

"Between Education and Catastrophe": Public Schooling and the  
Project of Post-War Reconstruction in Manitoba 1944-1960

by

George Buri

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg

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## Abstract

Anyone who read a Canadian newspaper or magazine in the fifties would have been aware of a 'crisis of education' gripping the country. The debate over public education was described as a methodological one between "progressives", who promoted participatory learning and a diverse curriculum designed to appeal to students' interests versus "traditionalists" who advocated a strictly academic program of teaching 'the 3 R's' via. In retrospect, however, this debate was not so much about *how* children were to be educated as it was about *why*. Progressives or Traditionalists were not solely schools of educational thought, but also "historical blocs" who advocated two distinct ideological positions. Progressives advocated what I term the "new liberalism": a vision of Canadian society in which Keynesian economics, compromise between labor and capital and mass consumerism would provide economic prosperity for a nation of middle-class, patriarchal, nuclear families. Supporters of progressive education included most major political parties, department of education officials, child psychologists, Teachers organizations and University-trained educational experts. Traditionalists were a more diverse group consisting of University professors, cultural conservatives, small 'l' liberals, journalists, retired teachers and concerned parents. The unifying factor among traditionalists was their opposition to what they saw as a flawed approach to post-war reconstruction. They argued that the postwar compromise was poised to create a society of "soft" and materialistic philistines, overly in thrall of psychology and unable to think for themselves or succeed without the help of government. They argued that only through an academically strenuous program of education that focused upon the a minority of students with superior ability could Canada reach its full potential and fight off the "Soviet threat". Thus, the battle over public education was a battle for the future of Canada.

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Human History becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe  
- H. G. Wells

In 1945 Bruce Moorhead, principal of the Manitoba normal school, ended his annual report to the department of education by paraphrasing H. G. Wells, stating: “the race ‘between education and catastrophe’ has been intensified by the trend of world events. The incidence of the conflict has shifted from the war of nations to the eternal struggle against ignorance and superstition.”<sup>1</sup> Describing the job of teachers in such apocalyptic terms was not as unusual or out of place as it may seem to today’s reader. The writings of Manitoban educational authorities and their counterparts throughout Canada and the United States in the immediate post-war period are filled with similar assessments. These men and women believed that once the war against Fascism in Europe was over, education was to be on the front lines of a new, even more difficult struggle to “win the peace”.

As Len Kuffert has observed, it would have been virtually impossible to live in Canada after the Second World War and not be intimately familiar with the term “reconstruction”.<sup>2</sup> After 1943, when it became clear that allied victory was merely a matter of time, the central questions that preoccupied Canadians did not concern the war itself so much as the kind of society that would emerge afterward. Kuffert shows that reconstruction was not merely a top-down process of the government “easing the economic and occupational transition to peacetime” but a genuine grass-roots cultural movement in which “more pragmatic intentions brought to light questions about the kind

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<sup>1</sup> D. Bruce Moorhead, “Report of the Normal School”, *Manitoba Annual Report on Education, 1944-45*

<sup>2</sup> L. B Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939-1967* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2003), 66

of society that Canadians could (or should) fashion once the war ended.”<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm has termed the years from 1914-1945 the “Age of Catastrophe.”<sup>4</sup> When viewed from a Canadian perspective this label certainly seems apt. One catastrophic European war in which over 200 000 Canadians had been casualties<sup>5</sup> had been followed by a period of dramatic confrontation between labor and capital, a horrific depression and another World War. Thus, the issue of reconstruction concerned not only the immediate reintegration of veterans and the transition to a peacetime economy but a rearrangement of the relationships between capital and labor, between government and citizens and between Canada and the wider world.

In the process of inventing the post-war world, Canadians reformed many of their most important institutions, including the public education system. Although most reached a consensus that the purpose of reconstruction was to avoid economic depression and create a more active democratic citizenship, they found the question of how to accomplish these lofty goals more complicated. Behind the universally held notion that education would shape the next generation into the sort of citizens capable of success in the reconstructed post-war world lay a great divide over the issues of how education was to reach its goals and indeed what those goals were in the first place. The 1950s in Canada were thus the era of perhaps the most publicized and heated debate surrounding

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<sup>3</sup> Kuffert, 67

<sup>4</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995)

<sup>5</sup> The exact number is virtually impossible to calculate but probably lies in the area of 240000 dead and wounded. Colin Nicolson, *The Longman companion to the First World War : Europe, 1914-1918* (New York: Longman, 2001) 248

public education since the Manitoba Schools question.

