



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Missing the boat in math

In the spring my third grade daughter came home with another sheet of multiplication tables to practise.

She had to write the answers as quickly as she could on this plastic-coated (so it could be erased and used over and over) card containing 32 different questions about multiplication with the number eight.

She had to practice it day after day until she could do it in less than 60 seconds. Then she went on to the nines.

When she successfully completed them all through the 12s, she got new cards combining two tables, and so on ad infinitum.

I resented it. When she finished the eights, I went back and asked her to do some from the sixes and she had no idea of the answers — she had forgotten.

When she successfully completed the eights, I asked her to do them backwards, and it took her three and a half times minutes instead of 60 seconds — she had learned them in order. On average, she and her friends spent a week on each card, so these multiplication drills take up most of the year.

Is it any wonder that we are so poor in teaching math and science? In November, 1996 the results of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) was released. It gave standardized tests to 11 million seventh and eighth grade kids in 41 nations.

Canada scored in the middle of the pack on most math and science. We scored higher than third world countries, such as Columbia and South Africa, but much below many others, including Singapore, Japan and the Czech Republic.

It gets worse. Ontario scored the lowest of all the Canadian provinces. We really do a terrible job of teaching math and science.

How is this possible? What are we doing wrong? Some of the answers are not very complicated.

For example, Ontario does not require teachers to take any math or science courses beyond 10th grade. Many teachers don't.

These teachers are teaching math and science to our elementary school children. Requirements for such teachers clearly need to be beefed up so that we are getting instructors with a genuine interest in math and science.

Second, we spend less time teaching math and science than other provinces. Ontario's grade 8 teachers spend an average of 5.7 periods per week teaching science, while B.C. teachers spend 12.2 periods, Alberta spends 11.9 periods, and the national average is 7.2 periods. Similar results were obtained for math.

Dr. James Stigler of the US Office of Education conducted an analysis of different countries during the TIMSS study. He videotaped 100 classrooms in several countries, as well as questioning the activities of children after school.



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

Children in other countries spend about one-third of their time outside of school watching tv, so our children are not poor at math and science because they are couch potatoes.

The most interesting result is that North American classrooms cover more topics and explain them in less depth. This is important. German and Japanese teachers make students think at a higher level than we do.

While our children are practising math problems, Japanese kids are inventing different ways to solve them. While we emphasize skills, Japanese schools focus on the development and understanding of concepts.

We have students memorize formulas to determine percentages, while Japanese students explore different ways to figure them out.

It's called divergent thinking. The notion here is that there are many ways to solve a problem.

Our goal should not be to teach one strategy, but rather to teach children that there are many ways to solve a problem.

You sacrifice breadth for depth. You cover fewer topics, but in more depth. It is the depth that is the key.

Students learn to struggle with complexity and novelty, higher level thought processes. We are not teaching it.

It is ironic that many people think Japanese education involves drilling students when we are the ones who do most of the drills.

I went in to see my daughter's teacher to explain my feelings on the issue of times tables. She knew me because she taught both of my older children (I've obviously had a great impact on her).

She suffered me well. She explained that kids need to have the building blocks before they could use them in problem solving. I told her that's how you reinforce the building blocks, by making them important to kids in problem solving.

Thinking is more important for children, so let's get on with it. She showed me that her approach is well within the Common Curriculum, and that I should go argue with those who wrote the curriculum.

So, I teach my daughter to think at home — using monopoly games, computer games, mind-bender puzzle books — just like I did with my first two.

Looking Back ...



Gold cords, the highest award in Guiding, were presented to two Milton Guides in June, 1972. Here the recipients, Joyce de Koeijer (left) and Karen Gotro (right), are presented with the cords by Guide Captain Mrs. S. Gotro.

It's a corporate tax myth

In Tony Clarke's book *Silent Coup*, Ursula Franklin argues that the so-called 'corporate rule' of Canada is like the Nazi occupation of France.

Canadians are either "collaborators", or are working to "build a resistance movement for the long haul".

This comment, among others, is a symptom of scapegoat hunting by spend and tax labour groups.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — which published "Silent Coup" — advocates tax hikes and increased regulation for business.

Big labour's latest gimmick is to parody the Fraser Institute by announcing 'Corporate Tax Freedom Day'.

The Fraser Institute describes 'Tax Freedom Day' as "... the date when the average Canadian family starts working for itself. Until that date, all of a family's earnings are required to pay the tax man".

They calculate this special day by taking the estimated total tax burden for the year imposed by all levels of government as a percentage of total income.

This year, 'Tax Freedom Day' fell on June 30 for the average family in Canada. For Ontarians, it fell on July 2.

Big Labour's 'Corporate Tax Freedom Day' is designed to portray corporations as the source of Canada's deficits.

Labour organizations accuse Canadian businesses of paying next to no taxes, claiming 'Corporate Tax Freedom Day' came as early as January 30.

The problem with such a calculation is that it's off by a country mile because it overlooks a variety of taxes and contributions which businesses pay in addition to income tax — taxes which must be paid by business whether or not any profits were made.

These include payroll taxes (employment insurance, CPP and workers' compensation), capital taxes, property taxes, and indirect tariffs such as sales and excise taxes.

According to federal budget documents,

Let's
Talk
Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

"excluding indirect taxes — for example fuel taxes — corporations paid about \$57 billion in total taxes and levies to federal, provincial and municipal governments in 1995".

As a percentage of pre-tax profits, corporations handed over 56.8 per cent of their earnings to government, which more accurately would put 'Corporate Tax Freedom Day' around the end of July.

Labour groups want government to raise spending by putting the squeeze on corporations for more tax revenue.

But hiking taxes on business would only serve to speed up the flow of jobs and capital out of the country.

In addition to killing jobs and discouraging investment, higher business taxes would force consumers to pay higher prices for goods and services, lower wages for employees, and reduce returns to shareholders like seniors' pension funds.

What the advocates of higher taxes on corporations fail to consider is that the fortunes of Canadians are linked to the businesses where they work, invest and shop.

If these advocates were really concerned about tax fairness and the welfare of Canadians, they wouldn't be using spurious data to justify their claim that Canadian businesses are a treasure trove of untapped tax revenues.

Things aren't always as they appear.