

That's My Line



Clara Piotrowski school principal

Clara Piotrowski has been the Principal at Burkevale School in Penetanguishene since January, 1970. Burkevale School is the only Protestant Separate School in Ontario.

The only other Protestant separate school in Ontario at the start of the last school year was in Graton, Ontario, in the Ottawa Valley. That school had one teacher and seven pupils, in Grades 2,4,5,6,7 and 8.

Burkevale in the school year just finished, had 160 students. It's 100th anniversary will be celebrated next July.

The school in Graton didn't finish the year.

Piotrowski, who started teaching in 1962, the last 14 years at Burkevale, sees a difference in the students of then and the students of today. She thinks that changes in the family structure and in social values, have contributed to the changes in the students she sees today.

Children today are not smarter, just more knowledgeable, she says.

Television has had a lot to do with the changes.

"In some cases the teachers almost have to compete with the television. Here I am teacher, entertain me!"

Teachers spent more time teaching their students how to listen. Piotrowski says that children are used to listening, or not listening, as they wish, to what is on the television, and that they are doing the same thing in

school.

More activities today stress listening, a skill that comes only after much repetition on the part of the teacher and students, she said.

In the day of the working mother, when the working mother has to work, the principal says, babysitters are apt to have more than the normal number of children in their care, perhaps five or six pre-schoolers. These babysitters can not spend the same amount of time as a mother might with two or three children.

Not as much time is spent reading to the children, or making cut and paste projects. "This contributes to our problem," she said.

On the other hand, children who spend time with a babysitter seem to settle in at school more easily than do children who are always with their mother.

Nearly 100 years ago the ancestors of some of today's pupils went to school on the same property. The first school was torn down in 1965 and replaced by the present building. Burkevale is a separate school because the first school board in Penetanguishene was formed by Catholic parents, and, being first established, the local public school system was a catholic system.

Even today, Piotrowski noted, only the head of five families are needed to start a school.

The present school can accommodate 180 students without overcrowding.

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