Anyone who regularly read a Canadian newspaper or magazine in the fifties would have been aware of a “crisis of education” gripping the country. Agonizing over the ability of public education to prepare young people to succeed in a complex post-war world seems to have been a favorite sport of Canada’s intellectuals at this time. The debate over public education was described as a methodological one between “progressives”, who promoted participatory learning and a diverse curriculum designed to appeal to students’ interests, versus “traditionalists” who demanded that schools return to a strictly academic program of teaching ‘the 3 R’s’ via older methods of drill and rote learning. Left unanswered by observers of the time was the question of why certain people became progressives and others traditionalists. The question becomes more difficult when one looks closely at the individuals who made up the two ideological camps. Progressives and Traditionalists were not homogeneous groups but rather represented numerous different segments of society. Many people who self-identified with either camp had little understanding of the intricacies of educational theory and, indeed, often showed little understanding of the educational methods they were advocating. Some progressives advocated methods that have been termed “traditionalist”, such as standardized testing, while some proponents of a “return” to “traditional” education argued for methods that had never been part of the public education system, such as special “enriched” classes for academically superior students.

To understand these apparent contradictions, we must move beyond the perspective of those who have viewed the battle over education as solely a

methodological one or a difference of opinion regarding whose techniques would best produce the desired goals of the school system. A closer examination of the battle over public education in Manitoba reveals that the most important reason for the methodological debate was a complete lack of agreement on the vital issue of what exactly the goals of the school system were. This was an ideological debate disguised as a methodological debate. What seemed like fairly dry disagreements regarding how reading should be taught, whether standardized testing and competitive marking should be utilized, or whether history and geography should be combined into something called 'social studies' represented a deeper and more fundamental debate about the nature of post-war society that took place not just in the realm of educational philosophy but throughout Canadian society as a whole.

Ideology was disguised as methodology in these debates. "Progressives" advocated what some historians have termed the "postwar compromise"<sup>6</sup>, what was in the United States termed the "New Deal" and what I will refer to as the "new liberalism": a vision of Canadian society in which Keynesian economics, a limited social welfare state, compromise between labor and capital, and mass consumerism would provide economic prosperity for a nation of middle-class, patriarchal, nuclear families.<sup>7</sup> Supporters of Progressive education included most major political parties, teachers' unions, department

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Peter S. McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada 1943-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000)

<sup>7</sup> Note that "new liberalism" is not to be confused with the "neo-liberalism" of the post 1973 era which is perhaps the exact opposition of the postwar new liberalism. Neo-liberals advocated complete deregulation and complete laissez-faire capitalism rather than the Keynesian approach favored by those in favor of the new liberalism.

of education officials, child psychologists, and social scientists. Traditionalists, who argued for a “return to basics”, were arguing against the new liberalism and for a more conservative postwar vision of Canada. They were generally individuals outside the official public education establishment and included conservative university professors such as the most celebrated critic of progressive education, Hilda Neatby, cultural conservatives, some business leaders, journalists, retired teachers and concerned parents groups. The unifying factor among traditionalists was their opposition to what they saw as a flawed approach to post-war reconstruction. They argued that the new liberalism would create a society of “soft” and materialistic philistines who were overly in thrall of the discipline of psychology and unable to think for themselves or to succeed without the help of government. The traditionalists’ critique led them to attack an education system which they saw as perpetuating such a weakened society. Those who advocated the postwar new liberalism chose progressive methods as the way to create citizens who supported their ideas of a tripartite, corporatist Canada in which cooperation between labor, business and government would produce a prosperous nation benevolently guided by experts trained in the social sciences. Thus, the battle over public education was perceived as nothing less than a battle for the future of Canada itself.

The idea that the study of the public education system in Canada between 1945 and 1960 is vitally important to our understanding of Canadian society as a whole during this era diverges from most of the traditional historiography of education, which does not regard public education as a catalyst for radical social change, and from postwar Canadian historiography which has ignored the importance of this debate in national

affairs. Education historians have, ironically, often downplayed the importance of their subject, claiming that education is inherently conservative, reflecting the most deeply entrenched values of society and seldom if ever challenging the status quo. Brian Titley, for example, in his introduction to *Canadian Education: Historical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, states: "Schools seem to follow rather than lead; they react rather than innovate. Their purpose and function is to provide stability and continuity; they cannot take an independent path."<sup>8</sup> In the postwar context, however, "stability and continuity" fail to describe the ambitions of Canadians who saw reconstruction as leading to a new social and political order that could solve the problems of the crisis decades. Those responsible for curriculum changes in Manitoba in the late 1940s saw themselves not as reacting but as innovating, using the latest psychological knowledge to bring progress and rationality to an outdated system of education. Even traditionalists believed in the radical potential of education, which was why they were so horrified by what they saw as a wholesale abandonment of common sense and tried and tested educational practices in favor of experimental pedagogy, weakened standards and questionable goals.

