

There is increasing public suspicion that claims of excellence within public educational institutions, as witnessed by transcripts and report cards, are but a mockery of the truth. Given the sharp disparities in current philosophies of education, it becomes understandable why a certain lack of integrity could obtain. In order to restore integrity within public education, two basic dilemmas must be recognized and dealt with: the dilemmas that stem from our conception of 'education' and of 'good teacher'.
Toronto, Ontario.

Laurence Stott*

Integrity in Public Education

Respect for publicly funded institutions of learning, namely schools, colleges and universities, seems to be at a particularly low ebb. Whilst the tax bills become more and more crippling, the quality of education at these institutions is being viewed not merely with increased concern, but often with outright anger. The suspicion that standards of both achievement and behaviour are nothing but a bad joke, that many teachers do little more than pander to students every which way, is hardening into an outright accusation. In addition, the suspicion that these institutions are effectively buying off student and taxpayer protest by liberally dishing out transcripts replete with A's undeserved, is also hardening into an outright accusation. In short, there is growing concern that public education is corrupt; public institutions of learning constitute an entrenched complex holding on to its power over the public purse whilst constantly deceiving the public that all is well when all is far from well.

Consider the following, each item being a matter of public record:

"Our girls were taken out of the public school system . . . because, quite frankly, the qualities and attitudes we were trying to teach in our home were, it seemed, diametrically opposed to what was being taught (?) at school.

The selfish approach to everything, the total lack of respect for teachers and fellow students, the lackadaisical 'if I don't like it I don't need to work' was more than we could understand. Several meetings with principal and one member of the staff in particular, resulted in a patronizing 'putdown' of our views and the remark that if we didn't like it, there was always the private school".¹

The number one social crime in Canada is the money being squandered on keeping people in school, former MP Ian Arrol will tell the Canadian Education Association today . . .

Arrol claims that when most students fail, marks are raised and new courses developed or 'slapped together' in the hope that something will seem to have been achieved.

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¹Letter in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 5 October, 1972.

"Told by modern education theorists that if a student is not passing it is the teacher, not the child who is failing, many teachers meet the challenge by passing them all," says Arrol.²

OTTAWA — High schools are not teaching the three Rs — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic — as they should be, say university presidents from across the country.

"We've found that a student's high school marks just don't prove they're good enough in English or mathematics to handle some of our first-year courses," said John Evans, president of the University of Toronto.³

And why do I want to see schools closed down? Because at something close to \$1,500 per "student" annually, they're a ghastly waste of the taxpayer's money. Because the only people learning anything in them are those who would learn as much — and a lot more cheaply — in some other environment, e.g. the public libraries which our "educated" politicians treat with such miserly contempt. Because the high schools are breeding grounds of, at best, dependency, passivity, boredom, apathy, indolence, sloppiness of speech and appearance, conduct, manners and morals; of, at worst, theft, vandalism, hysteria (including sexual hysteria), drug and alcohol abuse.⁴

MONTREAL — The violence and protection rackets at Daniel Johnson High School are symptomatic of what ails all the big, modern high schools in the city, say teachers.

For the past three months, gangs of teen-age toughs have been roaming corridors of the large east-end high school extorting lunch money from younger students and beating up those who don't pay. Things are no worse here than at other schools, say teachers.

Parents are concerned about the numerous beatings, some with iron bars, about the unemployed "outsiders" in the school, about little girls being sexually harassed. They worry about marijuana-peddling, the protection rackets on Friday afternoon, the vandalism and the violence.

The parents blame the teachers and the school board. At the Monday night meeting, after taking abuse from parents for an hour, one young teacher stood up and told them bluntly: "What else do you expect from factories like this?"⁵

School boards are granted money by the provincial Government on a per student basis. Consequently each board and each school tries to maximize the number of students enrolled.

At my own school, students aged 16 to 19 who seldom or never appear for classes are kept on the nominal roll until the supply budgets have been fixed. I believe there exists in Ontario and elsewhere an unconscious coalition of politicians, civil servants, teachers, trustees, board officials, teach-

²Report in *The Toronto Sun*, Toronto, 24 September, 1975.

