THE EDUCATION ISSUE

AT A CROSSROADS
WHEN IT COMES TO SPECIAL EDUCATION WILL CANADA CHOOSE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED?

HOME EDUCATION IN CANADA

HOW MUCH DOES CLASS SIZE ACTUALLY MATTER?
THE DEBATE SEEMS BIGGER THAN THE ISSUE ITSELF

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by Frank Stirk

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As parents, we have many education options for our children: public, private, home-schooling and in some cases, hybrids of different forms.

I started school when I lived on a small farm in central Alberta where rides on a big yellow bus were routine. At times, I had quite the entourage walk me to the bus stop: my dog, Suzie, the goat and maybe a cat. The school was small, especially compared to my graduating class years later in a different city and province.

Times change and later, my wife and I (but mostly my wife) home-school our children for a number of years and then sent them off to public school.

What does the future hold for our current education system? Is it meeting our children’s needs? How can we make the education system even better? These are some of the questions we ask ourselves in this issue of the IMFC Review.

In parts of our country, those running the school system appear to have more authority than those who are actually using it. In British Columbia, 15,000 parents just signed a petition challenging the province on who can influence curriculum changes. Province by province, systems vary, as does academic calibre. Alberta has opened the door to charter schools, something John Carter explores in depth on page 21, while Ontario maintains one public school system where Catholic schools also receive funding. Each province will need to address challenges successfully: for example, how we conduct special education. An international and historical look at developments in special education is covered extensively by David Carter in this issue. Paul Faris presents a detailed, national survey of home schooling on page 16, to help Canadians understand just what home-schooling is and what it achieves. But whether it concerns religious education, curriculum changes or larger structural modifications — like opening the doors to publicly funded charter and private schools — provincial education systems need to adapt to big changes.

We need to step back and re-evaluate our objectives. Only then can we move more accurately and realistically for the future.

I hope that you are challenged by some of what you read in this issue of the IMFC Review.

Until next time, all the best.

David Carter

DAVID CARTER: Dr. David Carter is a consultant in special education and educational measurement and evaluation. He recently retired as Director of External Programs at the University of British Columbia. He was also a Director of Special Education for more than 14 years. Dave spent 33 years in public education, and has been a classroom teacher, special education teacher and school psychologist. He is the co-author of two Canadian standardized educational tests, and has recently been involved as an expert witness in two B.C. Supreme Court cases involving autism and learning disabilities. He teaches university courses for both the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, and does extensive consulting and in-service training in western Canada. He and his wife Sharon have four children.

PAUL FARIS: In 2003 Paul Faris joined the Home School Legal Defence Association of Canada as legal counsel, he became executive director in 2005. Since joining HLSDA, Paul has been serving and defending home-schooling families across Canada in the courtroom, in the media and in Parliament and provincial legislatures. Paul lives in London, Ontario, with his wife, Suzanne, also a home-school graduate.

KATE Fraher: Kate Fraher is a researcher at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. She has just completed an internship at Triniti Western University’s Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, including a work term at the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. She is finishing a degree in political science from Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia.

PETER Jon Mitchell: Peter Jon Mitchell is a Research Analyst at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. A former youth worker and speaker, Peter Jon has been involved with several youth focused non-profit organizations. Beyond his interest in youth issues, he has studied culture, society and public policy issues at the Focus on the Family Institute in Colorado. In addition to his academic background in history and political science, as well as a graduate degree in theology, Peter Jon is currently completing an advanced Masters degree.

ANDREA MrOZEK: Andrea MrOzek is Manager of Research and Communications at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Prior to joining the Institute, she was associate editor at The Western Standard, an independent news magazine in Calgary. She has also worked in education and health policy at The Fraser Institute, where she co-authored ‘Let the Funding Follow the Children: A Solution for Special Education in Ontario. Her experience at magazines includes time at Toronto Life magazine and two political journals in Prague, Czech Republic. Andrea completed her Masters degree in History at the University of Toronto.

JOHN Robson: John Robson is a columnist with the Ottawa Citizen, a broadcaster with News Talk Radio 580 CFRA in Ottawa and a host with iChannel television in Toronto. He has been a Legislative Assistant and Social Policy Researcher with the Reform Party of Canada, a Policy Analyst at the Fraser Institute and a Sessional Instructor/Assistant Instructor at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Calgary and the University of British Columbia. He has also served as Deputy Editorial Pages Editor and Senior Editorial Writer and Columnist at the Ottawa Citizen. He has written regularly for publications including Fraser Forum, Western Standard and Gravitas.

FRANK Stirk: Frank Stirk is a freelance journalist and writer from North Vancouver, B.C. He earned a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Manitoba and a Master of Divinity from the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta.
**NEWS**

**DR. MARGARET COTTLE ON PARLIAMENT HILL**

By IMFC Staff

“It is said that euthanasia kills the patient twice: the first time when you look at the patient’s life and say, ‘Your life really isn’t worth living,’ and the second time is when you actually do it.”

Dr. Margaret Cottle palliative care physician and professor at the University of British Columbia does not mince words. All eyes were on her as the petite woman with slightly grey hair herself presented her information on palliative care on October 26, 2006.

Life is a gift, she told the audience, but what of compassion for those whose lives are filled with painful suffering? She strongly asserted there is “not one shred of peer-reviewed evidence that any person is better off dead and that a secular society simply cannot rest on unproven notions of ‘mercy killing.” Through her experience and studies of palliative care, Cottle proved her main point: that pain can be successfully controlled.

She highlighted the different kinds of pain: physical, psychological, spiritual and social and cited case studies: one where physical pain had been largely relieved but some remained because the younger woman, dying of cancer, was troubled that her Clp 2 points, collected over years, would not be spent on a bicycle to her child. Cottle was able to give her peace of mind by ensuring the patient could be in the room with her family and friends during her last moments.

“Are you going to take social tragedy and make it into a personal tragedy?” Dr. Cottle asked. “If you look at the patient’s life and say, ‘Your life really isn’t worth living,’ then you are going to want to take another life, and that is very dangerous.”

The IMFC thanks Dr. Sugrue for agreeing to speak at the event and for presenting her paper, Canadian marriage policy: A tragedy for children, at a reception hosted by Liberal MP John McKay and Conservative MP David Anderson on Parliament Hill on June 3, 2006. Dr. Sugrue addressed how changing the definition of marriage affects Canada’s children.

This was the IMFC’s first reception on Parliament Hill and a group of 30 gathered, including MPs James Lunney, Jason Kenney, Paul Szabo and Ken Epp, along with staff representing MPs from other offices.

Dr. Sugrue made a moving appeal to defend children’s rights and her expertise shone afterward as she fielded questions, which opened discussion on how heterosexuals are at least partially responsible for the breakdown of the institution of marriage and whether the Canadian decision on same-sex marriage is irrevocable. If this proves to be the case, and Dr. Sugrue would not comment on that, all Canadians will need to adapt to a brave new world where same-sex adoption, test tube babies and children who know neither biological parent are par for the course.

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The IMFC also thanks Mr. McKay, Mr. Anderson and their offices for hosting this event.

Dr. Sugrue’s presentation can be found on the IMFC website in audio format. A copy of her paper, which was handed out to those who attended the reception, can be found on www.imfcanada.org. The paper was also published in the IMFC Spring/Summer Review also online. Many thanks to Dan McTeague, MP (Hon) and Pierre Lemieux, MP, for hosting the event in cooperation with the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada and the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition (www.epca.ca). Cottle’s presentation can be found online at www.imfcanada.org.

**RESEARCH ROUNDUP**

**THE SHIFT: SCHOLARLY VIEWS OF FAMILY STRUCTURE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN, 1977-2002**


The authors of this report published by the Institute for American Values seek to determine whether a scholarly “consensus” has emerged on the issue of child well-being and its relationship to family structure. Norval Glenn and Thomas Sylvester examined articles spanning 26 years published in the quarterly Journal of Marriage and Family to trace how this “consensus” (if it, in fact, exists) has been shaped and/or changed over the last few decades.