Historians of Manitoba education, whether they believe in education's innate conservatism or not, have portrayed the 1950s as "a period of comparative stagnation"<sup>9</sup> in which "comparatively little educational development occurred."<sup>10</sup> This interpretation is

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<sup>8</sup> E. Brian Titley ed., *Canadian Education: Historical Themes and Contemporary Issues* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1990), 3

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co, 1984)

<sup>10</sup> Keith Wilson, "The Development of Education in Manitoba" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1967), 329

itself reminiscent of critiques of the public education system from the 1950s. Keith Wilson's claim that Manitoba was "a lackluster province characterized by dull uniformity; a province with little interest beyond the materialistic; a province continually drained of its youth; a province lacking direction and dynamic leadership" uncritically accepts the observations of traditionalists as reality and betrays a view of history that is colored heavily by partisan political views.<sup>11</sup> The pronouncement that the 1950s were a "dreary decade" when it came to public education has been commonplace among historians throughout Canada.<sup>12</sup> Historians who have paid attention to the advent of progressive education generally do not extend their discussion of it to the 1950s, stating that this was a decade in which "Canadian schools had abandoned their flirtation with American progressivism. The clamor for novelty and experimentation that had often characterized the inter-war period had dissipated and the old puritanism and elitism which had always been fundamental to the system were once more unquestioningly to the fore."<sup>13</sup> This dismissal of progressive education as a relic of the inter-war period or as a failed experiment that foreshadowed the radical "child-centered" reforms of the late 1960s and 1970s but had no lasting influence can be explained as a result of the

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<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 44 (Although condemning Liberal-Progressive administrations, Wilson goes on to describe the Conservative Duff Roblin administration as, "unencumbered by a philosophy shaped by long years of depression" and states that it "pledged itself to a vigorous programme of reform, including, not least, the reform of education")

<sup>12</sup> Brian Titley and Kas Mazurek, "Back to Basics? Forward to the Fundamentals?" in Titley ed., *Canadian Education*, 111

<sup>13</sup> Titley and Mazurek; See also Robert S. Patterson, "The Canadian Experience with Progressive Education," in Titley ed., *Canadian Education*; Gerald E. Thomson, "A Fondness for Charts and Children: Scientific Progressivism in Vancouver Schools 1920-1950," *Historical Studies in Education* 12, Nos. 1-2 (2000): 111-28 and Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982)

abandonment of the language of progressivism in the 1950s. Faced with mounting public condemnation of postwar reforms by traditionalists, educational authorities increasingly denied that they were implementing “progressive education,” which had become a dirty word in the mainstream media.

When one looks at the curricula in theory and practice, however, the basic principles of progressive education were firmly entrenched in Canadian public schools. Particularly in the western provinces, the 1950s marked the actual implementation of the principles of progressive education more than ever before. Perhaps historians of education in the 1950s have in part fallen prey to the myth of the “conservative fifties”. Recent Canadian and American scholarship has criticized earlier writing on this decade that echoed popular culture in suggesting the 1950s were a time characterized by generalized conservatism.<sup>14</sup> In *Born at the Right Time*, Doug Owram writes of a post-war Canada in which a generation of Canadians, after the dislocations of the previous decades, wanted nothing more than to get well-paying jobs, live in the suburbs, and support the status quo (even if that status quo was actually a radical new situation).<sup>15</sup> Education historian Robert Stamp has echoed this characterization of the fifties, writing, “the teenagers of the post-war era were an apathetic and altogether unadventurous

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<sup>14</sup> See: Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945 -1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in the Postwar Era* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999)

