

Against group rigour

It is February the 2nd, Candlemas, and Groundhog Day. There is sunshine on the snow, and shadows of trees lie across its brilliant contours in simple, clear-cut patterns, but no ground hog is in view. I am distracted as I write, however, by a pair of glossy black squirrels who are celebrating the day as a holiday from hibernation, and are darting and swaying about in the branches after a few wizened crab apples still hanging there. They have already feasted on some crusts they had found buried in the snow under the bird-feeder, from which some chickadee must imperiously have chucked them. Although plump and in excellent shape for further hibernation, the squirrels are foraging as if they knew all about those legendary six weeks of winter yet to come and predicted by the groundhog, wherever he is.

Robert Burns declared to the famous mouse on that far ago hillside, "The present only toucheth thee" (in plain contradiction of the evidence - the wee bit housie built with many a weary nibble that his plough had just shattered). As I contemplate the present and future of this Journal, I find a different message in the behaviour of these wilder but less worried and more natural earth-born companions and fellow mortals. In their instinct for what really matters they are far removed from the robotic processes to which this journal is now subject during publication, and to which so much of our modern approach to education now seems addicted. Like idiots who must be constantly kept from burning the house down, word-processing computers, and thought-processing systems of research and "decision-making", have no warning sense of the dangers that may threaten over the long term.

Our readers will have noticed the changes in the appearance of the Journal in the last issue and may have guessed at their fashionable cause - saving money. Because the Journal's style and policy have not conformed with the more robotic aspects of process deployed by funding agencies, federal or provincial, it has had little luck in its support from either. Both are programmed to ensure the greatest good of the greatest number, in their respective constituencies. It is no paradox in Canada that the Journal's readership falls into neither's "greatest number" category. In each agency the more machine-like aspects of process are supposed to be compensated, however, if not outweighed, by a human factor in the persons of a few selected academic colleagues. But human beings do sometimes aspire to the

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superhuman: the judgments of these colleagues are required to be made in a Star Chamber process from which there is effectively no appeal. You are informed after the verdict of some of the evidence of expert witnesses that has been brought to bear; and no matter how biased or indeed false that evidence may have been, there is no way it can then be challenged.

No matter by what rule of thumb the writing appearing in these pages may be judged by those who, provincially or federally, claim foreknowledge of what "education" needs, the one criterion that the Journal tries to apply is that the stuff be interesting. Funding agencies, and word-processing machines, and educational research, seem simply unable to discriminate interestingness. The apparatus chatters remorselessly, paper and words appear endlessly from its depths, and the entire contraption cannot turn itself off until it reaches the end of its program. Bland commonplaces, streams of incoherent babble, and words of great pith and moment emerge indifferently; they are folded, packaged, and dispatched; and in due course they are jettisoned or "consumed". This Journal's publication may have its rough and ready aspects, but we like to think that here and there an active, playful, and predatory reader may scramble for some food for thought with the instinct that tells him or her this is going to be a long winter.

Education is a stodgy word but a fascinating topic; we who are in it professionally find it crops up and is pursued on any and almost every social occasion, through no act of ours. It is interesting, but too many of the publications devoted to it fail to catch any spark. This Journal was conceived and reared in an academic context, but was from the first intended to reach beyond that. As our experience has shown, this is a position not easily understood by many academics, who unsurprisingly expect that from an egg hatched by ducks should emerge a duckling. Their habits of thought, and their computers, have provided them with what they now call parameters for such ducklings (or journals for academics). This Journal has nothing against ducklings, ugly or otherwise, but is not interested in being one.

Accordingly this issue marks the beginning of our turning more firmly towards that larger audience beyond. From now on the purely academic paper, written for fellow academics, is unlikely to appear here. The paraphernalia necessary to academic reports, the tables and the bibliographies, should become less obtrusive. Only if such papers are written so clearly and on such vital aspects of education that they may set alight that spark of interest in a lay readership will we consider them for publication. What the Journal most wants from its colleagues in academic life are readable essays, that deal in intimate understanding with the aspects of their work that touch on the main issues of this huge

field of social and political aspiration called education.

What the Journal most wants from our colleagues in school life are articles that reflect the actual events of that huge field of human interaction. The Journal wants from any one and in any form writing that is knowledgeable, interesting and readable. After all, education is about life, and humour, and hope. The proper place of rigour, that admirable but grim criterion of research, is in service to these ends rather than in domination over them; it is a domination that it enjoys, unfortunately, however, over the terms of acceptability of manuscripts in many otherwise scholarly publications in education. Rigour is a word associated with death; it is what the squirrels were keen to avoid.

J.K.H.

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