

OPINION

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Stay in school takes on whole new meaning

Advice for the '70s: Stay in school.

Advice for the '80s: Stay in school, but get good grades.

Advice for the '90s: Get into a school, stay there, and get *really* good grades.

Parents will do their children the biggest favor since offering them life by forcing them to attain the highest grades possible, and to stay in school for as long as they can stand it.

The competition for first year college and university students has always been stiff, but it just got a whole lot tougher.

Declining funding, fewer post-graduate positions, more stringent grant and loans policies and enormous unemployment figures have driven young people back to school in record numbers.



Viewpoint

Andrew Mair

And the simple fact is; that if you don't have the marks, you won't make the grade.

As well, even if you do perform well in high school and beyond, your chances of landing a plum career are slim to none.

College applications amount to 105,000 this year, for a meager 70,000 placements in Ontario's 23 community colleges.

The rush to get into the col-

lege system seems to be coming from those high school students unable to attend university, because they signed up for general courses, or assumed there would be trade apprenticeships out there when they graduated.

Destreaming of high school students, may buy some time for those who have not made up their minds whether they wish to attend college or university or enter the trades by the tender age of 13. (Actually young apprentices do very well and can attain a lucrative career in the trades.)

However, it should be every parents' goal to have their children attain as much education as possible, regardless of career aspirations.

Parents who are resigned to having their children leave

after high school are deluding themselves and their children. In 10 years, a high school education will only be the beginning. Retraining will take place constantly and adult education will have to be ongoing.

No longer can we be complacent about our children's education. It is the most important gift we can give them, and those parents that are not preparing their children now may find that they will be supporting their children long into their old age.

When a student hurts a knee, who'll give a hug?

You know the PC Thing? Political Correctness? Wherein a bunch of self-appointed Good Taste Arbiters tell us what's acceptable and what's not vis a vis culture, fashion, language?

I get nervous when I see what the thin-lipped PC police can do to culture and fashion. How they can geld a Stratford production of The Merchant of Venice or torpedo a North York revival of Showboat. I don't much care for what the PC movement is doing to language either. Redefining short people as 'vertically challenged'... insisting that a quadriplegic isn't crippled — merely 'differently abled.' Denouncing school dictionaries as racist because one of the many definitions of the color "black" is "evil."

Well, that's okay. Eons after our humorless and soulless semantic monitors have turned to dust, Dame English, feisty old broad that she is, will right herself like a gyroscope and sail on.

When it comes to the New Intolerance, it's not language I'm worried about. It's behaviour. Take for example, the hug. Among the simplest of words...hug. From the Old Norse, 'hugga' meaning comfort, soothe. It's a simple, basic word for a simple, basic human activity: hugging.

Except it's not so simple anymore. Ask a teacher. Any teacher. When I was a kid in Grade 5 I had a teacher by the name of Miss Sanford. She hugged. If you got something right on the blackboard or brought her a praying mantis or finally mastered the nine times table or if she just felt like it, Miss Sanford was apt to fling her chalk skyward and throw her arms outward and plant a great big hug on you. Girl, boy, janitor, principal (well, not the principal — but just about anyone else) — especially her kids. I got some of the best hugs of my life from Miss Sanford. She's retired now — and a good thing too. If Miss Sanford went around hugging her students nowadays she'd probably wind up serving three to five.

I'm joking ... but just barely. I know a master printmaker and art instructor who answered a knock at his door last year to find a couple of policemen standing there. "Yes?" he said. "You're under arrest," they said. And they cuffed him and popped him in the back of a cruiser and took him



Basic Black

Arthur Black

downtown, without a word of explanation to his family. Bosnia? No. Nicaragua? Beirut? Nope. Small town Ontario. His crime? Well, he had been playing a game of pickup basketball with his adolescent son and a bunch of kids in the schoolyard. That evening, one of the kids had complained to his parents that the teacher had 'touched' him, during the game. That's all it took to go from respected pillar of the community to accused pervert in the lockup.

That teacher spent two nights in jail, then one year of hell, waiting for his case to come to trial. During that time, eggs were thrown at his house, his kids were harassed at school, there were obscene phone calls.

When his case came to trial, the courtroom was packed. The man's minister was there. So was his doctor and a platoon of loyal friends who knew he was innocent. Just about everybody this side of Mother Teresa testified to the sterling character of the man. The judge was furious. With a laser glare at the police and a sulphurous lecture about wasting court time on a case that was without a shred of evidence, he threw it out of court.

Which brings me back to hugging. If a person can get arrested and humiliated for an alleged accidental elbow in a game of pickup hoop ball, what would the sentence be for a Miss Sanford who hugged us all — with or without a basketball?

More to the point, where does the New Intolerance leave teachers nowadays? Is it worth their career to ruffle a kid's cowlick when he's just scored a touchdown? Would they dare to comfort a student who crumples, weeping, under the stress of impending exams?

If your kid falls in the schoolyard and comes up squalling with a bloody knee, is the teacher going to be there to administer the obligatory therapeutic hug?

Not bloody likely.



ADAM

by Brian Basset

