

Principals adjust to meet changing educational needs

Schools have had to undergo numerous changes in the past years in order to keep up with the fast paced world we live in.

But change means time, and inevitably, in the education forum, much of the increased workload falls on the shoulders of principals.

In January, a report went to the board of education table, which would increase the number of principals and vice-principals in Halton Region elementary schools.

Although trustees recognized the need for more principals, the report was saved for consideration in the 1989 budget.

In the meantime, principals are faced with finding time to deal with approximately 10 changes that have been added to their workload since the policy was first drawn up in 1989.

"We are in the human growth business," said Carol Matheson, principal of George Kennedy Public School. "That is what growth is - change."

As the world changes, and new thoughts and ideas are born, people want choices, she said.

They are not content to follow the same thing in education as in the past.

In past years, programs such as the special education classes and French Immersion have become part of the regular school curriculum.

As the pupil/teacher ratio decreases in classrooms, principals have more staff to supervise and evaluate, while rapid changes by the Ministry of Education curriculum documents can make principals' heads swim in trying to digest

understand and teach all the information.

"As society becomes more complex, the school's role becomes more important," said Lillian Moore, principal of McKenzie-Smith School in Acton.

Schools have to keep up with the changes in the world, such as the development of computers, because future employees are being educated in schools today.

"You have to look ahead," said Limehouse Public School Principal Rick Kaufman. The children who started kindergarten in 1987 will graduate in the year 2000.

With the implementation of the French Immersion program, you are really running two schools in one, said Park Public School Principal Jack Peckitt.

Every time you put in a new policy, it may be better for the children, but it ends up being more work for the principal.

Mr. Peckitt spends a considerable amount of time away from his school in meetings concerning programs.

For example, last month he travelled to board offices in Burlington and the Pineview North Education Centre, attending committee meetings on placing students in special education programs.

As well, he organizes and heads meetings within his own school and teaches approximately 30 hours a week.

Without a doubt, the special education program is one of the more positive and demanding programs, said Mrs. Matheson. Teachers learn how to be more effective and therefore it benefits



Jack Peckitt, Lillian Moore, Carol Matheson, Rick Kaufman

"I see an increased interest of principals in the management and evaluation of the curriculum," said Mr. Kaufman, Limehouse, which goes from kindergarten to Grade 5, has 145 students.

The school is implementing a new writing program, which will change the material being taught, through all the grade levels.

The program will balance the reading/writing course, which previously had more emphasis placed on reading.

Not only are principals leaders and managers, but they have to sell

ple but with people," the principal said. With more people involved, it takes a tremendous amount of time, but the ultimate result is superior.

The Limehouse principal feels that involving more people in the decision making process is a good idea.

You get more of a commitment if people are involved at the grass roots level, he said. It is a good process, and in the end good for the children, but it takes time.

Changes in the curriculum require the principal to inform and teach their staff, Mrs. Moore said. McKenzie-Smith, which teaches Grades 6 to 8, has 302 students.

All these changes add up to a double barrel situation. The greater the number of staff, the more support they need, and the larger the workload for principals, Mrs. Moore said.

The programs are all positive and principals are not complaining, she said. On the contrary, they welcome them, but add new areas of responsibility.

The bottom line of all the new changes is they ask more of the principals' time. "We are finding it hard to get into the classroom to work with teachers," Mrs. Matheson said.

The concern of principals as a group is they cannot be as effective and accountable as they want to be.

Since 1989, the role of the principal has changed in many ways.

Mr. Peckitt sees the principal as the person in the middle, between the board and classroom. "The principal helps accomplish what has to be accomplished," he said. They are the gatekeepers as to how much change is acceptable.

When the ministry pumps out five new documents, the principal has to decide which one to focus on.

"You have to learn to say no in order to protect the environment," Mr. Peckitt said, which could become inundated with change.

Principals are also the communication link, taking vague board concepts, and teaching them to teachers and parents, the principal said.

"I try and stay on top of change, (but) it is just like trying to balance a whole lot of balls," Mr. Peckitt said.

Parents need good information and to be involved in the decision making process, said Mrs. Matheson.

Principals have to make sure all the letters are out in good time, and the meetings are well-planned.

"It is very time consuming, but it is time well spent," Mrs. Matheson said. The parents' involvement adds to the enrichment of the children.

