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| Manitoba | 29e | 3e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de l’Éducation | 7 juin 1971 | Saul Miller  | Minister of Education | NPD |

Mr. Chairman, I'll get down to my remarks. I think I have ample time, only about 40 hours. You know, education has become a very popular topic, and during the 1960s books written on the alienation of our young people were at the top of the best-sellers lists, not only here but in United States and in Europe. More recently, the critiques of education and the writings on educational reform are peaking in the book ratings, Everybody seems to be getting in 011 the act and everyone, of course, is an authority, But as a result, I am resigned to the fact that Ministers of Education are prime targets for criticism these days, and in talking to my counterparts in other provinces, I find that the same thing is happening there as in Manitoba, because our message is traditionally one of increasing costs and the need to change the educational system to meet the demands of a dynamic society, Rising costs and change, especially change, are seldom accepted happily.

However, we must accept two facts of life, There probably never will be any normality which is peaceful and quiet, and if we want quality in education in Manitoba we must find ways to achieve it. You will notice that the Estimates have risen by about $19 million, The major part of this increase results from a shift in financing the cost of education from property taxes to the provincial tax base and, as I suggested to them, I was pleased that some school boards have taken advantage of increased grants and have held, and in many instances have lowered, the special levies on property, You will also be interested to hear about changes in education system in Manitoba as we go through the estimates, However, I propose now, in my opening remarks, to go beyond these matters.

I would like to discuss the critical issues as I see them in education, the aims of education for the future, the means by which I see these ends in education being achieved, And it is my hope that members' response will be positive for it is essential to engage the sight of all Manitobans on the necessary reforms and, I may add, on the exciting reforms in education which must be achieved by the end of this decade, or even sooner if possible.

Mr. Chairman, I would point out that due to the scope of the task and the limits of time and endurance of all members, there will be many matters that I will not be dealing with in this introduction, and these can be discussed as we move through the Estimates. The most notable omission is an elaboration on the critical issues of post-secondary education in Manitoba. I propose to make a more detailed statement on the subject of post-secondary education when we arrive at the estimates of the Universities Grants Commission. And so with this introduction, Mr. Chairman, I would like to touch on some of the major issues and some possible answers regarding education in Manitoba,

We all know that during the last decade the pace of educational development in Canada has been unprecedented in our history, Challenged by the economic and the social imperatives of a province and a nation in the throes of modernization and development, people in education have worked tirelessly to provide a steadily improving education for more and more people,

The methods employed to achieve this progress in education are well-known: the creation of larger school units and massive school building programs; the introduction of minimum programs supported by the Foundation grant system; the reorganization of curriculum; the expansion of programs of special education; the offering of expanded post secondary education programs and adult education, These were a very powerful combination of developments for better educational opportunity, and without a doubt the leadership of the Department of Youth and Education has contributed to improving the quality of education in our province,

However, Mr. Chairman, despite the freshness of these developments, the acceleration of livings requires further programs of educational reform to move beyond the goals and the limitations of the '60s to achieve a new and even more relevant education during the decade ahead, A number of reports on education have been presented for public scrutiny. These reports, I feel, are helping to crystalize much of the growing concern over the state of the public school system, In Ontario the Hall-Dennis report, and here in Manitoba a Study of Education Finance produced by the Manitoba Teachers Society, have performed a very valuable service by giving dimension, depth and reality to the current discussion on the state -of education in Manitoba, The Local Boundaries Commission Report advised on the limitations of the present educational structure and has proposed a new regional structure for education. The Core Committee on the re-organization of secondary schools has prompted thorough discussion of the entire process of secondary education, Beyond this, it has helped to rouse the public to undertake an introspection of education in Manitoba and to begin to consider fundamental questions of aims and philosophy in education, and because the public school is facing intensified criticism, it is my belief that unless we keep pace with the acceleration of modern life, the most serious crisis of confidence in the public school systems in Canada may still be around the corner.

