

Parents' Council asks:

Are our children being educated?

By Ivy Reeve

Are our children being educated? Opinions clashed on this question when Thornhill Parents' Council and a panel of guest speakers met last week.

However, there seemed to be total agreement that "parent input" should increase.

Education, said Council President Michael Bailey, "demands a third voice — that of parents. It is our children and our money that are involved."

York County Trustee Margaret Coburn suggested the major difference between education in "The Good Old Days" and the current approach is consideration for individual differences.

Referring to a "selected emphasis on how people learn", she noted the "tastes and capabilities" of students are, by and large, being taken into account. "We are educating our children," she stated, and schools are also giving pupils opportunities to "educate themselves."

Mrs. Coburn recalled the drills she had undergone, and compared her outlook when a student to that of her son.

"He has trouble deciding about adverbs. But I had trouble deciding about my future." Her son, she believes, will "probably find his place before I did."

Panelist David Cork, a lawyer and resident of Baythorn Drive, Thornhill, wondered if the type of education provided by schools in the county is "sufficient or adequate". He speculated that on the average it is "borderline".

He expressed concern about violence on television, quoting an estimate that children see about 12,000 television characters being "killed" every year. He asked why educators and others had made "no real evaluation of the effect of television on children," and why schools "do not take a definite stand to counteract the effects of television or the environment in general."

Guidance in values

He said he hoped schools would provide "some guidance as to right and wrong."

Teachers who attended universities during the '50's and '60's when there was, according to Cork, a "swing to individual license," may feel they "should not impose their own will on the children," and that students should be allowed to "do their own thing."

"Something is wrong. The system is starting to crack and crumble." And teachers, he said, "are not meeting this problem head on."

Cork argued that standards are declining and said he was "afraid there has been obvious militancy on the part of teachers."

He noted that in the spring of 1974, OSSTF had rewritten its goals. "Education of children used to be given top priority," Cork said. Goal restatement, he added, seems to give OSSTF "top priority to protect its members."

Cork emphasized that he was not "trying to preach doom and gloom." Students, he observed, were "doing remarkably well considering the problems surrounding them."

Panelist Bruce Bone suggested that the "militancy" sometimes ascribed to teachers may be a consequence of "all the frustration teachers face with the job we are expecting them to do."

"Their basic concern is the child in the classroom," Bone, who served for 10 years on the York County Board of Education, is a former chairperson of Metro Toronto School Board and will seek the nomination as Liberal candidate for York Mills.

He urged parents to take an active interest in education. "With sufficient dialogue, a lot of problems can be solved."

He said he believes "valid changes have been made in the past few years" and that he would "hate to see them thrown out". However, Bone remarked he hopes for "more emphasis on the language arts."

More of 'three Rs'

"The 'three R's' perhaps have not been given the attention they need."

Dr. John B. Fotheringham described schools as an important source of stability "in a time of great instability". Schools, he said, inculcate "a sense of purpose for the individual," a sense of the "personal worth of the individual... an awareness of the value of other individuals and a sense of responsibility toward the community."

Socialization of students, Dr. Fotheringham suggested, is necessary "so we can impart knowledge to them."

In the past, he observed, "it was the family that was transmitting social goals. This area has fallen by default to the schools."

He expressed some reservations about a tendency to "become obsessed with courses." This, he said, may disrupt the socialization process. At the senior level, students may have to contend with different teachers, different classmates and different classrooms for each course.

Dr. Fotheringham recommended that when students demonstrate they are capable of taking responsibility, they could be offered more choice, and "proceed from structure to non-structure."

He also suggested it should be easier for a student to leave school and easier for a student to return. For those who find school "painful and unpleasant," part-time jobs, alternating with tutoring, might encourage such students to continue their education.

Dr. Fotheringham, a psychiatrist and the director of Children's Mental Health Services for North York General Hospital, is a resident of Elgin Street, Thornhill.

An out for 'turned off'

A policy permitting some children to leave school at age 14 was discussed by Mrs. Coburn. The Early Leaving committee, she said, has in the past four months received 30 to 40 applications out of the total enrollment in the county. Some of these children later changed their minds. The policy, she explained, was established to benefit the child who had been "completely turned off," and had developed behavioral problems.

She assured parents each case was dealt with individually and that circumstances were carefully examined.

Lillian Markovitch outlined some of her concern as a parent and a teacher. She is a primary school Master Teacher in York.



"I want each child to find satisfaction and the purposeful mind set that comes with confidence in one's capabilities and the sure and efficient use of communication."

"I want each child to be able to find and organize relevant information, to develop the inner calm that comes from self-knowledge and a realistic view of what we can and cannot do — to have a philosophy, a value system, that has evolved from personal experience and that of others... yet to remain open to new experience and new knowledge."

Teachers, principals and parents, she said, "must talk to each other and work together."

"If we as members of a common team will join together in concern and commitment, we can and will educate our children."

Ian Scott took exception to assumptions that teachers are to blame for declining standards. He is president of District 11, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

"In the past 15 years we have seen the introduction of the Robarts plan — streaming children into five-year, four-year or two-year courses with a choice of academic, commercial or technical training. This plan did accomplish its objectives of having more students complete more years of school, and consequently, they were kept off the job market for a longer period of time."

