

Students Give Exam Question Failing Grade

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Publication info: CTV News - CTV Television ; Scarborough [Scarborough]16 June 2008.

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LLOYD ROBERTSON: High school examinations are supposed to test knowledge, not touch raw nerves. But a variation on a common physics test is causing shock and disbelief all across Quebec, especially in Montreal. At issue, a question involving the speed of projectiles, in this case a bullet, and that is stirring up painful memories of one of the darkest days in the city's history. The story from CTV's Jed Kahane.

JED KAHANE (Reporter): Writing high school exams can be stressful enough, but for some grade 11 students this year's physics final went too far. The question asked them to identify a suspect in a school shooting with a diagram showing the victim with a bullet in the head and four suspects depicted as happy faces to choose from.

SIMON OHAYON (Grade 11 Student): I was just kind of wondering why would they put this on a school exam, you know? Honestly it was sort in poor taste.

KAHANE: For many students, this is what it brought to mind, the shooting at Dawson College two years ago that left one student dead and 19 injured. Those writing the physics exam will be moving on to college next year, and for many the question was anything but hypothetical.

ELYSSA FELDMAN (Guidance Counsellor): I had one student tell me, well of course I thought of Dawson right away because I'm going to Dawson next year.

KAHANE: At some schools, those overseeing the exam noticed the question and apparently removed it, at others it was spotted too late.

STEVEN ERDELYI (Teacher): When I saw it, I was shocked and disturbed. I couldn't believe, well, I couldn't believe the context of the question more than anything.

KAHANE: The question everyone is asking is how in a city like Montreal a question so specifically about that kind of violence could be approved. Physics teachers have long used the example of a bullet to ask questions about the velocity of projectiles. At Dawson they don't do that anymore.

DONNA VARRICA (Dawson College): It became a real issue for our physics teachers in view of the feelings and what we had been through, and so they chose other ways to show those examples and do those experiments.

KAHANE: Those involved in writing and approving the exam were unwilling to discuss it. Some schools say they'll wait to see how students scored before deciding if the question should count. Others are already planning to apologize for a lesson learned the hard way. Jed Kahane, CTV News, Montreal.

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