

# Teachers' activism endorsed

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There may be no shortage of expert opinion expressed on the American education system, but the right people may not be contributing to the dialogue, says Peter Gibbon, a history teacher at the Hackley School in Tarrytown.

"I'm concerned that I don't see more secondary school teachers contribute to the dialog on education. It's too bad that the people who have direct classroom experience aren't participating," said Gibbon, who is currently associated with the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute, an educational "think tank" at Columbia University.

"Education 'experts' are frequently impractical, unrealistic and boring. They're mainly interested in statistical studies which say nothing to the teachers," Gibbon said.

Gibbon said the education 'expert' "has to be where the data is. He can get many ideas from being a teacher and you have to be on the firing line to know what the problems are."

One reason why teachers and administrators, as a whole, are not outspoken stems from their fear of negative reaction, the fear of rocking the boat. Another reason is because many teachers and administrators fear that the power to change things is out of their hands. They believe the power has shifted to the superintendent and the school board, who, in turn, see their power shifting from the local district to the state, while the state sees its power being drained off by the federal government, according to Gibbon.

**THE 35 YEAR—OLD INSTRUCTOR** considers Hackley headmaster Donald Barr to be an exception to the pattern of reticence, as are Tarrytown's former district superintendent, Dr. Richard Lerer, and current district officials Dr. Lee Peters, acting superintendent, and Joseph DiPalermo, high school principal. They have expressed their opinions, and they do care about their schools, he said.

The shift in power from the local school is also one reason why the private school is becoming more popular. The parents are concerned with how the schools are operated, he said. In his five years of teaching at Hackley, he said that there has been an increase in the number of students, at Hackley and other private schools, who come from middle and working-class families.

Another reason for the popularity of the private schools, from the teacher's and student's point of view, is that public schools can be a place where the atmosphere is "anti-education." The public school at which Gibbon taught in Bronxville sometimes emphasized athletics over academics. "The schools tend to stress conformity and do not really encourage a true exchange of ideas. Only at an independent school could someone like Pavel Litvinov, a noted physicist, be invited to teach the students, even if he does not possess a teaching degree. Litvinov is probably more knowledgeable in his field than most physics teachers in private or public schools," he said.

Gibbon added that while the public schools have excellent programs for gifted and deficient students "the C-student floats along," lost in the crowd. This is sometimes unavoidable because of the large class size.

**SKEPTICAL OF** the public education system, many teachers also steer away from teachers colleges.

"Private school teachers simply haven't gone to teachers colleges for a variety of reasons. They're disdainful of education schools," Gibbon continued: "they usually think of themselves as subject specialists." As



Hackley's Peter Gibbon

Gibbon was graduated from Harvard University in 1964 with a bachelor of arts degree in English and received a graduate degree in history from the University of Michigan. He reviews books and writes articles on education, curriculum, the role of private schools in American education and adolescence for *Newsday* on Long Island. For the past year and a half he has been on leave from his teaching duties and has edited Hackley's alumni magazine. Gibbon says that he misses the immediate feedback from the students.

Gibbon and his wife, Carol, a teacher at Hackley, have two children, Brendan, 2, and Sean, who attends the first grade at Hackley.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Gibbon is one of 14 teachers and administrators to be awarded a Joseph Klingenstein Fellowship for 1978-79 at the Teachers College, Columbia University. He views the program as a vehicle to get private school teachers back to education schools and to get the teachers talking to each other.

"I suppose that some teachers will still reject education school, but they will reject them out of knowledge rather than ignorance," Gibbon said.

The private schools are so competitive with each other it is difficult to establish lines of communication among the faculty and administrators, he said.

The fellowship focused on acquainting the teachers with each other during the first few weeks of the program. From that point the teachers went their separate ways in pursuing their course of study, with the hope that they will maintain a path of communications, he said.

Gibbon said the fellowship gives him an opportunity to seriously and systematically examine the education system. He added that there are a lot of good people in teachers colleges from whom you can learn a lot. "You just have to shop around," he said.

In its second year, the Klingenstein Fellowship is envisioned as a \$1.46 million, five-year venture designed to help men and women working at the secondary level in private independent schools to improve their performance as educators, according to Francis A.J. Ianni, professor of education and curator of the program.