<sup>15</sup> Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996)

generation. As they reached their later teen years, their greatest ambition was to join the economic and social establishment in order to participate in the good life. Protest was out; conformism was in.”<sup>16</sup> Such simplistic generational analysis has been rightly criticized by writers such as Mary Louise Adams, who demonstrate that notions of a conservative world of suburbs, nuclear families, upward mobility and consumerism are not unimportant, but they should be viewed as prescriptions promoted by a minority, rather than descriptions of objective reality for the majority of Canadians.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the 1950s were more complex than many have claimed, the history of education in this time defies simple characterizations. The implementation of new curricula and the promotion of progressive education demonstrate an attempt to promote the sort of society that historians such as Owrarn assume most Canadians lived in and supported. However, some historians who have paid attention to the debate between progressives and traditionalists have questioned its actual relevance to day to day life in schools. Paul Axelrod argues that the rhetoric in the media regarding progressive education very little reflected actual experience in school during the 1950s. Although he relies partially on anecdotal evidence and personal experience, Axelrod makes a convincing claim that neither extreme of progressive nor traditional education ever existed in practice.<sup>18</sup> He conforms to the consensus among education historians, however, in arguing that “tradition rather than progressivism characterized education in

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<sup>16</sup> Stamp, 196

<sup>17</sup> Adams

<sup>18</sup> Paul Axelrod, “Beyond the Progressive Education Debate,” *Historical Studies in Education* 17, No. 2 (Fall 2005)

the 1950s.”<sup>19</sup> Studying the progressive versus traditionalist debate only in terms of actual classroom practice is useful but somewhat limiting. What does the debate tell us about Canadian society in the 1950s? In a broader sense, how does education history contribute to the study of Canadian history as a whole? What is needed in order to answer such questions is to examine the debate over public education not only in terms of day to day practice in classrooms but in terms of discourse.

Like all discourses, the debate on education reveals less about objective reality than it does about the hopes, aspirations and fears of Canadians in the 1950s. Education was not simply ‘reflective’ of society in general nor did it ‘lag’ behind the intellectual debates of the time. Education was a key contested ground in the battle over post-war reconstruction. Whatever form an ideal post-war society took in the imaginations of Canadians, education was almost always perceived as being vital to its construction. If the extremes of ‘progressive’ education or a ‘return to traditionalism’ existed only in the imaginations of Canadians, then these imaginings are no less worthy of study by historians of education than the goings-on of classrooms because of what they reveal about the subjectivities of those involved in the education system. In other words we should understand how the debates constructed a discourse that the participants then used to come to terms with the ever-changing world around them and their place within it.

As different groups of Canadians fought for their different visions of the post-war world, they formed alliances with each other along broad lines of ideological agreement. In terms of education, these alliances became two identifiable groups which contained

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<sup>19</sup> Axelrod

internal diversity but contained, too, a shared ideological thread that united them against the other. The progressive and traditionalist camps in the battle over education mirrored two larger political groups which existed in Canada in the immediate post-war period: those who favored the new liberalism and those who opposed it. These groups constituted what Antonio Gramsci has termed historical blocs or loose alliances among diverse groups with temporarily shared interests. The goal of any historical bloc is not simply to obtain temporary control of the power of the state and goes beyond merely implementing its short-term policy agenda. The true goal of a historical bloc is to win such widespread consent for its policies and belief in the assumptions underlying those policies that its entire world view becomes hegemonic, or is regarded as common sense, whereas opposing views become regarded as excessively radical or beyond the realm of serious debate and discussion. When what was once contested and controversial becomes so widely accepted as to be considered 'common sense' by the vast majority, it has become hegemonic. How any historical bloc gains control over cultural hegemony, however, is a very complicated process and defies simplistic explanations.

The concept of cultural hegemony was formulated by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to explain how the bourgeoisie is able to rule over the working class without constant recourse to physical coercion. The concept becomes particularly useful for societies with some degree of democracy in which the use of force is limited or less prevalent than in authoritarian ones. Gramsci postulated that the ruling class, by creating and imposing a framework of what constitutes "common sense", is able to gain the spontaneous consent of the working class for their policies, including those that act

against the workers' own class interest. A discourse, or a way of using language to describe reality, is created that makes certain ideas seem natural and timeless when in fact they are human creations which are historically derived. Similarly, the discourse brands other ideas as unnatural, radical and beyond the realm of possibility. For the historian the difficulty lies not only in identifying what is hegemonic at any given time and place, but in explaining how and why certain ideas came to be hegemonic in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of cultural hegemony provides a way to move beyond the two dominant but unsatisfactory theoretical frameworks that have dominated education history: the Whiggish notion of education as progress and the idea of education as social control. Education historian Ken Osborne sums up these two schools of thought:

On the one side were those who saw the establishment of public education as the largely benevolent spread of enlightenment, spearheaded by progressive reformers, philanthropists and assorted radicals. On the other hand were those who saw it as a kind of vast conspiracy in which the powerful hoodwinked the powerless into accepting and even believing in their inferiority. Today the accumulation of detailed studies, examining specific phenomena, has made it difficult to accept either theory.<sup>21</sup>

Certainly, those who influenced the public education system felt that they were bringing progress and enlightenment to the world, but their idea of what represented "progress" was not necessarily accepted by everyone else in society and certainly should not be

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony see: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Translated & Edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), or Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, Edited by David Forgacs (New York: NYU Press, 2000) as well as T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities", *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (Jun., 1985)

<sup>21</sup> Ken Osborne, "Introduction" in Rosa Bruno Joffe ed., *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993)

accepted uncritically by the historian. On the other hand, the social control school, while correctly observing that what reformers of education really meant by “spreading progress” was making everyone else accept their own world view, makes the mistake of assuming that such a task was readily achievable. No doubt the goal of schooling was social control, as Stamp demonstrates when he quotes from a teachers’ manual with a key chapter entitled, didactically, “Education for Social Control.”<sup>22</sup> But social control is not as simple a matter as the training of teachers and the construction of curricula. To assume that control over what is being taught in school means the same as control over the outcome of the experience of schooling is to assume that individual historical actors, even if they are children, have no ability to decide what to accept as true based on their own experiences. In short, the social control concept denies agency and turns all those without the power to control the content of schooling into objects rather than historic subjects. Even a cursory knowledge of current Canadian historical writing demonstrates that while a particular historical bloc would often wish to be able to impose hegemony in a top-down fashion, historical agents are notoriously independent and often choose not to believe what they are told.

The concept of cultural hegemony is an attempt to change the way we look at the attempts of one group of people in society to control the ideas of another. It stipulates that hegemony is not a “thing” but a process and therefore is being negotiated and renegotiated constantly. People must collectively choose which ideas to accept as common sense and which to reject. This may be a conscious or (in most cases once

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<sup>22</sup> Stamp, 73

hegemony is established) an unconscious process of passive consent on a daily basis. For example, by sending my children to school, I am consenting to the hegemonic notion that public education is legitimate and beneficial. If, however, enough people for whatever reason start to refuse to send their children to school, this spontaneous consent is lost and the old hegemony is thrown into doubt. At this point the old hegemony may be renegotiated (the education system may be reformed until people see it as beneficial again) or an entirely new hegemony may take hold (people educating their children in private schools for example). What is important to emphasize is that while individual actors always have the choice to accept or reject hegemony the consequences of rejection may be quite adverse (the state could take away your child).

Thus, individuals find it more difficult to challenge hegemony than do large historical blocs that can wield greater amounts of power. Therefore, the ability to create a new hegemony is always to some degree a product of power. Although no one can ever force someone to accept hegemony, each person's choice regarding what to believe is a product of the different options presented to them. Certain groups have more ability than others to transmit their vision of cultural hegemony. To paraphrase Marx, people make their own history, but not within circumstances of their own choosing. The children who were objects of the educational state in Manitoba in the post-war era made their own history, but within the framework of the cultural hegemony promoted every day in the classroom. Foucault addresses these same issues with the concept of "normalization" or the idea that schools provide a discourse that defines what is considered "normal" or "abnormal". By the very act of attending school, or participating in any institution, the

individual is in part acquiescing to established standards of what constitutes normal and abnormal, even if one later rebels against or challenges the norm.<sup>23</sup>

Education, then, is a most important subject for the historian interested in the creation of hegemony. The ideas that we are told are common sense when we are children have a great impact on the way we will live the rest of our lives, even if we later reject them. In the dialectical process of forming, challenging and reforming hegemony the initial discourse that people absorb has a profound effect, even in shaping ideas that react against that discourse. Certainly, many of the historical actors discussed in this dissertation believed in the power of public education for creating hegemony. The passionate debates about the future of Manitoba education as contained in professional journals, curriculum materials, government reports, newspapers and magazines, speeches and oral testimonies demonstrate that controlling the public education system was seen as vital to properly reconstructing a society that could succeed in the new and uncertain age emerging from an age of catastrophe.