Mr. Chairman, what are these problems associated with our schools which are causing this growing public concern and criticism with the entire process of education? I believe that there are essentially four critical problem areas. First, there is a general disenchantment with the condition of our society, especially among our young people. A second important question is the uniformity of approach evident in the public schools in Manitoba. Third are the rapidly increasing costs in education; and finally, in my view, a very crucial problem is the alienation of parents from the school and the weakening of relations between the home and the school and I would like to discuss these problem areas further.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, in the last two decades there has been a scientific and a technological upheaval of incredible proportion. Although most of this upheaval has occurred outside the boundaries of Canada, nearly every aspect of our life style has been influenced by these changes. It's a cliché now to talk about the "global village". Modern living is so overwhelming that we often seem at our wits' end to adjust to rapidly changing conditions, and as a consequence we are often reactive and defensive. As well, every night on television we see the reality of the world and Canadian society, and the impact is profound. Self-illusions are destroyed. We no longer can plead ignorance, and the young are most affected by this. The young have lost their innocence and they have pierced through the rhetoric of our times, and they have been led to a great moral concern and also to a sense of living now, in the present, in the immediate. They have challenged the basic assumptions of our way of life and I think they seek for a new humanism. So, Mr. Chairman, we know our young people have something important to say and our response to their challenge must be a constructive response and a human response.

It is said, Mr. Chairman, that the education system is a microcosm of our society, and it's considered by many to embody most of its ills. What is being questioned by our young and many other responsible educators and citizens is an educational system geared primarily to a stable society, which ours no longer is. At present, too many schools are still attempting to produce children with an appropriate set of predetermined values so that you fit into the system. Traditional schooling is too often regimented in approach and it's tuned to a style of life which places a premium on conformity. As a result, many students, unable to learn by and for themselves, become submissive members in a rigidly-structured environment where, too often, unfortunately some drop out, some turn to counter-culture movements, and a few, a very small few, turn to drugs. As well, it affects the teachers. Teachers may adopt authoritarian roles rather than serving as a catalyst in the learning process as they should be. Independent and non-conformist attitudes by students, or even by teachers, are too often met with condemnation. These old rigidities and resistance to change are no longer defensible.

Clearly the situation will not be overcome by minor palliatives. We must be prepared to break from the conventional mold and transform our educational system through a process of system wide reform to humanistic objectives which will enhance human dignity and self-confidence in a society which is marked by continuous change.

Mr. Chairman, I stated that the second major problem in education is the uniformity of the public school system. In Manitoba an increasing number of citizens are questioning the uniformity of values and educational practices that are characteristic of the school system. For many years our public schools have mirrored a single culture, They have transmitted a set of values which emphasized material success, property, the Puritan ethic, competition.

The schools have become the leading agents in retaining the status quo. Mr. Chairman, because of this, many Manitobans in their fear of losing their individual cultural identity, have been forced to the periphery of the public school system. Others with values contrary to the dominant ethic, notably our native people with their admirable concepts of non-materialism, sharing and co-operation, have seen most of their children become the rejects, the failures of the education system, The public school system must recognize that in Manitoba ours is a heterogeneous society and that the schools must reflect the cultural mosaic of our people. In Manitoba, we should place a higher value on the richness and the vitality that comes from our cultural and regional diversity,

The third problem, as I see it, Mr. Chairman, is this: it is very clear that public reaction to the spiralling education costs has hardened. Already in this session we've spent a little time discussing the problems of education finance, and I don't doubt we'll be spending more. The public attitude of the late fifties and sixties was quite different. At that time no education cost was too great to bear, Education was considered the pass to affluence. It was the complete, the total solution to our social problem, and it was the most profitable of any long-term investment. On this basis expenditures in education increased rapidly, and unquestioning parents passed their children over to the waiting arms of the school fully anticipating a finished product and a successful result, However, the fruit born from the school system is sometimes not the type expected and the automatic job at the completion of school has recently failed to materialize. All this has calleq the public to question the results of the school system, The public is now demanding more school accountability and program evaluation. But while education costs are rising, there is increasing competition for funds to meet other public needs and, Mr. Chairman, are not ecology, and urban development, and health, and social services,· and planned economic development, are not they also areas that require increased financing? I would think so, But without overstating the point, it is obvious that one of the major problems facing us in this decade will be to secure an allocation of resources to create an educational environment which will satisfy the education needs of our people in relation to our total needs.