³Report in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 29 October, 1975.

⁴Column in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 3 November, 1975.

⁵Article in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 8 December, 1973.

ers' federation executives and school industry contractors dedicated to maximizing the secondary school population to promote its own power, prestige and income . . .

With so many people kept in custody, students in general have developed a culture of hysterical boredom . . .

At a certain time early in the year, a sense of fear overcomes the entire school when the teachers realize that little can be done by teachers, vice-principals, counsellors, or social workers to protect the students from each other.

Students who seemed polite and helpful begin to develop profane speech, antisocial attitudes and bad health habits. Apathy overwhelms most of the teachers and other staff to the point where, for example, a board plumber neglects to repair a water fountain that has been deliberately vandalized several times. Many teachers walk around the building depressed and oblivious to their surroundings. Any formal work is performed in a haphazard and inefficient fashion . . .

If you do not stop the use of schools as custodial institutions you will continue to be faced with decreasing academic and moral standards, until the lowest common denominator is reached. Incessant demands by teachers for more pay and better working conditions are a superficial symptom of the underlying frustration.

I realize Mr. Wells is a busy man, but I wish he could find the time to read these words as the last wish of someone who was once one of Toronto's keenest new teachers.⁶

HAMILTON — Hamilton Board of Education trustee Dr. Harry Paikin says the truth about violence and vandalism in the schools "is being hushed up by principals and parents," and to meet the problem the board will open a private inquiry.

"It's been kept under the surface", Dr. Paikin said yesterday, "hushed up because schools don't want scandals and mothers are afraid their children will be retaliated against."⁷

MONTREAL — Seven years and \$2-billion later the provincial Government is discovering with regret that its 37 CEGEP community colleges aren't working the way they were intended. Technical stream graduates sometimes can't read or write properly and there are far too few of them.

University stream graduates sorely lack intellectual discipline and the universities often accept them only because they need bodies to fill their empty lecture halls.

Meanwhile, the private colleges, which the CEGEPs were designed to replace, are swamped with enrolment applications and are growing at an annual rate of 10 per cent . . .

⁶Article in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 28 June, 1974.

⁷Report in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 12 July, 1975.

The CEGEPs are huge, modern, plasticized education factories of as many as 5,000 students with little discipline, relaxed standards and the best equipment money can buy . . .

Only three of the 27 Cabinet ministers send their sons and daughters to public CEGEPs; the rest have enrolled them in the private schools. Education Minister Francois Cloutier who pays lip services to his CEGEPs, says the private education sector helps keep the public sector on its toes, but he too enrolls his children in private schools.⁸

The concern is over plagiarism, students buying essays, custom made or from the agency's files, and passing them off as their own, a practice which poses many questions for those in education . . .

A Chevron reporter phoned these companies and made enquiries about buying a paper. He said that the professor had given the whole class the same assignment. The reporter wanted some guarantee that other students wouldn't submit the same work. Essay Services assured him "we keep a record of where every paper goes and where every paper is from." He was also told that if someone else from the same university ordered the same paper the student would be asked to choose another paper. The final guarantee was that the same paper would not be sent twice to the same university, and to put his mind at rest he was informed that the company sent papers to universities all across the country and so the problem does not usually arise.

(He) . . . did give some indication of the volume of his business. He said in the fall and winter terms 15 to 20 writers are kept busy producing custom made work, and that is over and above the demand for essays on file. (All the writers have their degrees checked.) Connort also said the since he started the business three and a half years ago demand has certainly increased.

Students using these services pay about \$5 a page for a custom made essay, which can be delivered in 8 days. There is a minimum charge of \$25. But if the essay requested is one of the many essays on file the cost is between \$2.50 and \$2.75 a page (converted to metric that's about five beers a page). There is also some demand from students doing their masters, and for them a custom page of research comes in around \$7 a page.⁹

The whoredom of writing is really quite humiliating. When you walk into the essay bank's office and exchange guilty glances with prospective buyers you must work up the gall to introduce your services (they may be bogus: nobody seemed eager to check my qualifications).