"To accomplish this, it was necessary to somewhat lower the standards of the past."

Adoption of concepts in the Hall-Dennis report resulted in change, "offering almost unlimited choices of options." Meanwhile, Scott said, the government "not only cut back the grants which had been given in the past for some specialized courses, but it also imposed ceilings."

Seek smaller classes

"This was done in a time of escalating costs, in a time of inflation and when more and more teachers were appearing with better educational qualifications — especially in the elementary schools."

During the 1970's, he indicated, "teachers began to take more pride in themselves and in their profession. They began to ask for a say in the working conditions and in class sizes — not for their own selfish interests as sometimes has been suggested, but because they were more aware of the realities of the classroom situation than anyone else."

He advised the audience that if the education their children are receiving is "not to your satisfaction, let the trustees and government know."

T.H. Quail, a member of the audience, made a distinction between schooling and education. Students, he said, are receiving "too much education and too little schooling."

"We're turning out well-educated people who are good at relating, but what we're concerned about are academic values."

Quail contended that "hard facts, learned by heart, are the basis for education."

Teachers, he said, are "taking on too much."

University entrance easy

Dr. David Bell, director of the graduate program in political science at York University, told members of the council numerous first-year students are unprepared for university-level courses. The 60 percent average required for university entrance is unsatisfactory, he indicated.

Dr. Bell said written work submitted by some first-year students is defective and when assignments require conceptual analysis, students often display a lack of experience in critical thinking.

Lowering of university entrance requirements, another member of the audience suggested, may be a "matter of politics and financing." He challenged what he termed the "mythology" that most students are "not prepared", but admitted that some high school graduates "don't belong in universities."

In addition to problems of financing, the policy of allowing more students to attend universities may be a result of a "demand for universal education," panelist Scott stated.

"Twenty-five years ago, only about 40 percent of our students finished high school." Today, he estimated, the number of students who graduate from high schools represents about 80 percent of initial enrollment.

The findings of the panel and of the Parents' Council were summed up by Council Treasurer Ed Drenfeldt.

"There are perhaps thousands of answers," he said, to questions relating to education.

Tops York Math League

Thornlea cleans up in math contests

Thornhill's Thornlea Secondary School walked away with all the top honors in the second session of the York County Math League Thursday.

In a competition among 31 teams from 15 different schools, Thornlea had the two top teams and four Thornlea students won the top individual prizes.

Simon Ives and Mike Zurowski in year 3, Jun Terado in year 2 and Aube Ehrlick in year 1, also had top individual scores in the last competition at Thornlea in March.

On the first place team from Thornlea were Ives, Terado, Alan Clarke, David Clusiau and Saroja Polovarapu. They had 52 points.

On the second place team, with 51 points, were Zurowski, Ehrlick, Lorraine Butt, Richard Sharp and Steve Evans.

King City Secondary was third with 41, Woodbridge fourth with 37, Thornhill fifth, Richmond Hill and Markham sixth, Bayview eighth, Thornlea, Markham, Newmarket and Thornhill, ninth.

At the competition, held at Huron Heights Secondary in Newmarket, competitors answered a series of multiple choice questions in the first section and a set of essay-type questions in the second section.

The idea of a math league came from Thornlea Math teacher Shan Pinkerton. Only students in years 1, 2, and 3 competed.

Junior Math Contest In a junior math contest written recently by 20,359 students in six provinces, a Thornlea team composed of Ives, Sharp, Clarke, Clusiau and Butt was first out of 13 York teams competing, 46th out of 504 in Ontario teams and 66th out of 945 across Canada.

Markham was second in York and Bayview, third. The top student in York, R.S. Peterson from King City Secondary, scored 91.75 out of 140. He was 46th in Ontario and 73rd in Canada. P.A. Holyoke from Newmarket was second in York with 78.75 and Thornlea's Ives was third with 77.50.

Euclid Contest In the subsequent Euclid Contest for students with no



Six of the 10 Thornlea Secondary students who brought home the team trophy from the first annual York County Math League competitions were David Clusiau, Silver Aspen Drive; Richard Sharp, Romfield Circuit; Aube Ehrlick, Lady Slipper Court;

Michael Zurowski, Apple Orchard Path; Jun Terado, Romfield Circuit and Lorraine Butt, Snowshoe Crescent, Thornhill. Thornlea has done well in other national math tests and competitions.

more than four years of secondary school, two York students tied for 19th place out of 1,466 Ontario students.

They were Polavarapu of Thornlea and Dexter Salna of Langstaff Secondary, with 72 percent. They won \$20 each.

Only 25 students received a mark of 70 percent or better.

Senior Math Contest In the annual senior mathematics contest, sponsored by the Actuarial Association of America and written all over North America, Huron Heights was 23rd among 363 Ontario schools entering. Thornlea was 26th.

Norman Wildberger of Richmond Hill placed first in Ontario with a score of 112.

Richard Aikman of Huron Heights Secondary placed 21st with 84 and Burton Patkau, also of Huron Heights, placed 31st in Ontario with 80.

The top student at Thornlea Secondary was Maria Chiu with 72.

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