The results showed that social scholars were concerned about the effects of family structure on child well-being in the 1970s and 1980s, but that this concern lessened in the late 1980s. Despite these findings, the authors insert their own beliefs into the conclusion. They state that while not conclusive, evidence that family structure can have adverse effects on children is very convincing. The authors admit that non-experimental and quasi-experimental methods are fallible, but that “the preponderance of the evidence indicates that family structure matters, and matters to an important degree, for children.”

**TISSUE-ENGINEERED AUTOLOGOUS BLADDERS FOR PATIENTS NEEDING CYSTOPLASTY**


A team of researchers from North Carolina’s Wake Forest University have succeeded in creating tissue-engineered human bladders grown from patients own cells and successfully implanting them in seven patients suffering from bladder malfunction. Researchers say this is the first time tissues have been replaced with those grown in the laboratory from a patient’s own cells.

The lab in North Carolina, headed by Dr. Anthony Atala, is already working to develop 20 different tissues in the lab including hearts, livers, bones, blood vessels, lungs and nerves, although they say it will be a long time before they are able to engineer more complex tissues. It took Dr. Atala nine years to build and successfully implant the first bladder.

Because the tissues are made from the patient’s own cells, the bladders are not rejected by the patient’s immune system like organs transplanted from other donors. Also, the cells are derived from adult stem-cells, which is pleasing to those opposed to embryonic cell research. Furthermore, end-of-life questions are faced by families of potential organ-donors and recipients would not have to be so complicated in the future if doctors are able to grow replacement organs.

**TEENAGE SEXUAL ABSTINENCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**


Teenage sexual abstinence is linked to academic achievement, according to a paper written by The Heritage Foundation in Washington D.C. The paper employed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health in the United States. This longitudinal study surveyed roughly 14,000 youth and followed them for a period of seven years. The youth were interviewed three times during the seven year period and asked questions related to their sexual behaviour. After analyzing the survey’s findings, the authors of this paper concluded that teens who abstain from sex during their high school years are less likely to be expelled from school, less likely to drop out of school and more likely to graduate from college.

The study found that teens from identical socio-economic backgrounds who abstained from sex at least until age 18 did “dramatically better academically when compared to sexually active teens.” It is possible that teen virgins experience less emotional turmoil and fewer psychological distractions in their high school years. Teen sexual relationships tend to be short-lived and unstable, with 80 per cent ending within six months. This adds a considerable amount of stress to a teen’s life and could explain why sexually active teens fare worse academically. The authors suggest that teens who are not involved in any sexual relationships are able to focus more on their studies.

Abstinent teens also exhibit underlying character traits that serve to strengthen their ability to succeed academically as well as relationally. These character traits include perseverance, impulse control, the ability to defer gratification, future orientation and resistance to peer influence, as well as respect for parental and social values.

**EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AT AGE 19 ASSOCIATED WITH READING ABILITY AT AGE 15**


A Statistics Canada study shows that reading ability at age 15 is a predictor of educational outcomes at age 19 in Canadian adolescents. Tamara Kighton and Patrick Bassir provided study which asked if reading ability at age 15 had an impact on high school completion and participation in post-secondary education. The study concluded that students with lower reading levels at age 15 had a more difficult time graduating from high school and were more likely to drop out of high school or to remain in high school later than their peers. The results also showed that reading proficiency levels at age 15 affected participation rates in post-secondary education at 19 years old, even when controlling other factors. The authors concluded that reading proficiency at age 15 can be used to predict high school graduation and post-secondary participation.

Many thanks to Dan McTeague, MP (Hon) and Pierre Lemieux, MP, for hosting the event in cooperation with the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada and the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition (www.epca.ca). Cottle’s presentation can be found online at www.imfcanada.org.
IMFC Review: At the outset, did you encounter much, if any, public opposition to the idea of Christian education within the public school system?

Bruce Wilkinson: Not really. He had spoken to the Alberta Teachers’ Federation, telling them what we were doing, and they were of course against it, because their attitude is that they do not want any Christian teaching in the public system. They are essentially supporting another religion called secular humanism, which is intolerant of anybody else’s view but their own. But they never came out and said much. We never got any big outcry anywhere.

Gloria Chalmers: What we did say is that Logos would be based on fundamental Christian principles. He didn’t want a Pentecostal program and a United Church program, an Anglican, a Baptist program. What we would work at doing is have a program that supported the values and the beliefs of the home, as opposed to teaching some specific religious doctrine.

IMFC Review: What has the relationship been like between Logos and the public school board in the past 10 years?

BW: Wonderful, absolutely wonderful. We’ve had support from successive superintendents and from people like Gloria Chalmers and from the trustees. He has a commissioning service every fall for our program and the other three big Christian schools. Normally it’s attended by a representative, maybe several, from the school board and often a trustee. They have had excellent support.

GC: From my perspective, it has been very positive. Bruce actually spoke at a meeting of our board in November 2005 to mark the 15th anniversary of the Logos program, and he was very well-received. So I would say it’s been an excellent relationship.

IMFC Review: And what about the relationship with the community? It is interesting that Logos is formally described as “a program with an alternative teaching philosophy” rather than just simply “Christian.”

GC: Our School Act says we can develop alternative programs based on language, culture, religion, pedagogy or subject matter. We started in the business of choice in public education back in 1973. And of all the programs we started, we’ve only had two that are not still available today. We are committed to working with the parents and community to provide choice within public education.

BH: In Edmonton, there are more than 30 alternative programs of various types. Many schools have more than one program in it. One school might have the regular program and a specialized half-day in Spanish or Mandarin. There’s an all-girls school. One school emphasizes a military academy approach. Another specializes in sports. Ours just happens to be Christian. In some schools, Logos students make up about half the student body, and in one school, only Logos students attend because not enough parents were even interested in having the regular program there.

There have been one or two occasions where some parents wondered whether the increasing number of Logos students would adversely affect the school. We pointed out that without Logos, their school might be closed, because there wouldn’t be enough kids to keep it open. But on the whole, there’s been pretty good support for the program.

Sometimes when parents are moving to another major city, we ask them if it has a Logos-type program. We have to tell them that it does not.

IMFC Review: What have been some of the benefits to the children and parents who’ve been in the Logos program?

BH: Parents have been so grateful, because they find that their children are being given a standard, an approach that’s consistent with their own beliefs at home. We’ve had some parents who have said that it changed their son’s life, or things like that. They find that the nurturing that they’re getting at school affects their behaviour at home positively. They’re taught that we’re here to serve others. Each school has a service program for reaching out maybe to a seniors’ home in the community or a tsunami relief or whatever it may be that they choose.

IMFC Review: I understand there is a document that parents have to sign when they agree to place their children in Logos.

BH: That document may be a little unique to each school in some ways. But one of its key parts is our mission statement. Parents have to say that they support it. They have to agree to check their kid’s workbook and support them in any homework they have to do. The kids, where they’re old enough to make their own decisions, have to sign a document saying they’re going to do their best and respect others and so on. And the school and the teachers say what they’re committed to doing. So if discipline problems or some issues come up, the principals can say to the parents, “Okay, here’s what we agreed. Are we following that?”

If parents aren’t happy with the program, they always have the alternative to go to the regular program. But I know at least one school in which probably 10 per cent or more of its children are not Christian, but whose parents liked the values being taught and so put their kids in the program.

IMFC Review: I’m sure some parents would wonder, “Are you going to try to make my child a Christian against my wishes?”

BH: No. The program is meant to be sustaining and nurturing rather than proselytizing. That’s the focus. But the fact is there are prayer times in the classrooms. So when Johnny comes to class and says, “My mother’s very sick,” they can pray for her. They have chapel, a praise time and they celebrate Christmas and Easter. The parents, when they sign the document, know the children are going to be exposed to that.

IMFC Review: You’ve also said that the children who go through this program actually end up being more socially integrated than others.

BH: That’s right, because when people recognize that they’re able to express freely who they are and what they believe in, they’re less threatened by other groups. Second, because there are students from so many different nations in these programs, the kids just accept one another and are friends with everybody. Really it’s a very good environment.

IMFC Review: All this is so very different from the educational environment in B.C. A poll done recently showed most British Columbians think private schools are just for the rich. Is there an obvious way to avoid these public-versus-private battles?

