

Inundated by education's self-styled reforms

IN 30 plus years as an editor, a parent, and a teacher, I have been inundated (though not quite drowned) by several waves of self-styled "reform" of our educational system, especially that of Ontario.

Each wave has washed away some of the basic values in our system and left behind a heap of detritus, from which teachers and students eventually emerge, gasping for a breath of clean air.

Most of the "massive" reforms in our system are borrowed from the U.S., after 30 or 40 years of testing there have proven them dubious, if not worthless.

We have borrowed from the pragmatist, John Dewey, and American, who had some good ideas, but tried to put them into mass production, an endearing but not necessarily noble trait of our cousins below the border.

We have tried the ridiculous, "See, Jane. See Spot run. Spot, see Jane vomit," sort of thing which completely ignores the child's demand for heroes and witches and shining maidens, and things that go bump in the night.

We have tried "teaching the whole child", a process in which the teacher becomes father mother, uncle aunt, grandfather grandma, psychiatrist, buddy, confidant, and football to kick around, while the kid does what he/she dam-well-pleases. And we wonder about teacher "burn-out".

We have tried a system in which the children choose from a sort of Pandora's box what subjects they would like to take, and giving them a credit for each subject to which

Bill Smiley

they are "exposed", whether or not they have learned anything in it.

That was a bit of a disaster. Kids, like adults, chose the things that were "fun", that were "easy", that didn't have exams, that allowed them to "express their individuality."

New courses were introduced with the rapidity of rabbits breeding. A kid who was confident that he would be a great brain surgeon took everything from basket-weaving to bird-watching because they were fun.

And suddenly, at about the age of 17, he/she discovered that it was necessary to know some science, mathematics, Latin, history and English to become a brain surgeon (or a novelist, or a playwright, or an engineer, etc.).

There are very few jobs open in basket-weaving and bird-watching or World Religions or another couple of dozen I could name, but won't, for fear of being beaten to death by a tizzy of teachers the day this column appears.

The universities, those sacrosanct institutions, where the truth shall make you free, went along with the Great Deception. They lowered their standards, in a desperate scramble for live bodies. They competed for students with all the grace of merchants in an Armenian bazaar.

Another swing of the pendulum. Parents discovered that their kids know something about a lot of things, but not much about anything. They got mad.

The universities, a little red in the face suddenly and virtuously announced that many high school graduates were illiterate, which was a lot of crap. They were the people who decided that a second language was not necessary. They were the people who accepted students with a mark of 50 in English, which means the kid actually failed, but his teacher gave him a credit.

Nobody, in the new system, really failed. If they mastered just less than half the work, got a 48 percent, they were raised to 50. If they flunked every subject they took, they were transferred to another "level", where they could succeed, and even excel.

The latest of these politically-inspired, slovenly-researched reforms in Ontario is called SERP, and it sounds just like, and is just like NERD.

Reading its contents carefully, one comes to the conclusion that if Serp is accepted, the result will be a great leveller. Out of one side of its mouth it suggests that education be compressed, by abandoning of Grade 13, and out of the other side, that education be expanded by adding a lot of new things to the curriculum. How can you compress something and expand it at the same time?

Only a commission on education could even suggest such a thing.

There will be lots of money for "Special Education" in the new plan. There will be less money for excellence. Special Education is educational jargon for teaching stupid kids.

Bright kids are looked down upon as an "elite" group, and they should be put in their place.

The universities would enjoy seeing Grade 13 disappear. That would mean they'd have a warm body for four years, at a cost of about \$4,000 a year, instead of three.

I am not an old fogey. I am not a reactionary. I believe in change. Anything that does not change becomes static, or dies. Ideas that refuse the change become dessicated.

I am not against spending lots of money to teach stupid kids, or emotionally disturbed kids. But I am squarely against any move toward squelching the brightest and best of our youth, and sending off to university people who are in that extremely vulnerable stage of half-adolescent, half-adult, and turfing them into classes of 200 or 300, where they are no more than a cypher on the books of a so-called hall of learning.

And I have the proof right before me, in the form of several brilliant essays by Grade 13 students, better than anything I ever write, who have had a chance to come to terms with themselves and with life, in a small class, with a teacher who knows, likes, and encourages them, rather than a remote figure at a podium.

The Junk Drawer Part II: The serious side

Ray Baker

This week's exciting column is The Junk Drawer Part II. In last week's absorbing saga, the ground rules for a first class junk drawer were laid out. An in-depth study of size, accessibility, ownership, claim-staking, drawer recognition and identification, and capacity.

In part two, the serious side of junk drawers is analyzed, including such essentials as hours of operation, usage, and, finally, the most important point, which to my knowledge has been the least addressed, contents.

Hours of operation are seasonal. When used early morning, it serves to also waken people out of well-deserved sleep. Late night operation, usually carried out in a frenzy, prevents the onset of the well-deserved sleep. Both times are recommended as peak use.

Weekends, when most stores are closed, is a good time, more so in the depths of winter when heavy snowfall makes it impractical or impossible to slip, or slide, to the corner shop. Usage. Ideally everyone in the family

should access the junk drawer simultaneously. Burrowing or rummaging, rather than a logical search pattern, is the mode. A frenetic two-handed mess is first choice. The least preferred being the casual one handed leisurely approach when alone in the house.

Timing-wise, just as dinner is laid out, and ready to go cold on the plate, rather than between meals. The advantage here being increased activity around the junk drawer area adjacent to the kitchen sink.