My first assignments were lengthy discourses on Jeremy Bentham (and here a grimace at the irony of writing about economics) and Jane Austen for \$2.00 a page (\$1.00 for a page of footnotes) . . .

⁸Article in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 12 October, 1974.

⁹Report in *The Varsity*, Students' Administrative Council of the University of Toronto, 6 October, 1975.

After the exhilaration of your first few dollars you slink away into a corner of your room, and conscience, never noted for any degree of mercy, has a field day. You become disgusted that all your years of hard work have amounted to this pittance and self-torment, and you begin to despise those who can buy an education . . .¹⁰

In other business discussed at the meeting, Greene (Dean of Arts and Science, University of Toronto) expressed concern at "the moderate escalation of grades within the Faculty as a whole." He reported that the Committee of Academic Standards, of which he is chairman, had investigated 25 courses in which over 40 percent of the students were awarded a mark of A, and that "some department chairmen are not convinced that academic standards are being maintained."¹¹

John Macdonald, executive director of the Council of Ontario Universities, told a one-day symposium on higher education at York University "The universities are doing many things the colleges could do better . . . The problem lies mainly with the universities . . ."

The prevailing approach to undergraduate university education is off-base, he said. "It should show a student the depth of human knowledge and show him what it means to truly understand a subject."

He called for an end to introductory and interdisciplinary courses "that create the illusion of understanding" and an end to "bull sessions which are treated as educational and creative."

He also urged universities to:

- Insist that high schools provide "uncompromising discipline" especially in English and mathematics in the final years . . .
- Resume evaluations of students and faculty.
- Stop abusing academic tenure . . .
- Encourage ill-prepared students "to go elsewhere."¹²

Mattie Clark, head of guidance counselling at Monarch Park Secondary School in Toronto, said the universities "are letting education down badly" because they don't require higher standards of new students.

"I don't know why the universities can't hold some kinds of standards," Miss Clark said.

She complained that under Ontario's high school credit option system, students are not getting a broad range of educational experience. The universities are going along by "giving in to the idea that spending some amount of time in a classroom is equivalent to an education."

Miss Clark appealed to universities to "lay it on the line, and back us up" by requiring a wide variety of courses in high schools. But universities take them in and then complain the kids are illiterate.¹³

¹⁰Column in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 19 September, 1974.

¹¹Report in the *University of Toronto Bulletin*, 10 October, 1975.

¹²Report in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 10 October, 1975.

¹³Report in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 8 May, 1975.

Ontario universities are so concerned about students that admission programs have become hunting expeditions for warm bodies regardless of academic standards, the associate registrar of Trent University said yesterday . . .

Describing Trent's recruiting program, Mr. Pollock said "I go out in my safari van full of posters and brochures and I expect to come back with cargo, or at least the promise of cargo.

Admissions programs are directed at getting a BIU — that's a basic income unit (provincial grant). For those of you who don't know, that's a person. They are counted on Dec. 1 (for grant purposes) and if they are alive and breathing on that date we get the money . . ."

He said that many English professors complain that new students are illiterate. "Math professors, not to be outdone, say 'Yeah, they're innumerate as well' . . . We get this shoddy product and what do we do? We pass them."

The failure rate at universities is so low that most institutions won't publish statistics, Mr. Pollock said. He said he knows of only one of Ontario's 15 universities that has released figures and it showed less than half of 1 percent fail.

"We not only pass them, we convocate them," Mr. Pollock said. "But there's ironic justice because we put them into faculties of education for teacher training."¹⁴

The point is not that this picture is overdrawn, even maliciously overdrawn. The point is that there is sufficient truth in it to make it a matter of serious concern. What can one who believes in public education and who cannot completely dismiss the charges, say to all this?

I say that public education is currently confused. It is not that teachers are poor or lacking in any dedication, it is that teachers are subject to vicious cross pressures so that they literally don't know where to stand. These cross fires can be clearly seen in the literature of education, advocating everything from the use of behaviour manipulation techniques to love, warmth and empathy, to getting rid of educational institutions altogether. I wish to claim that the roots of this mess can be traced to two dilemmas. One of these dilemmas can be eliminated, the other cannot.