BH: When parents are given choice according to their desires, that strengthens the public school system. In contrast, in Calgary, trustees voted against having a Christian program in their school system. So consequently, they have a lot of kids that have gone to private schools or to the Catholic schools, which are also fully-funded. Or they’ve gone to home-schooling. And the public school system is weakened because of that. They’ve woken up now and realized they have to put in some alternatives—but not, as of yet, a Christian one.

In other parts of Alberta—Red Deer, Drayton Valley, Three Hills and elsewhere—the Logos model has been expanding slowly in one of two ways. Either it’s with an alternative program such as ours, or when private schools join the public system. Either way, it’s a big benefit financially for parents.
In the summer of 2004, 30 Korean special education teachers came to the University of British Columbia to study Canadian inclusion — how Canadian schools integrate children with handicaps. The trip was sponsored by the Korean Institute for Special Education, which sends teachers around the world to examine and learn “best practices.”

As the director of special education at UBC, I found the Korean teachers enthusiastic and experienced. They had spent years working with and advocating for children with disabilities in their homeland. But special education in Korea is, for the most part, different from Canada. The teachers usually work in segregated schools, where only children with disabilities may attend. In Korea, they explained, many people with disabilities are not generally accepted by society.

When the time came to evaluate and report on what each teacher had learned, one shy young teacher, who works with severely physically and mentally challenged children, abruptly covered her face and began to cry during our final interview. Finally, she spoke through heart-wrenching sobs:
“… how did your country do this great thing?”

“Doctor, last Saturday, a few Korean teachers decided to get into a public bus. As we were driving along, we saw up ahead a man at the bus stop. He was in an electric wheelchair, his head was in a brace and he moved his wheelchair by sipping and puffing on a little straw-like device. Suddenly, the bus stopped right where the man was. The bus doors opened and the bus “knocked down” low to the ground and the driver helped the man to get on. Then the bus drove away. The man sat in his wheelchair, and sometimes made unusual sounds. No one on the bus laughed or pointed, no one even stared at him. People just kept looking out the windows or talking to each other, or reading their papers. No one looked away – they just acted as though he was a regular passenger. After a few minutes, the bus stopped, knocked down again and the man in the wheelchair got off and rolled away. Doctor, please answer this question – how did your country do this great thing?”

How did Canadian special education get to the point that other nations, like Korea, want to emulate it? We must keep in mind the attitudes toward people with disabilities and special education that have developed throughout history. Only then can we examine the current forces influencing special education and those threatening its future.

ANTICIPATED GREECE TO MODERN DEMOCRACIES

Disabilities have existed as long as people. In pre-agricultural societies, children with serious disabilities were unlikely to have endured the hardships and dangers of everyday life. Evidence shows physically disabled children were routinely killed at or near birth. Around 10,000 BC, many societies moved to a settled agricultural base. Margaret Winzer, professor of education at the University of Lethbridge and special education expert, notes that the development of large-scale agriculture and urbanization that increased “opportunities for disabled persons at least for mere survival.” The first written records of efforts to assist persons with disabilities come from Egypt, where papyri from the second millennium BC mention treatments for mental handicaps, epilepsy and deafness. The priests at Memphis ran the first school “for blind children” offering training in music, art and massage.

Ancient Greek societies were harsh in their treatment of children with disabilities. Aristotle suggested a law stating “no deformed child shall live.” In Sparta, the laws of Lycurgus were routinely killed at or near birth. “If a man brings a deformed child into the world, his property is forfeited.” In Sparta, the laws of Lycurgus stated, “no deformed child shall live.” In Sparta, the laws of Lycurgus determined that disabled babies should be exposed to death in the Taygetus gorge or optionally thrown into the river Eurotes. In Athens, the law of Lycon instructed midwives to kill “weak infants” outright and discretely dispose of the body, or to place the newborn child into a clay vessel, seal it and leave it “on the wayside to die.”

Under the Roman rule of “pater familias,” a father held sacred authority over the life and death of the family, including killing, mutilating (for the purposes of begging) or selling his own children into slavery. Even with such draconian laws, both Greek and Roman governments at times became alarmed at the numbers of children killed. Both took occasional steps to reduce infanticide committed because of gender or handicap. By the third century AD, Roman law declared all infanticide murder.

Many children who would otherwise have been killed in the first three centuries AD were rescued by Christian sects, baptized and maintained within the community. By that point, Roman laws went so far as to offer financial assistance to parents of children with disabilities if they would agree not to kill them. And yet, Seneca, the Roman philosopher, statesman and playwright of the early first century AD kept a “blind imbecile” in his household to entertain guests, as owning a seriously disabled servant was seen as a sign of wealth.

By the sixth century, there was a move across Europe toward the “cloistering” of religious orders. Many children with disabilities were given to monks or nuns as a counter to infanticide. During the 12th and 13th centuries, a number of hospitals were established to provide care for those with serious health disabilities. The most famous of these was the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, founded in London in 1247. The name corrupted over the centuries into the shortened form, Bedlam Hospital, adding a new word to the English language to describe a place of chaos.

By the 15th and 16th centuries, there was a shift away from the humanitarianism of religious orders to the cloistering of children with disabilities into large institutions. In the 16th century, there was considerable discussion within the Roman Catholic Church about the care of people with disabilities. Some proposed sending them to the cloistering of religious orders. But by the 17th century, there was a shift away from the cloistering of religious orders to the “specialization” of treatment for people with disabilities. By the 18th century, there was a shift away from the cloistering of religious orders to the “specialization” of treatment for people with disabilities. By the 19th century, there was a shift away from the cloistering of religious orders to the “specialization” of treatment for people with disabilities. By the 20th century, there was a shift away from the cloistering of religious orders to the “specialization” of treatment for people with disabilities.

“It is not the parents who have; especially in a country where there was no tradition of being generous to those with disabilities.”

In 1867, Dr. Jean Marc Itard, now considered one of the great pioneers in special education, was broad consensus that the inclusion of children with disabilities into the “mainstream” of schools was, at least in the large majority of cases, a good thing. Research supports the benefits of inclusion not just for the child with a disability, but for all children. Benefits cited for regular education students include measurable academic and social gains along with heightened senses of empathy and caring – while students with disabilities grow in social skills (through modelling), and have better academic skills development and an improved sense of self-worth.

Hallaghan and Kauffman (1991) credit the spread of democratic ideals for the surge in improved services for those with disabilities through the 19th and 20th centuries:

“… as the ideas of democracy, individual freedom and egalitarianism swept … there was a change in attitude (toward disabilities). Political reformers and leaders in medicine and education began to champion the cause of handicapped children and adults, urging that these “imperfect” or “incomplete” individuals be taught skills that would allow them to become independent, productive citizens.”

By the beginning of the 20th century, there was a proliferation of special education programs across the West. Almost exclusively designed along segregated models, they included government-funded schools for children who were blind or deaf, and large institutions for the “mentally retarded.” During this century, however, hand-in-hand with great progress came the effects of belief in radical genetic theories (including concepts like “the survival of the fittest” and the Aryan “superman”). Armed with these theories, totalitarian governments moved to widespread murder of people with disabilities. Mass killings of those the Nazis thought genetically “unfit” followed – the sick and disabled preceded the murder of Jews and others in the Holocaust. Between 1933 and 1945, it is estimated that the Nazis euthanized 200,000 such men, women and children across Germany and its occupied territories.

Although the 19th and 20th centuries brought positive changes for special education, there are competing forces influencing the survival of people with disabilities today. These include infanticide, euthanasia, assisted suicide, genetic testing, abortion and forced sterilization (the last forced sterilizations in Canada occurred in Alberta in 1972, the same years the Sexual Sterilization Act was repealed). For more than 100 years, the political, scientific and social forces seeking to kill or limit procreation of people with disabilities have competed with other less violent forces that promote the rights, value and dignity of all people regardless of handicaps. Inclusion is the literal expression of a society’s belief in and acceptance of the worth of each individual, regardless of how weak or strong they are.

During the latter half of the 20th century, there was broad consensus that the inclusion of children with disabilities into the “mainstream” of schools was, at least in the large majority of cases, a good thing. Research supports the benefits of inclusion not just for the child with a disability, but for all children. Benefits cited for regular education students include measurable academic and social gains along with heightened senses of empathy and caring – while students with disabilities grow in social skills (through modelling), and have better academic skills development and an improved sense of self-worth.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TODAY: THE IMPACT OF LITIGATION

In Canada, the Constitution prohibits federal intervention in education. Each provincial government is independently responsible for special education legislation and service delivery. It is only very recently that litigation based on the Constitution has had an impact on special education as cases rise to the Supreme Court.