In Manitoba, educational reform was regarded as nothing less than a panacea for accomplishing the goal of reconstructing a society that could avoid the pitfalls of the previous decades including conflict between labor and capital, economic depression and international conflict. The school system needed to produce a new generation of citizens who accepted the “new liberal” hegemony of the postwar era and had the skills, both academic and social, to live successfully within it. Thus, even if some historians argue

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<sup>23</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977)

that education does not often lead the process of social reform, it does produce the citizens who give social reforms a chance at becoming accepted as universal and timeless common sense rather than recent and unstable compromises. In postwar Manitoba, both progressives and traditionalists sought to create a form of schooling that was compatible with their ideological agenda and would prepare the next generation for life in a radically different but, they hoped, successfully reconstructed Canada.

## Chapter 1: Reconstruction, the New Liberalism and Child Psychology

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the concept of reconstruction was conceived at first to be mostly an economic and political project of elites. Quickly, however, rather than simply being concerned with the transition from a wartime to peacetime economy, reconstruction became a social movement that assumed a “distinctly cultural cast.”<sup>1</sup> Ordinary Canadians desired to participate in the project of reconstruction, in no small part because they felt that, given the catastrophic events of the inter-war period and the war itself, reconstruction was sorely needed. Hope and fear existed side by side in the minds of Canadians. The end of the war represented a chance for a nation that had escaped its first-hand effects to return to peace time much more easily than most of the world. On the other hand, the promise of peace and prosperity seemed very fragile indeed, coming at the end of a decade of depression followed by another six years of war and with the country now facing another potential world conflict. In late 1943, the president of the Manitoba Teachers Society (MTS), Floyd Willoughby, summed up the situation facing Canadians:

As the war moves onward to its inevitable climax, the complete defeat and unconditional surrender of our axis enemies, it is only natural that we should begin to think more and more of the peace that will follow the final collapse of the forces of oppression and evil. What will the future years hold for mankind? Will there really be a just and lasting peace at the end of this gigantic conflict or will there be merely another breathing space before the plunge into still another and even greater world war?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L. B. Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939-1967* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2003), 67

<sup>2</sup> Floyd Willoughby, *The Manitoba Teacher* 22, no. 3 (Nov-Dec 1943) p. 3-4

The answer to these questions, according to Willoughby, would depend on the quality of education provided to future generations. This conclusion was widely accepted among educational “experts” such as teachers, administrators, superintendents, school inspectors, and other members of the provincial department of education. Education was, for these individuals, a vital part of the process of reconstruction that would determine Canada’s fate in the brave new world of the post-war era. In the *Manitoba School Journal*, the official organ of the department of education which was delivered free to every classroom teacher and school trustee in the province, John Dryden, Manitoba’s Minister of Education, wrote in 1945 that, “the character of the work done in our schools today will determine in large measure what will be done in the world of tomorrow. Never was a greater challenge presented to all concerned with education.”<sup>3</sup>

An immense amount of lofty rhetoric was produced by educational professionals both within and outside of the department of education. Annual reports which in later years would consist of dry banalities about the past year and the lengthy reporting of statistics became, in the immediate post-war era, opportunities for grandiose statements about reconstruction and education’s role within it. John C. Dryden, minister of education from 1944 to 1948, constantly used the *Manitoba School Journal* to inform teachers that they were among the most important citizens in the process of reconstruction and that “purposeful direction in the classroom will be essential if hope is to be held out for progress.”<sup>4</sup> He occasionally struck a rather apocalyptic tone, as when he stated, “We

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<sup>3</sup> John C. Dryden, “Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 1 (sep 1945) p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Dryden, “Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no 1 (sep 1944) p. 3

who are interested in education realize that the development of (peace) is primarily an educational task. Only by increasing the intensity of the forces that make for peace can we hope to combat the dark allurements that have brought our world to the brink of destruction.”<sup>5</sup>

Not only was there widespread sentiment among educational authorities that education was key to societal reconstruction but there was also nearly universal acknowledgment that reconstruction meant radical experimentation and change to the program of public education. C. K. Rogers, Provincial Superintendent of Education, wrote in 1944: “we see changes all about us. Education must keep pace with these changes.” He acknowledged that Manitoba’s educational program was plagued with weaknesses and shortcomings that prevented it from meeting the needs of the students of the future.<sup>6</sup> R. J. Johns, Director of Technical Education, was even more emphatic, stating in a January 1946 article in the *Manitoba School Journal* that, while the exact changes to the curriculum remained a mystery, “what is known and generally accepted is that revision is inevitable.”<sup>7</sup> The idea that the program of public education in Manitoba might not be radically reorganized was dismissed out of hand by Johns who insisted that, “no one who thinks in terms of education doubts the validity of the movement for a change.”<sup>8</sup> Many observers speculated that, in the future, Manitoba would have to expand