The first dilemma, in microcosm, revolves around our conception of 'education'. We have a high flying notion of education as a highly motivated widening of horizons, a significant and deeply satisfying increase in understanding, appreciation or skill. The scenario created by this conception is that of the person who has got off on something, is fired up with desire and finds great meaning in pursuing this quest. Let us term this Education. Perhaps the most extreme expression of Education was made by George Leonard:

Education, at best, is ecstatic . . . As he (the educator) loses his fear of delight, he will become explicit and specific in his pursuit of the ecstatic moment. At its best, its most effective, its most unfettered, the moment of learning is a moment of delight . . . When joy is absent, the effectiveness of the learning process falls and falls until the human

¹⁴Tbid.

being is operating hesitantly, grudgingly, fearfully at only a tiny fraction of his potential . . . Indeed, the skillful pursuit of ecstasy will make the pursuit of excellence, not for the few, but for the many, what it has never been — successful.¹⁵

This notion of education, which is legitimate inasmuch as there is such a thing as genuine interest and delight in learning, is often used to deprecate institutions of learning where, it is claimed, rather than joy there is dullness, anxiety over exams, hostility or apathy because of forced assignments, strictures like "Your paper must make reference to at least five major sources", rules, bells ringing, etc. That is, it is claimed that the typical pressures of traditional institutionalized learning are inimical to *Education*, hence the current demands to revolutionize or obliterate institutions of learning, or to proliferate alternatives. Add to this the emotional upset, and severe consequences later in life, that poor performance in exam or classroom can bring, and the need for emotional well-being as a cardinal right let alone a necessary condition for a good learning experience, and one can see how easily *Education* can be used to devastate schools, and hence, teachers. *Education* is constantly held out as the goal of teaching, and furthermore most teachers recognize it as such, not least because it is such a pleasure teaching interested people, and such a depressing and debilitating drag teaching those who show no interest.

However, we have another conception of education, namely that of education as a preparation for adulthood, where the major task of adulthood is being able to support oneself and one's family. The vast majority of adults and students see education as a means to earning a living. Let us term this education. Parents are prepared to fund schools, colleges and universities mainly because they see these institutions as a legitimate and worthy means whereby their children, and other children, can attain a job of their choosing. The poorer one is, the more one tends to look to schooling to liberate one's children into a better life. Thus parents demand results. They pay for results, and accountability demands that teachers demonstrate success in teaching. To demonstrate success, there must be measures of student progress such as assignments and/or examinations. Measurement involves a distinguishing of high achievers from low achievers, hence a measure of unhappiness and anxiety for those who can't or won't achieve. And like any institution handling large numbers, schools need rules, timetables, records, checks, delegation of responsibilities, and so on. The scenario created by this conception of education is that of a student working hard, meeting the expectations of the teacher-institution, being accredited for achievements made, and gaining the pleasures that attend achievement and/or accreditation.

It is clear that whilst *Education* and education are not mutually exclusive, they tend to militate against each other. There is a very real sense in which *Education* can neither be institutionalized nor measured. Schools will not admit to forsaking the pursuit of *Education* since it is recognized as ideal, and schools cannot, politically, forsake the pursuit of education. So schools live with two conceptions of education which are deeply at variance, and teachers are gradually wilting under the resulting cross-fire. To the degree that the teacher pursues *Education* he finds himself at odds with the pressures of traditional accountability and of organization, and proceeds to blame parents and establishment for having such a petty and rigid vision. To the degree that the teacher pursues education, he finds himself pilloried by believers in *Education*, both student and adult. To

¹⁵G. Leonard, *Education and Ecstasy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), pp. 21, 22.

the extent he pursues both, he often disappoints everyone and may well tear himself to pieces.