And so finally, Mr. Chairman, to turn to the fourth critical problem in education, it is one which in my view has not received sufficient attention, and that is the alienation of parents from the school. In my view, a profound and a basic dilemma in our educational system arises from the separation between' the home anci. the school. Parents and school administrators have created a situation in which the parents have opted out of the school and education decision-making process, and recently we have heard strong pleas that the public must have more faith in the school system's highly qualified professionals, that teaching in the schools should be left to the educators. This position is justified with the rationalization that the ordinary citizen doesn't have the knowledge to participate fully with the educators and the students in the school decision-making process and in the classroom, and I don't hesitate to make an unequivocal rejection of this notion, I have more faith in parents and in the adult community than that.

So, from this discussion of education problems, we can conclude that much of the meaning and the purpose of education has become confused and often blurred, and I'm aware that there are many proposed solutions being put forward: the setting up of free schools; the introduction of Montessori approaches; abolishing of grade and compulsory attendance, etc., a number of them; and whatever the merits of these suggestions - and some of them have merit they are to my way of thinking nothing more than patchwork solutions to the education system.

Mr. Chairman, what is required is a re-thinking of the purposes and the objectives of our educational system, There are 250, 000 children in our schools in Manitoba - that's a quarter of the population; and we have an obligation to develop a system where each individual student is offered the best possible chance of developing his ability and his interest to the fullest.

And so I have to repeat, Mr. Chairman, that patchwork solutions to this fundamental challenge of the seventies would, I suggest, be wholly inadequate. However, before we can proceed on a course of reform, there is .an urgent requirement for agreement on a definition of purpose in education which will prepare our children to meet their great challenge in the future. This definition must also be the basis of a clear set of realizable objectives.

I referred earlier to the study made in Ontario, the Hall-Dennis report, and Lloyd Dennis, one of the co-authors, speaks of education as a personal, sensitive and individual experience that has one supreme end: the attainment of those characteristics that are found in the noble and compassionate man. He rejects the school as a place of solemn and utilitarian purpose, and describes the school as "an arena where the men and women of tomorrow come to search for truth, to find evidence that will lead to conviction, and to develop the courage to live by that conviction."

In its preamble, the Core Committee - that is the study made in Manitoba - provides a succinct articulation of the aim of education, and I quote from this in its preamble : "The basic purpose of education is to provide an instrument through which each individual realizes self-respect, self-fulfilment, and is relevant in a dynamic society, and that it is mandatory that the education system be ongoing, flexible and centered on the human needs of the student which, in the final analysis, it is designed to serve," To achieve these ends, Mr. Chairman, the school must cooperate with the home in promoting the personal development of the individual student. With this view, we can develop educational activities that will contribute to the student's self confidence in influencing his and the community's objective by rational methods.

Mr. Chairman, following this over-view of education problems in Manitoba, I would like to turn to the means, or discuss the means, some of the means, by which our school system might develop towards this humanistic goal, At once it should be recognized that there is no one way to reach this desired end in education. There are many paths to follow, some of which are relatively unexplored and others which are already receiving attention by my department and by the schools in Manitoba, However, I think there are essentially four main paths for progress toward the education development of which I have spoken.