To understand why the Charter has been the basis for a number of high-profile special education cases, it is essential to understand what it says about “equality rights.” When the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force in 1982, with the addition of Section 15 (the “equality” section) three years later, there was considerable discussion within the education community about what effects this might have; especially in a country where there was no tradition of citizens taking their own government to court. Section 15 states that “every individual is equalbefore and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without...
In the mid-1980s, the Supreme Court made several decisions suggesting a willingness to interpret and apply the Charter to individual cases between citizens and government. Many felt that this heralded a convergence of the Canadian non-litigation tradition with that in the U.S. where suits against government are common. Poitier, Goguen and Leslie noted in 1988 that “the attitude of the courts may be changing … they may take a more active role in interpreting the Charter.” Recently, a series of exceptional court decisions affecting special education have tested the accuracy of their prediction. One of the earliest was the Eaton case (1997), where the parents insisted on regular class integration for their child, but the school district did not agree and legal action commenced. The ultimate findings were that a) the concept of “equality” requires accommodations to the needs of those with disabilities; b) parental views about what is best for their child are not “determinative;” and c) there is no constitutional presumption in favour of integration – rather the programs must be considered in deciding what, if any, level of integration is appropriate.

In B.C., in the Auton case (2004), a group of parents of children with autism took legal action against the Ministry of Education and the provincial government. The ultimate findings were that a) the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the rights of students with disabilities. On balance, we do not yet comprehend the importance of the legal protection accorded to children with disabilities, provided they are made thoughtfully and consistently. The Charter protects the rights of children and cull those that do not meet their standard (the “new eugenics”) begin, staff that would otherwise work with children end up with intense interest – for all the talk of special education it is not about the child but about the programs and certain professionals. They are impossible to ignore … they are natural and honest questions.”

From ancient times to today, we can trace the ups and downs – mostly vast improvements corresponding to movements toward democracy – in attitudes towards special needs education. On balance, we do not yet comprehend the importance of the legal protection accorded to children with disabilities, provided they are made thoughtfully and consistently. The Charter protects the rights of children and cull those that do not meet their standard (the “new eugenics”) begin, staff that would otherwise work with children end up with intense interest – for all the talk of special education it is not about the child but about the programs and certain professionals.
To answer these questions, the Canadian Centre for Home Education distributed 5,800 questionnaire packages to home-educating families in every province and territory, and invited parents to participate by completing a 16-page survey and have their children write a Canadian Achievement Test (CAT). We received 1,648 English and French replies, which included responses for over 3,800 students (a healthy 30 per cent response rate). 1,080 CAT3 tests were completed and analyzed. In 2004, the Canadian Centre for Home Education, along with Home School Legal Defence Association, released Home Education in Canada: A Report on the Pan-Canadian Study on Home Education 2003 – the first study of its kind in a decade. In this summary, we present a selection of what our respondents have told us about home education in Canada.

DEMOGRAPHICS
A portrait of the home-educating family

The vast majority of home-educated students (96 per cent) live with both parents in families with an average of 3.3 children, where an average of 2.4 students are being taught at home. The majority (89 per cent) of home-educated students are between the ages of five and 13, and are in their elementary years of schooling. About 67 per cent of kids surveyed have been entirely home-educated, 33 per cent of students have experienced some mix of years in the classroom and at home. Home-schooling parents are well-educated: most (84 per cent of mothers and 80 per cent of fathers) have completed secondary school and have received at least some college or university instruction. Home-schooling continues to be, for the most part, a first-generation endeavour, since almost none of these parents were home-educated themselves. Despite their higher-than-average education levels, almost 70 per cent of home-educating families live with an annual household income of less than $65,000. Two-thirds of the home-schooling households report having only one income earner. In those households reporting two-income earners, most (67 per cent) of second-income earners report less than 15 hours of employment per week. Just over 11 per cent of home-educating mothers and just over five per cent of home-educating fathers hold provincial teaching certification. Most families report a religious preference or denominational affiliation.

SUPPORT GROUPS
Do home-educating families community and work one another?

Participation in home-school support groups is quite popular, as more than 70 per cent of families report affiliating with local or provincial associations. These groups offer support ranging from curricular advice to sports programs to legal protection. The vast majority of Canadian home-educating families have never experienced any legal difficulty. This suggests an entrenchment of home education into the accepted methods of educational alternatives. However, 30 per cent report some level of interference by a school board, ministry or social service agency.

MOTIVATIONS
Why do parents begin to home educate in the first place?

Most parents do not choose to home-school in response to a negative situation, but rather to proactively achieve some combination of moral, social, familial and academic goals (such as teaching certain beliefs and values, encouraging enhanced family interaction and individualizing curriculum). Many, however, do report avoiding such negative aspects of classroom attendance as wasted time, perceived lack of discipline and safety concerns.

METHODS AND LIFESTYLE
How do home educators “do education”?

This study uncovers a wide range of educational choices available to home educators. About half utilize an eclectic mix of various traditional texts and workbooks, another 17 per cent use a comprehensive textbook approach, while the rest report following a more child-initiated approach to studies. Almost all students have primarily their mother involved in their instruction, while 60 per cent report their fathers’ participation as well. Instructional roles in home education appear to have expanded over the past decade to include adults other than the parents, as child schooling continues to be, for the most part, a first-generation endeavour, since almost none of these parents were home-educated themselves. Despite their higher-than-average education levels, almost 70 per cent of home-educating families have completed secondary school and have received at least some college or university instruction. Home-schooling continues to be, for the most part, a first-generation endeavour, since almost none of these parents were home-educated themselves. Despite their higher-than-average education levels, almost 70 per cent of home-educating families live with an annual household income of less than $65,000. Two-thirds of the home-schooling households report having only one income earner. In those households reporting two-income earners, most (67 per cent) of second-income earners report less than 15 hours of employment per week. Just over 11 per cent of home-educating mothers and just over five per cent of home-educating fathers hold provincial teaching certification. Most families report a religious preference or denominational affiliation.

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amount of money spent per child, per year, to home educate is zero and, unlike those in some independent or private school settings, most families receive no financial support or funding from their broader church, family or educational communities or governments.

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

**How do home-educated students compare academically with their peers?**

Many home educators are philosophically opposed to standardized testing (possibly the reason for a lower participation rate in this segment of the study), yet 1,080 home-educated students did participate in the standardized testing option an ample sample size for further statistical analysis. The Canadian Achievement Test (CAT) was administered at home by the parents in the students’ usual educational setting and the tests were processed by the Canadian Test Centre in Markham, Ontario, with results sent directly to the CATS researcher. Over 94 per cent of home-educated students scored above the Canadian norm for both grade equivalency and age.

The growing body of research on home education is becoming an essential component of education choice in Canada. In light of the research to date, home education should be viewed as an acceptable educational option for those families willing and able to undertake it.

**LIFE SATISFACTION**

In addition to testing academic achievement, this study is the first known to collect data using Huebner’s Student Life Satisfaction Scale (1995) to capture the home-educated students’ own subjective sense of well being. Of a possible average life satisfaction score of six, home-educated students score 4.94 compared to an average score of 4.21 for students in a previous study of public-schooled students. While this data will serve as a benchmark for future similar studies, it does indicate a general contentment among the home-educated. Students who base their happiness more on positive relationships with parents than on peer relationships, physical appearance or schooling, score higher in life satisfaction; this might explain some of the higher life satisfaction among the home-educated than among publicly schooled children.

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The survey included a section to be completed by formerly home-educated adults, with 182 older siblings of those currently being home-educated responding. Virtually all are moving into further education or taking their place in the labour force as productive members of society, and are represented in the areas of agriculture and education, service, technical industries and business. The average age of this group of young adult respondents is just under 21, yet they volunteer at a high rate, with more than 82 per cent holding one or more volunteer positions in their communities (significantly, more than half of these positions in leadership). More than 60 per cent of these young adults report having voted in the last five years and none report having received any form of social assistance. While this is not a representative sample of all Canadian adults ever home-educated, it does point to a body of citizens that contributes to and participates in their communities.