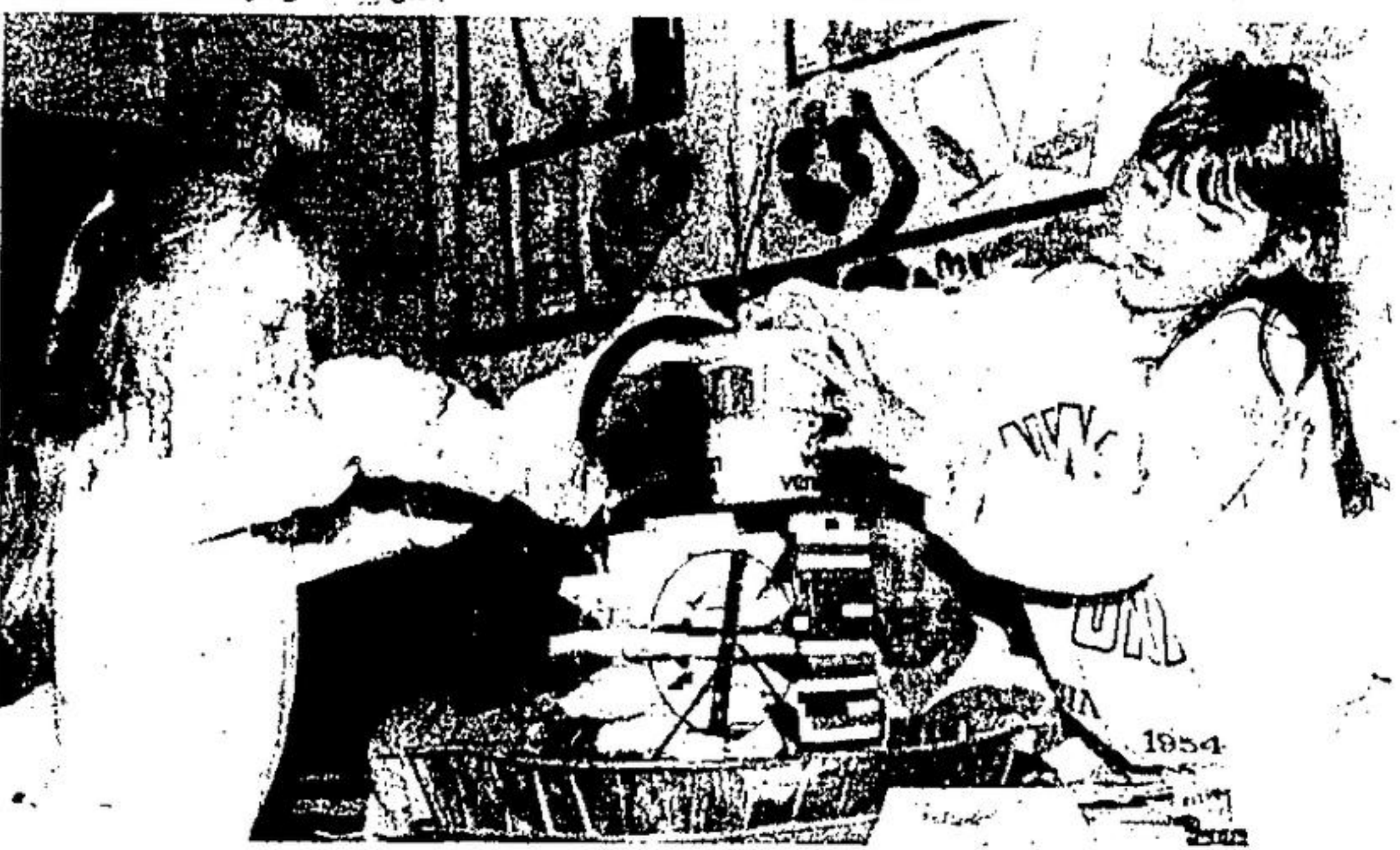
Ten years ago the role of the principal contained the same components as their role today, except that new responsibilities have been added, said Mrs. Moore.

You would not be as effective to the changes being made in your school if you were not involved in the decision making process, she said.

By bringing more people into the role, such as teachers and vice-principals, the workload can be shared.

A full-time teacher would allow a principal of a small school, who currently has teaching duties, more time for his administrative duties, Mrs. Moore said. Full-time vice-principals would assist with some of the administrative duties of a principal in charge of a larger school.

It means an expenditure of money, but parents are willing to pay for quality service, Mrs. Matheson said. "That is what we want as well."



Water Wonder

George Kennedy Grade 3 students Mercer, 8, demonstrate the water wheel they made for their unit of motion study. The students had their projects set up Thursday for show.

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