A pre-condition and a first step to our educational goals is a genuine equality of educational opportunity to be achieved before the end of this decade. Many people today believe that the equality of which I speak already exists - if not totally, at least in large part. They say that all schooling is accessible and the success a path drives for equality can be measured convincingly through equal educational expenditures. Unfortunately, these are not satisfactory indicators of equality, The size, the equipment and modernity of a school building are no guarantee of a completely successful educational result, No abundance of open area classrooms or textbooks, television sets or laboratories can overcome or compensate for a child's chaotic family environment, for a child's hunger, for poor housing, for the handicap of a learning disability, for the lack of basic linguistic skill. No single program can possibly solve the problem of such inequities. We must understand that a comprehensive and a co-ordinated program of social development and reform is needed of which school reform is but one part.

The MTS brief on priorities for education in Manitoba has properly stated that in education special programs should be instituted to reduce as far as possible social, economic and cultural inequities. Their brief is clear on the point that this can only be accomplished if children and adults from low income sectors of society, the handicapped and the culturally poor receive special treatment through compensatory programs, We have, of course, an additional responsibility to support the principle of two official languages for Canada. Through legislation we made it possible for children to be educated in either of Canada's two official languages within the framework of the public school system, A special section has been created within our department's curriculum branch to produce French language programs, and committees are now at work on the job of evaluating material and the development of new programs.

Recognizing the cultural mix which is Manitoba, we are also within the public school encouraging the study of the many languages of the people who comprise the ethnic mosaic of Manitoba. My department has undertaken a number of other special projects which are steps to providing greater equality of education in Manitoba, Last fall we introduced a program we refer to as "New Careers". This program provides a radically different approach to training programs for the disadvantaged. It is a program which is carried out within the government services and demonstrates how new career paths can be opened to the disadvantaged by providing training, education and experience on the job, By this summer, the number of trainees, we expect, will be doubled to sixty from the thirty of last year.

At Brandon University a second project called "The Special Mature Student's Program" has been undertaken. This program indicates that through special practices by compensatory tutoring, remedial reading and writing skills, and modification in certain adult instructional practices, opportunities may be provided for a special adult group who have the capacity and the will to benefit from post secondary studies,

On another front, the position of Extension Agent in the north has been established. This is a provincially-sponsored inter-universities office in The Pas. Through this program, six times as many credit courses were offered this past year as has been the case in the past.

This fall we hope that an Indian-Metis teacher-training program will be launched in a number of Manitoba locations. Indian and Metis citizens will be encouraged to become certified teachers through a work study program, They will teach half days, attend Brandon University for several intensive three-week sessions, and receive instruction one day a week in their home communities from itinerant professors. Mr. Chairman, because time does not permit me to elaborate on them, I'll only mention other activities in this area. There is cultural project to identify, publish, print and distribute material suited to children of Indian-Metis ancestry. Twenty Indian-Metis students will be employed this summer for this work. Students will also be employed to compile a critical analysis of research, demonstration projects and existing practices in Indian-Metis education.

The Review and Development Branch of the Community Colleges Division has completed a study on the problems of students taking vocational preparation training, which will be helpful in developing new approaches. This summer, as we did last summer, the Summer Enrichment Program for Core city children from Winnipeg at Cranberry Portage will be continued and extended, As children from Winnipeg will be going north, northern pupils, this year will be brought to Winnipeg. All members I am sure, Mr. Chairman, know of the what is known as the Seldick report, the report which deals with children with learning disability, We are encouraging, we are continuing to encourage school boards to develop programs with special education that can be more flexible as a result of the new grants system which came into effect in September. I hope it will be possible this year to proceed with the establishment of the structure of the child development services which will help in the diagnosis and the treatment of children with learning and personality problems, It is essential, of course, that teachers become sensitive to children with learning disability in order that they may identify difficulties at a very early age and then apply appropriate remedies in individual cases, Greater educational opportunities will become more widely available when four of the regional high schools now under construction open in September. These schools will provide wider program offerings, especially in the vocational area. Legislation will be introduced to make these schools more accessible to pupils in the province.