**PERSUASIVE RESULTS**

The growing body of research on home education is becoming increasingly persuasive. Not only do home-educated students seem to be doing well academically, but the newest evidence also suggests that they are becoming responsible, well-socialized citizens who enjoy life. While further research is certainly called for, home education is being recognized as a responsible education choice in Canada. In light of the research to date, home education should be viewed as an acceptable educational option for those families willing and able to undertake it.

**HOW MUCH DOES HOME EDUCATION COST?**

The accepted wisdom is that smaller classes improve academic outcomes. As early as 1980, the province of Alberta lured striking Calgary teachers back into schools with larger class sizes. However, when they were forced to teach again, they were unable to help the students in the classroom. In October 2005, British Columbian teachers walked off the job; among the reasons cited was the failure of the province to confirm (smaller) class sizes. The Ontario government initiated a four-year class size reduction program in 2004 and in June 2006 also created an online class size tracker to show parents the progress school boards are making in reducing the size of primary classes.2 Class size remains a critical issue for teachers, boards and parents alike, all in spite of a lack of consensus about its effect on academic outcomes. Countless studies have attempted to produce definitive answers, to no avail. The most agreement lies around the younger years—a class size cap at 17 students for children from kindergarten to third grade may produce some increased benefit in academic outcome.

The bigger question is whether the attention given to class size caps overshadow other important initiatives to improve schooling. A 1997 Canadian Education Association report concurred with previous findings regarding class size in the primary grades, but warned that caps are not the most efficient way of improving overall achievement.3 Teaching methods, “teacher quality,” parenting and family support and finally parental involvement can significantly affect academic outcomes. And then there are finances. At a time when school boards and provincial education ministers are attempting to offer more with limited resources and are legally obligated to operate a balanced budget, do the purported benefits of class size caps justify the financial cost and sacrifices to other education programs? Class size caps, while they may overshadow other important elements of improving education.

**THE METHODS BEHIND THE MADNESS**

“Teacher quality” may be difficult to measure, measuring how effective teaching methods are is less so. Project Follow Through, the largest, most expensive educational study ever undertaken in the United States, began in 1967 under then president Lyndon B. Johnson, who wanted “to find ways to break the cycle of poverty through improved education.”4 At a cost of about one billion dollars,5 the study continued until 1995. The government asked educators to submit pedagogical techniques, which would then be used and compared with other non-Follow Through programs. Of all the approaches reviewed, only the Direct Instruction Model, a teacher-centred approach, was found to rate more positively than others in all but designated assessment areas.6

Another meta-analysis of teaching methods, published in 2005 by the American Institutes for Research, allowed researchers to review 22 school reform models used mostly in high-poverty, low-performance schools and found that of those 22 models, Direct Instruction came out as a high performer above all but one other teaching model.7

How do home-educated students compare academically with their peers?

**WHERE ARE THE APPLE POLISHERS?**

But just as class size alone cannot remedy poor academic outcomes, neither does the implementation of the best teaching methods function in a vacuum. Teachers rely on parents to raise the “odd childhood prank aside—well-behaved kids. In a perfect world, class size might be a non-issue because student behaviour would always be the same. In reality, teachers are far from utopia and disruptive classroom behaviour is rising. In 1990, public school teachers listed the top seven disciplinary problems they faced in class: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, dress-code violations and littering. In 1990, public school teachers listed drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, rape and robbery.8

A two-year Queen’s University study of 1992, commissioned by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, found that teachers across Canada agree “while typically teachers can deal with discipline issues, most say it takes an inordinate amount of their time and can detract from both the quality and extent of what can be taught.”9

The study also found that teachers felt their jobs were more difficult because of new public demands that schools deal with children’s social problems, as well as behavioural problems. A spokesperson for the study, which surveyed 17,000 elementary and secondary teachers, said, “In their (the teachers’) view, parents are turning over many of their child-raising responsibilities to the schools and making unfair, unrealistic demands of teachers.”10 When teachers have to ‘socialize’ other peoples’ children and begin teaching values instead of reading and writing, the academic
To many parents, guaranteed smaller classes are a guarantee of a better education. To many teachers, it’s what allows them to keep pace with teaching well-behaved children. Smaller classes are not a panacea. Until we broaden our focus to include other aspects of education reform, we will remain hoodwinked into discussing one aspect of educational reform, the impact of which remains dubious.

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out at least partially. But regardless, there is a colossal problem. In all cases you end up comparing kids whose parents see education as a commodity. In Canada, for example, are you considering comparing vouchers to monopoly or Chile to Canada? As a partial solution, international comparisons may exclude East Asian countries with a huge cultural emphasis on education. The best alternative, though expensive and politically problematic, is to introduce choice and see if overall test scores improve. Especially if scores improve at the lower end, and in public as well as alternative schools, it vindicates competition.

**WORDS IN LECTURES**

If what matters is the content of the lessons, not the neighboring desks, then we are doing education wrong. But the success of charter schools depends on a significant difference when education is the issue. Doesn’t a persistently smaller-than-usual gap between wealthy and poorer students in charter schools prove such schools work better? Not if parents care more about education have kids who do better at it.

It’s not much helping comparisons, either. If you measure differences only in what’s happening in Canada without, are you comparing vouchers to monopoly or Chile to Canada? As a partial solution, international comparisons may exclude East Asian countries with a huge cultural emphasis on education.

**MEASURING THE TWO CS**

If education were only about literacy, the results we get can despite obvious measurement issues would be quite persuasive. But education is generally meant to make students better and smarter, teaching character and civics in addition to literacy? And even if we could measure whether schools taught that in “1992 Columbus sailed the ocean blue,” how, in principle, could standardized tests show whether they sensitize pupils to native issues? Especially if students are clever about giving answers they know teachers want, highly desirable in math class but problematic in civics.

**BODIES IN SEATS**

Such concerns go to the heart of the debate. Many critics of school choice make only a half-hearted stand against testing not just because they value critical thinking over so-called “rote learning,” but because they think the key contribution of public schools is the results of civics education puts the kibosh on all forms of choice, not merely those involving private schools. Alberta, for instance, has made it clear that no voucher would allow to teach that blacks are inferior. Not any subsidized school.

**SELF-INTERESTED SABOTAGE**

True, in a voucher-style system some schools will undoubtedly drift towards educating customers. But the school authorities in and shut down any that clearly fall below elementary standards of competence or decency, and it only takes a few disgruntled parents to bring such cases to light.

High schools, therefore, have two reasons for assuming that a public education monopoly does not even try to exert the wishes of most parents. Anecdotally, most people understand that governments are accountable to voters, so they wish the government that employs them, in the 1990s Ontario unionized teachers brought bizarre poloniums to their school. A group of four teachers.

**DO IT**

Milton Friedman’s 1953 proposal that instead of running education out of a state monopoly, we create voucher-style reforms with a year’s schooling at the approved educational institution of their choice, remains fundamentally sound. It gives normal parents a bit more say about what children are taught and a lot more say about how schools are financed. But schools are difficult to measure partly for methodological reasons but also because most actual voucher-style reforms have been watered down. But the less citizens and politicians misunderstand why and how, even in a democracy, various forms of the government are likely to develop and vigorously defend agendas for which they have no popular mandate. Under the forbidding moniker “public choice theory,” they stress that people in the public as well as the private sector respond to incentives. But the incentives are different, the ability of the state to compel people (for instance not to sell eggs without a licence), whereas private companies can only try to persuade them (for instance that these eggs are fresh and delicious enough to be worth a quarter each), offers rich rewards to special interests. A small number of dairy farmers who each gets tens of thousands of dollars a year from cheese tariffs are far keener to defeat deregulation than people whose parents each lose a few bucks a week at the supermarket are to get rid of them.

And public school teachers with decent pay and great job security have strong reason to oppose parental choice that puts both at risk.

But self-interest can be philosophical as well as personal. Public education monopolies are a highly tempting target for political “capture” by zealots who don’t trust the average parent. And when there is no way they will have any say in what their children are taught, as they should rely on the judgment of ordinary parents.