A concrete example of the dilemma posed by the two conceptions of education, is that when university examinations were dropped in the name of *Education*, the swapping and buying of essays quickly became big business since those in the pursuit of education understand that transcripts are what it is all about. So in the cause of its highest ideal, universities lost the most elemental integrity. Similarly, in schools, in the name of *Education*, teachers tried to cater to genuine interest rather than force learning on the disinterested or hostile. But one very common interest is that of getting the most for the least and many students responded by selecting the easiest courses, which resulted in teachers with high standards losing students, which meant they either had to lower their standards or lose their jobs. Students at all levels will often reject examinations and structured assignments on Educational grounds, but then create hell if they get less than a B; having made it impossible for the teacher to arrive at meaningful grades that the teacher can be sure were honestly deserved, the student then demands high grades, for he understands very well that when the chips are down, transcripts matter. In both the case of university and school, all criticisms, internal and external, can be bought off by handing out fine looking transcripts: straight A's prove how well the student has done, how well he has benefited from this fine educational experience, and if the student knows differently, why would he raise his voice in protest when to do so would be to debase his recently acquired passport to job, money and eternal happiness?

The dilemma of *Education*—education is aggravated by an even worse dilemma which revolves around our conception of the 'good teacher'.

A 'good plumber' fixes the toilet, a bad plumber does not. A 'good carpenter' builds well fitting cupboards, a bad carpenter does not. A 'good teacher' produces students who have achieved much, a bad teacher does not. Hence the constant parent demand for exams or whatever to prove that you are a good teacher and therefore worth funding, and hence the constant temptation to dish out high grades to 'prove' how good you are. But whereas the plumber and the carpenter need only skill, since metal and wood cannot refuse to cooperate, the teacher needs both skill and the willingness of the student to cooperate. Hence the constant attraction of the elementary school where children are eager to cooperate or too scared to refuse to cooperate. But in high school, college and university, it is common knowledge that many students do refuse to cooperate. Why learn when there are more pleasant things to do? Why be pushed around by rules, required assignments, bells and the like when you are 17 years old? Why cooperate if you don't believe in *Education* or education or both? Yet this conception 'good teacher' forces me to take responsibility for another's learning. It also forces me to take responsibility for the students' behaviour in general since interested and cooperating students don't vandalize, don't abuse others, are not anti-social.

The conception 'good teacher' is as legitimate as it is devastating and unfair. It is legitimate since how else can a teacher be rated? If he articulates well, is competent in his area, clear in his presentation, enthusiastic and caring, yet none of his students are learning anything, how can we say he is a good teacher? Why should a taxpayer or parent support such a 'teacher'? Yet the conception is devastating and unfair since short of torture, hypnotism, drugs or money pay-

ments, nobody can guarantee the behaviour of others, and even these well known devices don't positively guarantee behaviour — it's amazing how resistant some people are to the manipulations of others. You cannot compel interest. What can a teacher or anyone else do with a group of students who have chosen not to learn, not to cooperate? The teacher is a failure, but is he at fault? "Good teacher" is a difficult dilemma.

The first dilemma can be easily resolved. Ministers of Education and teacher federations could make it abundantly clear to the public, adult and student, that schools are not in the *Education* game for the very good reason that it cannot be institutionalized and 'produced'. It could be made abundantly clear, and without apology, that schools are in the education game, for the very good reason that it can be institutionalized and 'produced'. The Department of Education must, for the sake of all concerned, declare that like everybody else it is all for the utopia of *Education*, but since it is actually having to run schools on real streets with real students and real parents, it must do what it can do, and what most want it to do, and that is educate. People in positions of responsibility have got to clear away the rhetoric and grapple with the realities of school. By not claiming to be in the *Education* game, a hundred and one guns are immediately silenced, and teachers can move with good conscience into meeting parent and taxpayer demands for accountability. Teachers who are contemptuous of education and value only *Education* will move out to free schools where they will be welcome and where they will be happy. If parents or students are adamant about rejecting education, they could go to private schools or possible publicly funded, but clearly labelled, 'free schools'. And since everyone is agreed on the ideal of *Education*, schools, colleges and universities could permit teachers to help those students who are intent upon *Education*. So, for example, in a secondary school there could be occasional 'free school' enclaves, learning webs, or what have you. These will wax and wane with student interest. There would be no evaluation, no transcripts. But all would understand that education is what schools, colleges and universities are all about. Taking teachers out of the crossfire would, in my opinion, totally revitalize public education in general simply because teachers would now know where they stood, and so would the public.