I think all these and other activities are evidence of the department's dedication in dealing with the inequities in education, They do not represent total solution; obviously far more is needed to achieve equality in. the school system, However, my expectation is that these projects will pay handsome dividends through constructive changes in approaches in our public schools and in our post secondary adult and upgrading programs. Mr. Chairman, a second means to achieve our stated purposes for education is individualization in the schools. Clearly, if equality of educational opportunity is a precondition of a humanistic educational program, then individualization in the schools is a necessary means for the personal involvement and the development of the student, Individualization means that the school offers students the possibility of choosing courses from the broadest possible set of choices, It means that the school must allow students to mature at their own pace by a process of continuous programming. The role of teachers and parents is to work and co-operate with students, helping to guide them down the different paths of discovery and development.

Individualization also means, Mr. Chairman, that schools must offer freedom and flexibility and operate on principles of mutual respect, responsibility and co-operation. By accepting individualization as a way to contribute to personality development, the assessment of students takes on a new all-round form, Assessment has generally been done on the student's performance and, to an excessive extent, has been concerned with memorized knowledge and skill. This is changing, but perhaps not fast enough. An all-around student assessment should cover the attitude of the student to his work, his willingness to study, his ability to plan his work, to co-operate with his colleagues, to carry through a task he has undertaken and also to report the results. Assessment should not be limited to the concept of pass or fail, but should act as guide posts in the decision-making process of determining the pace of that individual student's progress and development,

It is obvious, Mr. Chairman, from this description of the concept of individualization that it does not necessitate students working separately - that is, on their own; simply that work is adapted to recognize that every student. is an individual, Their working procedures should include class and group work as well as individual study, I am not arguing for a decrease in teacher-pupil ratio but for a restructuring of practice within the school. It will be the teacher's job to perceive the differing needs and interests of each child and to create environments which will stimulate those interests. The teacher will have to understand the experience of the child and help promote the respect and the discovery of the child's background and heritage. To do this; our schools must be staffed by independent, critical and creative people in an ongoing way, in-service programs and professional staff development programs will certainly be needed, If we want innovative and committed teachers, then also we must seriously assess our program of teacher training,

Mr. Chairman, the third path that I feel we must follow is that the schools must become a more democratic place if we are to succeed with our educational aims. We must recognize that, as the recipients of our educational process, students can be a most important source of relevant feedback. They need to be actively engaged in cooperative practices as soon as they enter school. Children who get used to taking part and bearing responsibility from the start, likely will continue to do so through adult life. The confluence of students with the responsibility for shaping the school environment can become a natural thing. As this process becomes more widespread it must be clearly understood by students that joint decision entails joint responsibility.

Our teachers as well, Mr. Chairman, must move from the fringe to the heart of decision making in the school, The talents, the expertise of teachers are not always fully utilized. The teacher must not only be concerned with how he works but with the shape and the pattern of the curriculum he teaches and with the whole operation and policy of the school in which he operates.

Students, parents and teachers must play a role in the decision-making that affects them. Let me say, Mr. Chairman, that I'm very confident that greater democracy can be achieved throughout our education system, My confidence has been re-affirmed during this last year with the progress of the community colleges in developing more democratic structures.

These are large and complex organizations and therefore the community colleges present special problems. However, through the community colleges council system, it has been possible to involve students, faculty, government, industry and the community more intimately with the decision-making process.

I have also authorized the introduction of a more democratic structure for the Frontier School Division. Under the new structure, the division will be divided into seven regions, each electing a representative to the advisory committee. Government representatives will no longer be members of the committee since their inclusion tended to inhibit the full participation of the citizen members. As well, local school committees will be set up and given considerable responsibility for school policy. The regional representatives will be elected by representatives from the school committees in each region.

Mr. Chairman, the fourth path is the general acceptance of the need for government to develop a more comprehensive program of human development services. I believe the public mind on this point may be in advance of government. I said earlier that equality of educational opportunity would remain an illusion without a comprehensive and a co-ordinated program of social development reform of which a school reform is but one part. It is now generally known, as I said earlier, that poor health and living conditions can do irreversible damage to a child's learning ability. Can we doubt that educational opportunity is closely linked, therefore, to programs of health, welfare and community development? As well, is there any doubt that education is a lifelong process designed to contribute to personal development, relates directly to a whole host of other community, recreational, cultural and public affairs activities?