**BACK TO THE VOUCHER**

Unfortunately, we do have a way of measuring results. It is in the back of the minds of most students, not the ability of the state to compel people (for instance not to sell eggs without a licence), whereas private companies can only try to persuade them (for instance that these eggs are fresh and delicious enough to be worth a quarter each). Offers rich rewards to special interests. A small number of dairy farmers who each gets tens of thousands of dollars a year from cheese tariffs are far keener to defeat deregulation than people whose parents each lose a few bucks a week at the supermarket are to get rid of them.

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The capacity of opponents to resist choice frontally is nevertheless limited. Parents care a lot more about their children than the price of cheese, and make highly sympathetic figures in public debate. Where the monopoly has struck back is in fiddling the fine print so most ostensible choices systems actually tightly restrict the right of dissatisfied parents to take their children and their money elsewhere.

One way of fiddling is to persuade governments to create an uneven playing field to begin with. Thus four Canadian provinces (B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick) have introduced what the Chronicle of Higher Education calls “partial vouchers” to parents of private school students, worth a third of the public system cost per child. It’s better than nothing, but having to come up with two-thirds of the cost themselves for their kids to attend a public school. Without a substantial financial barrier especially to parents who are less well off. Then others get it twice. Others get it the third time. Sweden’s public schools consider it harmful to give marks grades, because what school starts to turn them off gives them a way to feel like a failure, and a school that starts to turn them off gives them a way to feel like a failure. It was quickly made illegal last, then the minister of education said, it gives those schools an unfair advantage. All sorts of similar devices exist, from restricting vouchers to the poor or those in truly awful schools to making all schools hire members of militarized unions. And all are supported by people who understand very little about public education monopolies tend not to reflect the wishes of voters/parents. For educational reform to work, we must prevent such sabotage and insist on the substance, not the shadow, of state-funded parental choice.
Examining the restorative justice movement in domestic violence.

Escalating verbal and emotional abuse erupted into sexual and violent physical abuse at the hands of her partner. Charges were laid and the man was sentenced to three years in prison where he participated in a life-changing program and the mediated his violent behavior. The woman continued to be forced to face her past and her concern for the future of their son, requested a face-to-face meeting through a victim-offender mediator. At the meeting, the woman questioned her abuser about his behavior and the changes he had undergone. For his part, the man took full responsibility for his crime, and reassured her that she had done nothing wrong to bring on the blame. She verbalized her forgiveness, and they discussed how they would parent their child. Both the man and woman agreed that mediation was the best thing that had happened between them. 1

THE CANADIAN JUSTICE SYSTEM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The story at the beginning illustrates the ideal outcome when restorative justice values are applied to cases of domestic violence. In practice, the concept is very controversial. At the heart of the debate lies the criticism that restorative justice philosophies place a disproportionate focus on offenders. Conversely, domestic violence scholars and practitioners advocate for a victim-centered approach in justice initiatives. Many domestic violence scholars share concerns regarding the implementation of restorative justice values in cases of family violence. They argue that restorative justice values, apart from the current justice system, would put victims in greater harm.

The Canadian justice system has made significant contributions to the understanding of domestic violence in Canada. The Criminal Code defines and denotes inappropriate behavior in domestic relationships. Clear boundaries are set around contraception and drug use is controlled within the current system of justice. The system provides practical applications that protect victims, with moderate success, through measures that include the mandatory charging of offenders and emergency protection orders.

The current system of justice also has its shortcomings. The court system does little to adequately address the root causes of family violence. Victims rarely have the opportunity to share their experience free of the duress of adversarial tactics. A review of the Program for Young Women Against Family Violence in Newfoundland suggests that the current legal system can be confusing and overwhelming for victims, sometimes leaving them to feel as if they were the person on trial. Too often unscrupulous the traditional justice system, children who witness adult-to-adult violence. 5 Scholars have criticized the model for its inability to protect children from re-victimization. 6

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE VALUES – CONSIDERING A HYBRID APPROACH

A hybrid approach blending restorative justice values with the strengths of the current justice system could provide benefits to victims, children and offenders. Models based on restorative justice values can include, but are not limited to, forms of mediation and conferencing. The process would require willing participants, including offenders who are ready to take responsibility for their criminal behaviour and who seek to make restitution. Victims must be fully aware of the process and feel confident about ceasing the procedure if they feel uncomfortable or threatened. For these reasons, cases would require thorough screening and preparatory work by knowledgeable practitioners. It is fully conceivable that many cases of domestic violence would be inappropriate for this process.

Proponents of restorative justice argue that activities such as mediation or family conferencing allow victims to confront their abusers in a controlled setting. Unlike the traditional court setting, victims have the freedom to share their story on their own terms. This empowering experience can assist victims in the healing process. Empowering victims is beneficial for children as well. Studies have shown that some victims of domestic violence are very permissive as parents after a history of domestic violence, while others can be too harsh or even abusive. 7 Restoring a sense of empowerment among victims strengthens the possibility for a healthier parental relationship. Offenders who take responsibility for their crimes have the opportunity to make personal apologies to their victims. 8 This process opens the way for further dialogue, allowing personal healing for victims and offenders alike. It may also help to create some relationships or even provide an opportunity to repair marriages, though this may not be healthy in every case.

CRITICISMS OF THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACH

Scholars and practitioners who advocate for victims have voiced legitimate apprehensions regarding the use of restorative justice values within the context of family violence. The journey to recognize domestic violence as serious criminal behaviour in Canada has been a substantial accomplishment. Some critics have argued that justice systems that endorse restorative justice values as an alternative to the traditional system could move the victims’ rights movement backward by softening the understanding of domestic violence as a crime. 9

The intimate connection between victims and offenders in domestic violence crime should raise a cautionary flag when considering the introduction of restorative justice initiatives. Some offenders continue to wield power over victims of domestic crime even after an arrest. Many critics fear that victims will be re-victimized through the mediation process, especially at the hands of under prepared facilitators. Critics have argued that restorative justice values do not account for the need to prevent the risk of further abuse through the process.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Developing a hybrid justice approach for certain cases of domestic violence provides some intriguing possibilities for the rehabilitation and restoration of families. Consideration of how a hybrid model might include the needs of victims and the process would be a valuable exploration. The viability of a hybrid model remains to be determined as considerable caution requires careful evaluation. Further research would benefit from the consideration of the following questions:

• How might children of domestic violence be assisted through justice initiatives?
• What do victims require from the justice system?
• How could a hybrid model address the tension between retribution and rehabilitation?
• How should the community interface with intimate relationships destroyed by violence?
• What other forms might restorative justice values take in regard to domestic violence cases?
• How might a hybrid model meet current challenges in the justice system concerning cases of domestic violence?

The implementation of restorative justice values in cases of domestic violence remains controversial. Further exploration may contribute to the continued evaluation of the current model of justice and promote healthy policy discussions. The current system of justice may not be the best thing that had happened in the healing process, however, it also has its shortcomings and falls short in meeting the needs of victims and their children. A hybrid approach could begin to address these needs in some cases of domestic violence. Restorative justice is just one of many tools that can be used.

The performance of justice systems also depends on understanding the inherent rights of victims and offenders, including the right to protect one’s self from harm. The performance of justice systems also depends on understanding the inherent rights of victims and offenders, including the right to protect one’s self from harm.
WHY ARE CHILDREN KILLING THEMSELVES?
AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HELP?

BY PETER JON MITCHELL

When a 2006 study in the journal *Injury Prevention* uncovered an alarming trend among Canadian children, many mental health professionals were not surprised. The shocking news: the suicide rate has doubled among children 10 to 14 years of age over the last 20 years. The number of children with mental health issues should be a growing concern among Canadians.

And while suicide rates have historically been higher among males, now the mental well-being of young women is also causing great concern. Research published in 1997 from Quebec determined that older teen girls had the highest rate of hospitalization for attempted suicide. They also led all age and sex categories in exhibiting symptoms of depression. While teen girls were hospitalized at twice the rate as teen boys for attempted suicide, girls 10 to 14 years of age were hospitalized at five times the rate of boys. A survey from British Columbia revealed that 20 per cent of the grade eight girls who responded had considered suicide within the previous year as compared to 13 per cent of their male counterparts. So the question is: why are our children displaying an increase in suicidal behaviour?