Contents. A good rule of thumb is everything but the kitchen sink. This particular object being located nearby would make duplication rather obvious. The basic starter kit comprises, as a minimum: 1) Short lengths of string, pre-tangled, with four

ends; 2) Fishing line in Bird's nest condition, containing at least one lure, with hooks; 3) One-left hand only, rubber glove, with finger missing; 4) A transparent measuring cup, handle missing; 5) An old shoe polish tin, containing rusty pins and lead shot; 6) A deck of new playing cards with at least six missing; 7) A precision engineered steel handle for something; 8) Plastic bread bags, tied at the neck with un-loosable knots, containing assorted beads, marbles, a broken 30A fuse, nuts and bolts with dissimilar threads, bent washers; 9) Miscellaneous rubber bands, varying in size from too small to too large, the apparently good ones being perished with age; 10) Mismatched plastic soldiers, bayonets and rifles having been chewed off, two smellie cards, from which the

smell is long gone, one rubber date stamp with four sections missing; 11) Magic markers, dried out, hard paint brushes, paper clips in excellent condition, a hardened tube of all-purpose glue and an extension cord with one end missing, complete the ensemble.

The rest is up to you.

For maximum efficiency, the thing you think you need is always on the bottom. This means pulling everything out in a mess until you find it, at which point everything is stuffed back in at random.

You now have the makings of a good junk drawer which you can be embarrassed to show anyone.

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE. Junk a large Chinese vessel with high poop, prominent stem and battened lug sails, Funk and Wagnalls (deluxe edition).

Ray Baker is a freelance junk collector, as is his family. They live in Penetanguishene. He is also a writer.

HDH brass to gather at hospital, Aug. 26

Board of Huronia District Hospital will be attending a monthly meeting at HDH on the evening of Monday, Aug. 26, reports Gord Key, hospital administrator.

Local law-makers meet in public session

Midland law-makers met last night for a public session at town hall. The meeting fell on the heels of a special one policy makers attended last week.

Fair weather on its way today in Huronia

The weather man is calling for fair weather today with winds gusting out of the southeast at 10 to 15 knots.

Ambulance company busy this summer

Midland District Ambulance Service personnel continue to have a busy summer.

So far this month attendants have responded to 125 calls. Last month they answered 335 while in June they responded to 260 and in May, 266.

Town, police meet once more this Thursday

At the suggestion of the contract negotiators for the Midland Police Association, negotiators for the police and the town will meet on Thursday to try to settle outstanding details of a contract for the town police.

The town police have been working without a contract since the end of 1984. Conciliation did not resolve the impasse. The contract negotiation is set to go to binding arbitration.

Pension benefits for police officers, and increased salaries for civilian members, are at

issue. Police negotiator Constable Dan Gilbert believes the two sides are close on the matter of salaries for the civilian members.

The years put in by the town's two police officers who started with the town before 1963 do not count in their pension calculation.

Nineteen sixty-three is the year the pension plan started. Giving the two officers credit for all of their years is another unresolved issue.

Glider pilot recording record 'highs' these days

Gerhard Ehmcke, a well known Midland glider pilot did it again. For the second time within the past few weeks he has flown a glider to an altitude of well over the 6,000-foot mark.

Earlier this year he did the feat high over Thornbury. Two Sunday's ago he climbed to an altitude of 6,100 feet over the Barrie airport thanks to super warm updrafts.

He managed to stay aloft 90 minutes on both occasions.

North Simcoe news briefs

Provincial Park programs sure to spark up summer

Visitor Services programs in Provincial Parks are organized for the enjoyment and education of park users. In Huronia, programs will be offered at Awenda, Earl Rowe, Six Mile Lake and Wasaga Beach Provincial Parks. An array of experiences are offered, ranging from demonstrations of canoeing, camping and other recreational skills, to nature hikes, guest speakers and film programs.

Campers, day-users and the general public are all welcome to participate. A valid campsite or daily vehicle permit is the only fee applicable. The \$2.50 per vehicle day use fee provides entry into the park as well as use of all park facilities for the day.

Voters go to polls on Tuesday, Nov. 12

Tuesday, Nov. 12, is the day voters in Ontario go to the polls to elect their new municipal councils and school boards to a new three-year term.

Highway accidents mar seven-day period here

Sixteen motor-vehicle accidents took place on North Simcoe highways during the week Aug. 6-12, Midland OPP report.

Chalk up yet another busy week for OPP

During the week ending Aug. 12, Midland OPP probed 135 general occurrences, including 16 thefts and six break-ins, as well as investigated Liquor Licence Act violations over the weekend in the area of Tiny Beaches which resulted in a total of 55 charges being laid.

Bandage One makes eight trips to HDH

Bandage One, Ministry of Health's helicopter ambulance based at Buttonville, made a total of eight trips to Huronia District Hospital from last Friday to Sunday, reports Gord Key, hospital administrator.

The 'chopper made two trips to HDH on Friday, three on Saturday and three more on Sunday.

Only Peterborough Hospital uses the 'copter more than HDH, it has been reported.

Building permits tell story in Town of Midland

So far this year a total of 125 building permits have been issued in Midland for a total value of construction of \$2,249,075.

During the same period in '84, a total of 144 were issued for a value of \$2,573,900.

Downpour drenches district

Wednesday's hazy weather with its unstable air heralded a 4 p.m. downpour which was enough to soak dry lawns and parched fields.

The brief five minute shower turned an otherwise sticky afternoon into a lot less humid one thanks to a cold front that rolled into the area with the rain.

Shed fire leaps to pickup

Penetanguishene Fire Department reports just one blaze since last week, when a storage shed at 147 Main St., and a truck parked alongside were totally destroyed by a fire of suspicious origin, around 3:30 a.m. Friday.

The full damages estimate, currently being prepared by an insurance adjuster, is likely to be substantial, reports Fire Chief Ted Light, as the truck was a 1972 Ford pickup with a camper top and the shed was full of camping equipment.