In accepting a community role for schools, in a very real sense our schools must therefore become community schools. This role is a natural one for all young Manitobans, for most rural and most urban adults, the locus of inter-personal activities in the area school. For example, while many schools do not have formal evening activities, most educational facilities today, especially the high schools, are in use for athletic programs or other community activities, three or four evenings a week. All of this underscores the demand that the public schools must respond to differing needs, to the extended use of school facilities, and through community and personal development programs. Our ultimate aim must be to fashion a real working community in and about the schools.

So, Mr. Chairman, the public wants, and I feel and I agree that there is a great need for more effective and better management of our education resources so that expenditures and education are in line within our financial capability. I emphasized much earlier in my remarks that the cost problems in education and the public attitude on the need to control educational costs was very severe. I have interpreted this to mean that the traditional quantitative definition of higher quality education, which is identified with increased inputs like higher salaries or more audio-visual equipment or more administration, is now being questioned by the public.

What is required now is for us to develop priorities for reform and to re-order our allocation of existing and foreseeable resources in a rational and a long-term way according to a priorized list.

To do this, it seems essential for school boards to relate educational expenditures to the total needs of the community and of society, and to keep them related to the ability of society to pay, I think this can be done. If it seems impossible to do this, I see no alternative but to the imposition of control. The reason seems clear enough, Not only is the public asking whether the returns, either educationally or economically, warrant the present heavy expenditures, but they want to assure the introduction of appropriate innovations in education practices, It is therefore mandatory that we proceed rapidly to introduce more effective cost benefit, cost effectiveness and performance budgeting methods into school systems, Our operations must be focused on objectives which will lead to consideration of a system of management by objective. With a better process of assessment and program evaluation, it should be possible to achieve a more rational approach to decision-making and to make it possible to encourage greater lay participation, participation by the citizens in education, and better relations between the public and the school. In order to introduce more effective managerial procedures in education, including finance, as well as to carry out reforms in education, an obvious requirement is a systematic approach to planning, because planning, Mr. Chairman, is a process that must be ·seen as a vehicle for bringing about needed and desired change. Education planning must be future-oriented, it must be action-centered and developed within the context of the totality of the needs of our society.

The Research and Planning section of my department has initiated programs which already have had considerable impact on the schools and on education planning. However, there is a great need to extend and expand our planning capacity. Provisions have been made in the estimates for this purpose. While this planning section will deal with immediate problems and studies, one of its top priorities will be to develop long-range plans for the rationalization of the education program and budgets. Planning must be based on adequate research and the experience gained from experimental programs,

In order that experimentation in new programs may be stimulated at the local level, schools will be able to apply for funds to assist in initiating pilot projects, The Planning and Research section will consider applications for experimental funds and help to coordinate the experimentation, Every effort will be made to use experimentation to provide evidence which will put the somewhat abstract concepts of our future educational system into the real classroom,

The Planning and Research Branch will have the responsibility for co-ordinating efforts to identify and disseminate innovative practices, to issue information to the public, to encourage internal communications and provide consultative services to school divisions. All this is intended to lead to better application of existing knowledge, techniques, plans and equipment.

It is not intended as a means to generate bigger and more expensive proposals to spend money.

I am convinced, Mr. Chairman, that in Manitoba we can resolve the difficult problem of education. I know that during this decade we will succeed in making progress towards our education goal, However, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, it is important to make one cautionary point. In the past, particularly in the recent past, we made the mistake of expecting the instrument of education to be a panacea for all our social problems, In the future, we must treat school and educational reform as only part of an entire program of reform in social development whose ultimate aim is to create a society in Manitoba where there is an equality of human condition and an equality of opportunity.