To insist that the strictures and structures that are inevitably part of an honest and accountable education system preclude warmth, humanity, empathy, caring and such is, to speak very carefully, nonsense. Do we conclude that the pilot is lacking warmth, humanity and caring because he insists that there be no smoking during takeoff? It is true that strictures and structure can on occasion make warmth difficult, but this is the very heart and challenge of teaching just as it is the very heart and challenge of being a parent.

And people who insist on deprecating the school by listing the drawbacks of education had better accept the fact that *everything* has its price. Life is not utopia. The whole point of the list of quotes at the outset of this paper was to demonstrate that 'freedom, love and light' in education has its price too. Yes, grades do not always prove too much, but dishonest grades, or none at all, prove much less. Yes, some students may become too dependent and docile, but this can be so in any environment, and on the whole, acquiring knowledge and skills is more, rather than less, likely to lead to creativity and independence of thought.

And people who insist that education precludes *Education* are in grave error. It is commonplace that a person often becomes intensely interested in something

he was initially coerced into. Education is such that you never know what will trigger it off, or when or where this triggering will take place. It is often said that the apathy one finds in many secondary schools proves that traditional education has killed the spontaneous curiosity that nature gives to every child, that education is the evil dragon that slays the innocent young princess of Education. Kittens are intensely curious and playful too, but cats are not. Were they too the victims of the school system? More importantly, since Education as an ideal haunts all dedicated teachers, it is virtually inevitable that given how these teachers will pursue education, Education will be a spinoff. And that is exactly how it should be — a spinoff, not an aim, a delightful surprise, not a programmed pursuit.

The second dilemma is not resolvable. A teacher never knows when students will choose for him or against him. With class A you are a good teacher and with class B you are a bad teacher. You do your best to create a significant learning experience for all your students, but you know from experience, and reflection, that it is impossible. Nevertheless, the public who pay me to do a job can rightfully demand that I be good.

Whilst this dilemma is not resolvable, to the extent to which it is clearly seen and understood by all concerned, the problems engendered by the dilemma will be alleviated. Ministers of Education, teacher federations, all who are engaged one way or another with education, must make abundantly clear to the public, adult and student, the dilemma of 'good teacher'. To understand the dilemma is to understand that a teacher can never be wholly responsible for the learning of another, and is never wholly non-responsible for the non-learning of another. Teaching-learning is pure duality. Trying to demarcate degrees of responsibility, trying to apportion praise and blame, is, in principle, doomed to failure. It is doomed to failure because it misconceives what a human relation is. The truth is, as Albert Camus saw so clearly in *The Fall*,¹⁶ that in a sense we are all responsible for each, and each responsible for all. For far too long now parents have been sloughing off responsibility, and so have many students.

Departments of Education must, then, forthrightly declare that education is the fundamental purpose of the school, and must forthrightly insist that everyone accept their responsibilities instead of shirking them. If this were done, and why shouldn't it be done, I believe our whole society would heave a great sigh of relief and applaud. Teachers would escape much of the cross-fire and could embrace firm purpose whilst still feeling the difficult dilemma of 'good teacher' and the tensions set up by the ideal 'Education'. 'Standards', of both achievement and behaviour, would cease to be a dirty word. And integrity could return to publicly funded institutions of learning.

RESUME

La prétention d'excellence des instituts d'enseignement, soutenue par les transcriptions et les notes, est de plus en plus soupçonnée par le publique, à tel point qu'on accuse une moquerie de la vérité. Etant donné les vives contrastes à l'intérieur de la philosophie pédagogique actuelle, un certain manque d'unité se montre fort compréhensible. Pour remettre de l'intégrité dans l'éducation publique, on doit reconnaître et traiter deux dilemmes de bases des dilemmes qui viennent de notre conception de l'éducation et du bon professeur.

¹⁶A. Camus, *The Fall* (New York: Vintage, 1956).