RISK FACTORS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Research has shown that family environment greatly affects the mental well-being of children. Incidents of parental violence, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug use and suicide or attempted suicide by a parent profoundly influences a child's propensity towards self-destructive behaviour. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), one-third of children under the age of 12 have experienced “great unhappiness.” The chief causes cited include parental divorce, separation and death in the family. This survey response confirms that family environmental factors are critical in determining the happiness of children.

Researchers have devoted effort to determine the links between divorce, separation and death and suicidal behaviour in children and youth. Having surveyed the current research, Wagner, Silverman and Martin (2003), are reluctant to cite parental divorce and separation as a specific “risk factor” for suicide, but they confirm that there is a correlation to some degree. A collection of research studies confirm that the loss of a parent to death or divorce, or removal from the home to foster care is more common among suicide completers than control groups. Also, a number of studies demonstrate that suicide ideation is higher among youth who are not living with two biological parents. Further, the scholars have little hesitation in concluding from a number of studies that “family dysfunction,” including relational issues in the parent-child dyad, is a risk factor for suicide.

Conversely, the findings of the NLSCY concur with theories that suggest healthy functioning families and effective parenting strengthen children's mental health and coping abilities. Parental provisions, including emotional security and nurturing in the infant and toddler years, shape the coping mechanisms children will depend on throughout their lives. Evidence indicates that secure attachment to a primary caregiver is the
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-common philosophy exists behind these statements, individual needs and desires trump those of the collective, in this case, the family. Today more women approaching the end of their child-bearing years are opting to have a child without a biological father (with a donor's sperm) because a child is "something they’ve always wanted." It’s not just women, either: mothers and fathers both will leave their families because of a lack of fulfillment or happiness that they believe they can find in a different mate, a new city or another family. The divorce rate reached unprecedented levels in 1987 when, according to Statistics Canada, the proportion of marriages expected to end in divorce reached 50 per cent. In 2002, one in four Canadian families with children was headed by a lone parent, which represents a 15 per cent increase from 1980.51 Today, 50.6 per cent of people aged 15-16 believe they can find in a different mate, a new city or another family. Both provinces engaged in consultative processes and developed strategies that focus on three areas of development and service: prevention, intervention and postvention. In theory, a broad-based strategy would raise awareness among parents and children and would better equip adults to identify children with mental illnesses. This would provide a partial response to the problem of child suicide. However, a national strategy would fall short in effecting change to the familial risk factors that cause children to choose suicide.

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greater individual choice clashed directly with the obligations and social norms that held families and communities together in earlier years.**10** Once the affluence effect had taken root in mainstream culture, social scientists observed another trend that would further the expressive individualist ideal, they called it the psychological revolution.

The term came out of a study of the emotional well-being of postwar Americans. Psychologists found that between 1957 and 1976, Americans devoted more time to studying the inner world of the self.**11** The economic boom following the end of World War II meant that instead of focusing on their economic well-being (i.e. putting food on the table), people now had time to think about their emotional well-being. The study found that: “The link between economic well-being and personal happiness weakened; people were less likely to cite economic reasons as the cause of unhappiness than they had been [20] years earlier. Instead, their sense of emotional well-being became more dependent on the richness of their emotional lives, the depth and quality of feelings, and the variety of opportunities for self-expression.”**12** In this way, the psychological revolution changed the conception of the successful life as “middle-class ambitions shifted from the patriarchal road to economic security to the more personal road of the inner self.”

The psychological revolution made people more mindful of their level of inner contentment, according to Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, author of The Divorce Culture. With a heightened awareness of their level of inner contentment, Whitehead argues that people “became more acutely conscious of their responsibility to attend to their own individual needs and interests.”**13** The new thinking of the psychological revolution suggested, ‘At least as important as the moral obligation to look after others… was the moral obligation to look after oneself.”**14** Once this had become accepted wisdom, Whitehead argues that “Americans began to change their ideas about the individual’s obligations to family and society,” beginning in the late 1950s.**15** She claims that an ethical shift took place: the ethic of obligation to others shifted more toward an ethic of obligation to the self. This shift had “a profound impact on ideas about the nature and purpose of the family.”**16** After this shift, the purpose of the family became more about satisfying individual needs and desires, than about satisfying the broader needs of the group. Dr. Roy Baumeister, a Francis Eppes Professor at Florida State University, asserted that rather than teaching the economic ladder to moving up the happiness scale.”

The psychological revolution changed the conception of divorce. In her book, The Divorce Culture, Whitehead argues that the psychological revolution did three things to change the conception of divorce. “First, it redefined divorce as an individual experience. Americans ceased to regard it as a ‘legal, social and family event with far-reaching consequences for others.’ Second, it ‘changed the locus of divorce from the outer social world to the inner world of the self.’” She explains that you would never hear people talking about divorce as “a completely factored emotional journey” before the 1970s. She says that after the psychological revolution, divorce “became a subjective experience, governed by the individual’s needs, desires and feelings.” Third, Whitehead says that the psychological revolution changed the realm of the family — it shifted from being the place of the obligated self to a “fertile realm for exploring the potential of the self.” Divorce was an option in the realm of the family if it could assist in furthering the process of self-actualization. She states, “According to this new conception of divorce, leaving a marriage offered opportunities to build a stronger identity and to achieve a more coherent and fully realized self.”**17** The focus on self-actualization was detrimental to families, as social psychologist David G. Myers says: “The more people view self-actualization rather than child rearing as the purpose of partnership, the more likely they are to divorce.”**18** Technology also furthered the development of expressive individualism in families. Widespread access to birth control and abortion on demand gave women more power to limit the number of children they had. This, coupled with a range of new modern appliances in the home, gave women time to pursue careers in the public square.**19** Women with full-time careers became economically independent from their husbands, which meant they could support themselves should they decide to go get a divorce. This radical change in women’s economic status also impacted men; husbands who knew their wives could sustain themselves economically in their absence could feel less guilty about leaving them. Women’s economic independence made possible by technology, facilitated the expressive individualist ethic by making divorce and/or separation affordable. If it was in a spouse’s best interest to leave a marriage, there was now no reason to stay and complete freedom to go.

“Sorry, but my children bore me to death!” says London journalist Helen Kirwan-Taylor. About her children, she writes: “They stopped asking me to take them to the park (how tedious) years ago. But now when I try to entertain them and say: ‘Why don’t we get out the Monopoly board?’ they simply look at me wearily and say: ‘Don’t bother, Mum, you’ll just lose.’”

Here is a classic example of the expressive individualist ethic: self-interest should never become subordinate to family needs. The inherent problem with this attitude, however, is as Whitehead states: “The parental role carries an obligation to sacrifice one’s own interests and defer or even limit satisfactions in pursuit of children’s well-being, and this makes it a role that runs contrary to the expressive ethic.”**20** In parenting and in marriage, self-interest and self-fulfillment seem to be overriding self-sacrifice. Parents who find their children boring, have children alone by choice and divorce for purposes of self-fulfillment are hypocrites of a society that values self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment, self-expression, unhindered freedom, choice and a moral obligation to fulfill one’s personal needs. The progression of affluence, psychology, and technology has played a role in the rise of these new values which some social scholars have labelled “expressive individualism.” Expressive individualism is not always, but is at times directly, opposed to traditional views of marriage and child-rearing, which call men and women to act sacrificially for the good of the family unit. This opposition inevitably causes friction as a nation of “expressive individualists” attempts to fit into an institution that has traditionally been dependent on selfless giving and voluntarism. Remember the story of The Giving Tree — Shel Silverstein’s evocative tale of a tree who loved a girl, giving his apples, his branches and his trunk away without expecting anything in return? We read it to kids to teach the beauty of giving selflessly. It might just now be time to pull it out for our disgruntled older generations, those who have learned to call selfishness “expressive individualism.”

**endnotes**


Jennifer Roback Morse is known for her writing on social and family policy issues. But economics? Her latest book addresses the laissez-faire family, something she calls “the new problem that has no name.” Roback Morse defines the laissez-faire family as one where “each member pursues his own self-interest.”

She breaks down raising a family into components and applies economic principles to it. And while there would appear to be a fundamental economic framework for raising a family, it fails to address the essential building block of successful families – love.

