

# The 'gong show' in our high schools must stop so learning can be enjoyed

by Dr. K.A. Hackstetter

Not so long ago I tried to analyze, in this newspaper, some of the shortcomings in our educational system, and I suggested several remedies.

In this second article, I would like to talk about what is in my opinion, the most obsolete structure in this same system: The use or misuse of time in the classroom.

Between a quarter to nine and nine o'clock in the morning crashes a bell, siren or gong, etc. through every action, conversation and contemplation to announce that another schoolday is about to start in Canadian schools.

That was so in 1780 and 1880 and it is still so in 1980.

The grownups of tomorrow move like a herd of cattle from the "grazing" outside into the narrow confines of a corral, in order to be forced with special tidbits of knowledge, which have been prepared and pre-chewed, according to ancient recipes. These bits are usually old stuff, some very tough, and all without sugar or spice. Nobody has any doubt what that kind of food will do to anyone.

Very regularly, every 35 or 40 minutes, the same charring sound as at the beginning of the day, changes the class structure in a disturbing fashion.

Every time a new teacher comes into the classroom or the students go to a stranger.

The teacher meets roughly 25 or 30 not so eager students. He does not know what they experienced previously or what awaits them when they leave him.

To add to all that, who knows what happened to all of them last night or at breakfast.

The teacher knows them through "his" classes only, which is, of necessity, very little. The colleagues who taught the students before or will teach them afterward are, at most known to him privately.

Their teaching, their contact to the students is totally unknown to him, except when the students complain, either about a teacher who is too strict (there are still some of those) or a dud.

## Confrontation not Cooperation

On the other hand the students don't know what happened to their teacher: In his family, during the last "period" or what he will be experiencing in the next. What a situation!

For years these people have to work with each other and none of them has a clue about the other.

It is not surprising then, that in many instances instead of working together the strain on all sides develops into confrontation or worse still into lethargy.

The inflexible structure of a schoolday divided into single periods (double periods are still the exceptions and usually reserved for the technical subjects) does not fit anymore. We need a new way, one which does not concentrate on the single period, but considers the whole schoolday in a more life-like fashion.

### Clock

The clock on the wall and the bell, how well do I remember them myself, become magnets. Some periods won't end, so it seems, and some are gone too fast.

The teachers too are forced to live by these twin-horrors. The subject matter should be summed-up and the homework must be assigned before the "sound" chases the students out of the room.

All that in 35 to 40 minutes? The three to five minutes of change, which follow are the most exasperating time of the day. The students

jump into a vastly different world during these minutes. Every teacher knows how difficult it is to get the students "back on track" so to speak.

This happens seven, eight or nine times during the schoolday. Some sober research here would probably discover that not five but more likely ten minutes are lost during each change.

There are, of course, other periods full of enthusiastic and excellent work. Those in groups with wild discussions about marijuana, the Prime Minister, the death penalty or some ridiculous school rules, until the "sound" tears into a beautifully, carefully orchestrated learning situation. There is no pressure and no anxiety to spoil the easy flow of getting to know each other. But to do all this in only 40 minutes leads to superficiality. At the end all you can say: See you tomorrow when we start at square one again, and they are gone. In the meantime the tools of the factory, (punch) clock bells, and periods are taking their boring course.

The present bell system is destructive. Trained by the bell, (poor Pavlov and his dog) which turns the still developing brains of our students on and off, it is more often than not the measuring stick by which students judge their different subject classes.

Since those classes are far apart by time and through the personalities of their different teachers - there can hardly be a connection between all of that.

A formula in chemistry or an equation in physics are unwillingly accepted in biology or mathematics; to analyze the language of any textbook, other than French or English, seems utterly ridiculous.

The possibility of using diagrams in a language class produces incredulity. There are certainly more and probably better examples to demonstrate the "apartness" of some subjects in our curriculum. Every teacher teaches his "stuff" and contacts to other subject areas are rare.

Schools totally out of date. The schools with which we have lived are out of date. The American educator James Coleman in "Education in the age of computers and mass computation" and in "The Children have outgrown the school" is of the same opinion, or a very similar one, as Toffler. His analysis: "The signposts of past societies show a poverty of information a narrow range of values (transmitted by family, church and school), a rich variety of activities within the home. All these signs are reversed in our fast developing industrial society.

An overabundance of information through television, an un-

believable extension in the range of values (or what is thought of as values) and an almost total lack of activity in the home with the family; these are the modern characteristics!"

