

oth
l
ite

-The an-
cat had
ures, but
actually
ion.
cat's jaw
out one-
er of a
ng to a
ition of
ional A-
Colin R.
rsity of
ia used
o calcul-
cat, Smi-

l, Smilo-
" co-au-
id in a
e sabre-
a good

wesome
d in bite
e up for

immen-
fect for
to the
ls show
s before
said.
kely ap-
oat, be-
rain the
ite was
ve died

Noisy classrooms bad for grades

Grade 1 students, on average, miss one in six words spoken by teachers, researchers find

By TERRY PEDWELL
The Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Canadian children have trouble hearing in school because their classrooms are too noisy, a newly released study suggests.

The study, conducted in New Brunswick for the Canadian language and literacy research network, found many classrooms have poor acoustics and kids just can't hear properly.

Researchers found that Grade 1 students, on average, miss one in every six words spoken by teachers.

"More than 90 per cent of Grade 1 classrooms had inadequate listening conditions," said Dr. Linda Rammage, spokesperson for the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

Some of the noise comes from the typical physical envi-

ronment of a school, said Rammage.

"Desk and chairs scraping on the floors as students move around, equipment, computers, projectors, fish tanks, ventilation and cooling systems, lighting systems," she said.

"Often rooms are very poorly designed and have too many hard surfaces."

Many teachers also strain their voices to be heard above classroom background noise, Rammage added.

But the problems, particularly with noise coming from high-tech equipment that has permeated classrooms in recent years, can be reduced by some simple fixes, including improved acoustics, says one audiologist.

"We are creating classrooms that are very technologically advanced in a lot of ways (but) we're creating a problem," said Andre Lafargue at River

'Desk and chairs scraping on the floors as students move around, equipment, computers, projectors, fish tanks, ventilation and cooling systems, lighting systems.'

DR. LINDA RAMMAGE
Listing discordant factors

Valley Heath in New Brunswick.

"If we can find ways to maybe hide the computer," he said.

"Even a simple panel ... would absorb some of that sound and it would not just escape into the soundscape environment of the classroom."

Speech-language pathologists say teachers working in poor acoustic conditions often speak louder, straining their voices. Studies have shown that a disproportionate number of teachers compared with other professions end up in voice clinics, making up about a quarter of the clinic caseloads, the association says.

When those teachers strain

to get through to their students, their voices become hoarse, making hearing them over background noise that much more difficult.

The noise problem is often compounded by the reverberation of sound within a classroom as it bounces off uncarpeted floors and flat, hard walls.

As well, noise comes from neighbouring classrooms, hallways, gyms, music rooms and traffic outside schools.

The association offers tips for reducing noise levels, including putting something soft on the bottom of chair legs or installing carpeting in classrooms over hard industrial flooring.

One inexpensive way to cut the scraping noise of chairs and tables on classroom floors is to cut an X-slit in tennis balls and place them under the legs of the chairs and tables.

Other, more expensive options include installing hypoallergenic carpeting and curtains in classrooms, installing amplification systems or suspending acoustic ceiling tiles and sound-absorbent panels from upper walls.

(DAVID BREWER / AP)

"We say police planned and carried out an operation so badly that the public were needlessly put at risk and Jean Charles was killed as a result," prosecutor Clare Montgomery said at London's Central Criminal Court.

Iraq death toll down in September

BAGHDAD — The number of American troops and Iraqi civilians killed in the war fell in September to levels not seen in more than a year. The U.S. military said the lower count was at least partly a result of new strategies and 30,000 additional U.S. forces deployed this year.

Although it is difficult to draw conclusions from a single month's tally, the figures could suggest U.S.-led forces are making headway against extremist factions and disrupting their ability to strike back.

The U.S. military toll for September was 64, the lowest since July 2006, according to figures compiled by The Associated Press from death announcements by the American command and Pentagon.

More dramatic, however, was the decline in Iraqi civilian, police and military deaths. The figure was 988 in September, 50 per cent lower than the previous month and the lowest tally since June 2006, when 847 Iraqis died.

Old-book thief made high-value haul

ROME (AP) — An Italian man who sometimes disguised himself as a priest and even locked himself in a bathroom for a day managed to sneak away with dozens of 300-year-old books, drawings and watercolours from top libraries and public archives in Rome, authorities said Monday.

Italian police recovered dozens of items, worth at least \$921,635, including 17th-century

ing sides declare