While some may not agree with all of the components necessary for building a healthy family, Roback Morse gives strong rationale for all of the parts she identifies in Love & Economics. She strongly defends the libertarian premise that while we are all individuals and have choices available to us, she also recognizes that this in itself is not sufficient to raise and nurture a family. She sums this up nicely in the prologue: “[Self-giving actually elevates the worth of each individual.”

The family continues to be under pressure and the rights of individuals continue to expand. In our quest for individual rights, Roback Morse has identified that family cannot be broken down into individual tasks or duties. Rather, to reach its full potential, family members must give and support each other. Families are inclusive of the members, not competitive within themselves. This book will challenge post-modern individualist thinking, and that in itself makes it worth the read.

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE: FAMILY, STATE, MARKET, AND MORALS


The Meaning of Marriage delivers a multidisciplinary approach to the marriage debate, gathering together philosophers, sociologists, ethicists, historians, political theorists and legal scholars at a time when thoughtful responses are required in the national dialogue.

Although the book is an American product, Canadian readers will find that many of the essays transcend the forty-ninth parallel. Defining the underlying presupposition of the book, John Bethke Elstain writes in the foreword, “If we alter the institution of marriage as it is understood in our laws, there will be profound and perhaps unintended consequences for the society we live in.”

Elstain and co-editor Robert P. George, who are University of Chicago and Princeton scholars respectively, present an “A-list” of thinkers who address unilateral divorce, family law, the well-being of children and the historical foundation of marriage and family in social and political institutions. Most importantly, the authors weigh in on the same-sex marriage debate as they consider the future of the institution of marriage. The edited volume includes articles from Don Browning, Elizabeth Manuvaridi, Jennifer Roback Morse and Seana Sugrue, to name a few.

Each of the essays are excellent stand-alone pieces; however, several themes recur throughout the volume. Harald James examines the historical influence of family on the state and market. David Forte’s complimentary article discusses how the Framers of the American Constitution believed that family was the moral and political building block underpinning the creation of a political society. Historical analysis should serve as a guide for future considerations regarding the role of marriage in society. Browning and Manuvaridi examine the influence of modernization on the current marriage debate. They introduce “critical familism,” a pro-marriage strategy that builds on gender equality in the domestic and public spheres. Several articles examine how recent marriage legislation has threatened the development and rights of children. This dialogue will continue to be at the centre of the marriage debate.

The Meaning of Marriage develops strong philosophical arguments, including practical outcomes; this is not just a collection of philosophical musings, but rather a collective finger on the pulse of marriage dialogue, and a much needed voice to the policy debate.

LOVE & ECONOMICS: WHY THE LAISSEZ-Faire FAMILY DOESN’T WORK


Reviewed by IMFC Staff

In Stumbling on Happiness, Daniel Gilbert, a Harvard psychology professor, explains “why we seem to know so little about the hearts and minds of the people we are about to become.” That’s no small feat. Gilbert explains that happiness is often perceived in relation to past memories of happiness. The trouble with this tactic, he states, is that our memories are often wrong. According to Gilbert, memory is a “faithless friend” upon which we cannot rely to recall our past success. Therefore, when trying to assess our current happiness we should not measure it against memories of past happiness. Get it? Only a Harvard professor could make happiness this complicated.

Gilbert warns that our present feelings can occupy the gaps in our imaginations of tomorrow, making predictions of our future happiness inaccurate. So, for example, he says people have a common tendency to assume that only they themselves can predict what a future situation will feel like, whether it’s a mortgage, a job or starting a family. On the contrary, Gilbert suggests, the world is full of people with common experiences and the best way to predict how we will feel is simply to ask someone currently in the middle of the scenario to tell us how they are feeling. In the same way we project our feelings from today onto the memories of yesterday, we project the feelings of today onto our imaginations of tomorrow, making our predictions less than accurate.

This book doesn’t give answers to the complexities of our mind so much as it forces us to fess up to its idiosyncrasies. Scientific happiness predictors are not likely anytime soon; better we accept, as the book suggests, that our memories and perceptions of happiness are not always accurate in order to let go of preconceived notions of happiness. Happiness is, after all, something that is sometimes “stumbled upon,” not carefully calculated. But is happiness in the offing upon reading this book? Probably we’re better off leaving it to the reader to share his common experience.

STUMBLING ON HAPPINESS


Reviewed by IMFC Staff

The books are divided into six topics beginning with the constitutional limits to Medicare and says the guiding principles decision makers use are not open enough. Next section: Access to abortion, which they also assert is not open enough (in spite of the fact that Canada does not legally limit abortion access). A chapter on mental health debates the patient’s autonomy and the right not to take medication. In the chapter discussing the role of the “physician gatekeeper,” the authors argue that the introduction of a profit motive will undermine care. The final section debates whether free trade helps or hinders health care.

Just Medicare is a book that deserves equitable access to health care for all, but who doesn’t? It’s just not clear what the authors want to do to fix it. Editor Colleen Flood asks “…who decides what services are medically necessary…” When resources are limited and cannot fund all “medically necessary” services or needs, how do we prioritize?” A conundrum indeed. Here’s to hoping that this band of merry ivory tower academics isn’t among the key decision makers.
It's no secret that Canadians are moving to Alberta to experience the economic benefits of the oil boom. Unemployment and taxes are low; the need for workers is high. But there's an additional benefit for parents with kids. Alberta's education system helps fund choices for families outside the public school system: home schooling, charter schools and private schools are among the options. It's no coincidence that Alberta has the best academic outcomes in the country.

That's great news – if you live in Alberta. Ontario is hopelessly behind on the issue of school choice, to the detriment of kids' learning (and parental sanity). British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec also already fund choice for parents. School choice is policy undertaken successfully by four Canadian provinces – it is not foreign to Canada.

Still, Ontario holds back. In 2001, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, a teacher's union dedicated to maintaining the status quo, wrote about an "organized campaign to discredit and undermine our public schools in order to privatize public education, divert public funding to private schools and to create a two-tiered system based on school choice and vouchers."

Others see school choice as an accusation: public schools are not good enough. "When they say (they) 'provide choice'...they're talking about the choice to go to private school.... This re-enforces (the) belief that in the private system, you can get a better education...there's nothing to show that that's true," Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education told a college newspaper in April, 2006. This Ontario-based advocacy group has a mandate to preserve publicly-funded education.

But there is indeed evidence that the academic calibre in Ontario's public schools is merely mediocre. What are parents to make of Ontario grade 10 literacy tests published in June 2006 that only 84 per cent of students passed? And the Society for Quality Education, a charitable group that supports education choice, reports that the number of passing students is in reality much lower. They believe the true pass rate to be 73 per cent, because the higher pass rate does not take the low percentage of students who took the test into account, and further, that some students were given special considerations in order to pass.

Academic results are one thing while funding is another. Still, should parents not be concerned about recent reports indicating Ontario school administrative costs are rising, even as enrollment falls? Or that in July, Toronto District School Board trustees quietly voted themselves a pay raise: from $5,000 to $26,000 annually?

Many concerned parents, frustrated with their child's public school, attempt change from within. Malkin Dare, president of the Society for Quality Education, refers to hundreds of parents from Ontario who tried this route in her book How to Get the Right Education for your Child. "While every story is different in its details, each testifies to an utter lack of responsiveness on the part of school personnel," she writes.

Choice creates competition, which creates an incentive for schools to respond. Ontario came close: the provincial Conservatives passed an education tax credit in 2002, which eventually would have offered as much as $3,500 a year to parents to send their kids to independent schools. It was among the first programs to be cancelled when Liberal Dalton McGuinty became premier in 2003. Cancelling that credit hardly affects families who can afford private schools already. Instead, the Liberal government denied low- and middle-income families the choice that already exists for higher income earners.

By offering some financial support to parents that opt for independent schools or permitting communities to open charter schools, Ontario could improve its academic outcomes. Parents would have greater choice when faced with a school that is unresponsive. Such progressive reforms would compel the province's public system to perform, reform or else lose more pupils. Any education debate should focus on student outcome, not saving a school system on ideological grounds, a system so large and monolithic it cannot possibly reform from within. Until that happens, Ontario's parents have a different choice: which of the more choice-friendly provinces to migrate to.
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