Television is feeding, overfeeding out children daily with information for many hours in a day. (A thought for TV set producers: Come up with a failsafe shut-off lock, so that parents can switch it off. We all know that another room or detaching the cable just won't do).

Again, after many hours of TV there is hardly any enthusiasm left for the school. What else can there be new, interesting or to be learned in our schools which television has not shown them already? The teachers are no longer the worldwide people who can talk about the wonders of the world - not like the great teachers of the past, or our great Canadian writers.

But who of our students reads anymore? About the past or the present? Perhaps one book a year when it is demanded for a test!

A new model for the schoolday

There must be another and a better way than that. I suggest that the whole day be

divided into three blocks of 1½ to 2 hours.

There should be real "rest periods" within the block, determined by the teachers (and the class?), not just 5 minute class - teacher changes determined by a bell or a clock.

The possibilities of what to do within such a block are staggering, obvious and exhilarating!

Discussions, research, groupwork and, of course, teaching and drill in the respective subjects. Even, if felt strongly enough, why not a 10 to 20 minute break for a walk within the confines of the school property. Or, the demonstration of a world champion chessgame, or, or.

Organized like that, stress can be reduced to a minimum, teachers and students alike will, at last, be able to communicate with each other. The capability to concentrate on fewer subjects during each day will certainly grow and with it the enthusiasm to learn. The preparation of such a block, in order to be effective etc. will demand far more from a teacher than now. (The danger of "letting them do their own thing" is always present) He or she will not be able just to hide behind their subject, or

say sorry, I was hired to teach mathematics and nothing else.

More all 'round education for teachers will be demanded, teachers interested in inter-related subjects like English, political science and history (the same for French), teachers open to the world and not just pure specialists, teachers friendly toward their students; those will be some of the criteria for the boards who will do the hiring.

There will certainly be problems, for example how to distribute the subjects within the block. But I think, with a creative administration, it can be done. Apart from that, even that body, needs a challenge for the future.

The main task for the students will be to acquire techniques of how to study so that in later years they will not hesitate to conquer other spheres of knowledge on their own.

With that achieved schools will approach their real destiny, not to hammer away at facts, but to teach how to learn.

Editor's note: Dr. Hackstetter is a retired math teacher and resides in Midland.

## UNWANTED HAIR



Gone Forever!  
Mrs. Alice Goodman  
Electrology  
Therapist

Permanent removal from face and body. Eyebrows shaped. Safe, gentle, shortwave method.

— Medically approved  
— Free consultation and test  
12 years experience

GOODMAN CLINIC  
OF ELECTROLYSIS  
526-9479

Member of Ont. and Am. Electrolysis Association

## Dancercize

Fun with  
Dance and Exercise  
to Music

- Helps Tone-up
- Shape up for better health and co-ordination
- Lose inches and weight the Dancercize way

Classes start Thursday Oct. 16 for 10 wks. from 8-9 p.m.

Registration on Thursday Oct. 16 at 7:30 at Wasaga Stars Arena.

## RIVIERA SCHOOL OF MODELLING

72-A Dunlop St. E.  
Call collect 726-4723 or evenings 429-4138

## Church directory



### FREE METHODIST CHURCH

Wyevale  
'A church that cares about you'

Sundays  
Light on Life Hour - 10:15 a.m.  
Worship Hour - 11:00 a.m.

Thursdays  
Prayer - 8:00 p.m.  
Tel.: - 322-1718

# CHRISTMAS

## CAKE

### SPECIAL

THE COUNTRY FOOD BARREL

LIST OF GOODS

- Candy
- Nuts
- Spices
- Dried Fruits
- Dried Beans & Lentils
- Baking Supplies
- Pastas
- Tea
- Coffee

LIST OF GOODS

- Jams, Jellies & Honey
- Fruit Crystals
- Soup Bases
- Jelly & Pudding Powders
- Pie Fillings
- Sauces
- Condiments

SHOP AND SAVE IN AN OLD-TIME GENERAL STORE ATMOSPHERE

Glazed Cherries red and green  
**\$1.85** lb.  
Mixed Fruit  
**\$1.20** lb.

Golden Raisins  
**\$1.65** lb.  
Glazed Pineapple red, green and natural  
**\$1.85** lb.  
Thompson Seedless Raisins  
**\$1.60** lb.

Hours: 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Monday to Saturday  
9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Thursday & Friday  
42 Dunlop St. W., Barrie, 726-4326