do not want to learn." As a grade 1 teacher, I can state they wanted to learn before they came to school. Is it possible that the system of regimented learning in our schools is to blame?

MR. LAVENDER:

This is a very large question. I don't believe that Mr. Price said that "children are not interested — they do not want to learn." I think he said that some secondary school students do not want to learn. That is an obvious fact with which we can all agree.

The usual reasons given for this stifling of student interest are too simple, in my judgment. Labels like regimentation, alienation, irrelevance, really hinder a closer analysis of the whole process of education because we who use such labels make the judgment and then stop thinking about the problem.

All would agree that kindergarten children come to school eager to learn (except those whose life experience has so twisted or brutalized them, that it may already be too late for them.) Whitehead refers to this first step of the educational process as the stage of romance of novelty, exploration and romantic emotion for children who discover the excitement of relating bare facts together.

Perhaps some of us make a mistake and assume that this stage of romance should continue for a youngster. But Whitehead indicates a second stage in the educational process, a stage of precision in which experiences are sharpened and definitions made precise. New facts are added to the ones gained in the primary area (the stage of romance) and these facts are assembled in systematic order. For Whitehead the final stage in education is the stage of generalization.

Again relying on Whitehead, he says that we teach too many subjects and we don't relate the facts of these subjects to the experience of students in an attempt to guide individuals towards some comprehensive of the art of life, towards what it means to be personally mature and socially responsible.

Then, too, perhaps we have a serious misconception about the real relationship between pleasure and learning. Yes, of course, learning should be a pleasant experience wherever possible, but I wonder whether television has lured some of us into a belief that "if it doesn't entertain, it isn't worth it."

Teachers recognize the criticisms levelled against them. And in general are working very hard to improve the quality of education. Not all would agree with the changes that have been made, of course, but in the last five years a great number of things have happened in the secondary schools at one. The Grade 13 external examination has been dropped. Requirements for university entrance have dropped from 9 credits to 7. There is much reliance on the formal examination as a means of evaluating pupil progress. A credit system for graduation, individualized programs, a multi-level offering of subject matter, new courses of study like Man in Society, Man in Space, Theatre Arts are but a few examples of the changing nature of the school curriculum.

If one puts any faith in statistics, excerpts from the Report of The Minister of Education, 1968 may prove interesting. In 1949 39.5 per cent of Ontario's population in the age group 15-19 was in school. In 1968 77.1 per cent of the same age group was in school.

Pupil retirements (drop-outs) related to school enrolment are indicated below:

Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Gr. 13
1050	134	16.8	16.1	34.1
20.9	1068	2.3	4.8	4.8
21.8	8.8			

Schools of 1970 are educating more of the children of more of the people for longer and longer. Curricula, teaching methods, organization, philosophy, are changing. Too fast, some say! Not nearly fast enough others cry! And you know, I also think that for a very few of our young crits, a new game has been discovered. It is called "Let's get a bunch of uptight adults together and tell them how bad things are and watch them jump."

QUESTION

I understand that an open concept school is just a name for a school without walls, the

design having many advantages and disadvantages. It seems to me that wonderful advantages can be realized only when children are working individually and have the freedom of mobility. The disadvantages are quite obvious, when you have seven teachers trying to command the attention of their own classes at the same time in the same room.

The open schools in Halton County (Pineview, in particular), seem to be suffering ALL the disadvantages of this architectural design, while gaining none of the advantages! The reason seems to be that Halton County lacks in teachers and administrators that believe in the philosophy of education that the open concept school demands.

Why are you spending taxpayers' money to build yet another open concept school — Moore Park?

MR. LAVENDER:

I would agree that an open concept school is a name for a school without many interior walls. Depending on the size of the school and the nature of the program, some walls exist. For example, a gymnasium is separated off from the classroom area, as are music rooms in some schools. I would further agree that the design of any building has advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage of a conventionally designed school building is that it is difficult, though not impossible, for teachers to work cooperatively in a group or team to present the curriculum to their pupils.

THE OPEN CONCEPTS

I agree with the general condemnation of the open concept schools in Halton County nor with the criticism of Pineview in particular. One of the staff committees of the Halton County Board of Education has recently presented to the Board an assessment of program offered in five open concept schools in the West Education Area. This assessment was based on discussions with parents, pupils, teachers and principals.

While it is not possible to reproduce the report here, it is fair to say that, in general, children seem happier, there are fewer discipline problems, better attendance at school, greater use of library and resource material, greater coverage of skills of reading and pupil evaluation by more than one teacher.

From the point of view of a teacher in an open concept school working in a teaching team, there is no question but that their work load has increased! They are more highly motivated. There is a greater flow of ideas. At the same time, however, the pressures on a teacher are greater when he is a member of a teaching group of three or four who must plan, teach and evaluate pupil progress, program, and teaching methods in very close cooperation. This approach to teaching demands a high degree of professionalism.

Let it be stated bluntly. A building does not make for good education or for bad education.

Teachers, principals and all the other support people do that. And this brings me to Pineview.

Mr. Ronald Chatten, principal of Pineview School, is eminently qualified to develop an excellent school program. He and his primary staff are working hard to do just that in the open part of their school. I am not sure what the author of the question has in mind when he refers to a belief "in the philosophy of education that the open concept school demands." For Halton County I would say that an open concept school makes it easier for a staff to work cooperatively to plan and teach a program that allows children to grow academically, socially and physically at their own rate.

One of the problems facing teachers today is their responsibility in the light of the Hall-Dennis Report. Some teachers have interpreted the Report to mean that children should be allowed to 'do their own thing,' without structure, content or direction and that teachers should no longer teach but be an advisor or counsellor!

I am convinced that the principals and teachers of our open plan school believe that there are basic skills in reading, phonics and mathematics that children in the primary division must master. Hopefully, these skills and concepts will be mastered through an approach to a content that more closely reflects the interests and experiences of children and through a use of teaching capabilities that is more effective and in an atmosphere that is freer and less restricted.

As far as Pineview is concerned I would make two further comments. Mr. Chatten would be delighted to have any interested citizens drop in to see the school and discuss the program with him. And last, I would ask that an evaluation of this school's program by the public be delayed until the Fall by which time the program that is being developed now will have been in operation six or seven months.

QUESTION

We never did talk about QUALITY of education — only about cost. I do not think people complain about high costs of education if they feel they are getting value for their money. Comment, please.

MR. LAVENDER:

I agree completely! This is a very valid criticism of our discussion. I am also heartened by the question. Perhaps we should have another panel to talk together on quality of education.

In any case, if the author of this question wishes to pursue the question of quality of education personally, I would be delighted to chat with him. I can be reached at 878-4154.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some 60,000 articles of sick-room equipment are loaned free of charge to about 50,000 persons every year from Red Cross Sickroom Loan Cupboards throughout Canada.

Rotarians' \$1200 Will Furnish Hospital Room

by Lee Clerk

Tonight (Thursday, March 12) is the night of the annual Hospital meeting and election of directors. This should be an important meeting to the people of Georgetown, particularly those who contributed towards the initial building fund and the individuals and organizations who have since helped in so many ways.

The meeting is at 8:15 p.m. and consists of reports of committees, and the administrator plus the election of four directors.

Refreshments will be served, and we promise you a short meeting and an interesting one.

Last week Dr. Harry Greig presented the Administrator with a cheque of \$1200 on behalf of the Rotary Club. This magnificent gift was presented at their annual Monday dinner meeting.

The amount given is to be reserved for the furnishing of a room in the hospital's expansion project.

Needless to say, this gift toward the new expansion is a wonderful one, and certainly is appreciated by the Board of Directors.

And with the mention of the word 'expansion' we hit a raw nerve, with the administrator, hospital staff, doctors, and the directors. We originally started to plan an expansion in 1967 and so far we have not even been able to contemplate a starting date. Through the extreme slowness of our architects and the equal amount of tardiness shown by the Commission to give us the go ahead, we found ourselves in the target year of 68-69 with an increasing tight money situation, until finally after many months of negotiation with the Hospital Commission, we found ourselves told bluntly that we could not proceed due to lack of funds.

This is on both levels of government, and is an extremely unhappy situation, with the town having already included us in their long range forecasts, and the county have gone even further, granting us the county grant of \$10,000 per bed for construction.

In the meantime, our hospital continues to suffer from overcrowding, and at times our emergency area, (designed before its use became greatly expanded due to the change in coverage) becomes completely overcrowded and overworked. This is an area particularly that can only be brought up to scratch with a largely expanded area, as well as staff.

We had hoped to expand by some 60 beds, and 'shell in' a third floor as part of this expansion. However the Commis-

sion, in their wisdom, (or lack of it), only allowed us 31 beds. This, mind you, in 1967! A recent communication from the OHSC states that we still will get only 31 beds, and this is expected to last for five years. Evidently one of their glaring errors, in the survey taken (if they ever took a serious one, which the writer doubts), has set the area served by our hospital as an area of 12,000 population. This is a community of over 16,000 and with a township that must be approaching 10,000. As most readers know, beds in the corridors are more common than not, with a tour one night by board and administrator showing some ten beds in the corridor. We shudder to think what would have happened if there had been one multi-car crash that night.

From all indications there is to be no major relaxation of funds this year, and the earliest possible we can hope for is some time in 1971. Let's pray that it's early in '71.

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Explains St. Leonard's Work With Ex-Prisoners

The women's Take-a-Break group sponsored by the local Y recently heard a speaker from St. Leonard's Society, a group interested in the welfare of former prisoners. Fran Williams, who edits the paper of the national St. Leonard's Society, spoke to the 17 women at St. John's United Church.

She outlined the purpose of the Society, to help men on their release from prison. Emphasizing that the law applies to everyone, she pointed out how even an automobile accident might result in a prison sentence.

NO PLACE TO GO

On his release a man is disoriented. Often he has no place to go. He has no job, and his record makes it difficult to find one. He may be in need of counselling, or at least of acquaintance with people who are sympathetic and helpful. To help him readjust to society there are half way houses spread throughout the country, to give him accommodation, friendship, and help in finding work, in the critical few weeks or months after release.

FEWER RETURN

Fewer men return to prison when they have spent some time in one of these houses.

She spoke of a local group that was about to start one such house in Bramalea; and of the women's auxiliary to the group, Abra, which was becoming more active now that the Bramalea house is close to begin functioning.

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