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<sup>5</sup> Dryden, “Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 5 (Jan 1947) p. 1

<sup>6</sup> C. K. Rogers, “Superintendent’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no. 2 (Oct 1944) p. 4

<sup>7</sup> R. J. Johns, “Between Doubt and Confidence”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 5 (Jan 1946) p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Johns, “Between Doubt and Confidence”

its program to include such areas as counseling, mental hygiene, drama, art and music. To educational professionals, improvement in education in order to meet the needs of the post-war world was almost always envisioned as “progressive education”. Reforms were to make schooling more accessible to a larger proportion of the population and more practical in responding to the needs of everyday life. Labor historian Peter S. McNinnis argues that working Canadians *en masse* envisioned a greatly changed world after the war was over: “People spoke of how their lives would improve once the fighting had stopped, and many vowed that the collective sacrifices of citizens must be rewarded with a secure future.”<sup>9</sup> Educational professionals took it for granted that the postwar compromise would require a radically different system of public education and not surprisingly reacted with astonishment when their attempts to implement radical change were met with scorn and derision by traditionalists.

It was not simply those within the system, however, who looked to public education to lead the way in the project of reconstruction. Business and labor leaders as well as politicians and intellectuals all weighed in on the importance of education in the postwar era. Educational issues increasingly gained a higher profile on the pages of newspapers in the province. In particular, Manitoba newspapers promulgated the notion that the use of education in the process of post-war reconstruction would require much greater levels of funding and perhaps direct involvement from the federal government,

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<sup>9</sup> Peter S. McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada 1943-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 45

despite public education being traditionally a solely provincial responsibility.<sup>10</sup> In addition to supporting such a radical new scheme for funding public education, newspapers also called for immediate implementation of the 1944 *Legislative Special Committee Report on Education* and roundly criticized the government when such implementation was not immediately forthcoming.<sup>11</sup> In criticizing the Manitoba Government for spending a much smaller proportion of its budget (19%) on education than BC (38%) and Ontario (44%)<sup>12</sup>, the *Winnipeg Tribune* argued that significant increases in government spending were necessary in order to fulfill “the requirements of a long-term educational program worthy of Canada’s status among democratic nations.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, in the quest for reconstruction, normally fiscally conservative governments could not afford to be thrifty in the area of public education.

In the early 1950s it certainly seemed as though everyone and anyone had both a concern with public education and a prescription for turning it into a useful tool for post-war reconstruction. The Royal Bank of Canada in its newsletter proclaimed that, “education rescues men and women from slave-like insignificance” and “will, as a matter of course, give us a feeling of significance...and a knowledge of our purpose as citizens in

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<sup>10</sup> See: “Equalize Educational Chances Member Asks; 3 Parties Agree”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 20 1949; “Dominion aid to Schools”, *Tribune*, March 5 1949; “Schools Need Federal Help”, *Ottawa Citizen*, Oct. 12 1949; “Federal Aid for Schools”, *Tribune*, Dec. 6 1951

<sup>11</sup> “MLA Raps Inaction in School Policies”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 16, 1950; “Education Stands Where it Did”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 25, 1950

<sup>12</sup> “MLA Raps Inaction”

<sup>13</sup> “Manitoba’s Education Problem”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 23 1944

a political society.”<sup>14</sup> Sidney Katz of *Macleans* reminded Canadians that “next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained.”<sup>15</sup> While some expressed vague and idealistic beliefs about education, others took a more practical approach to expressing their concern. During Canadian Education Week, an annual event designed to bring the school and the community closer together, numerous organizations took an active part, including the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Labor Congress of Canada.<sup>16</sup> Big business had, since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, played an important role in shaping the course of public education in Canada, realizing that it was key to molding “a supply of suitably trained and disciplined workers”.<sup>17</sup> Organized labor was a relative newcomer to the area of public education, although some more radical labor leaders and socialist groups had previously argued that universal education of the working class would lead to greater potential for worker activism and radicalism. In the post-war era, however, it seemed that more and more working class organizations were interested in the shape of public schools. For example, the Manitoba council of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees

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<sup>14</sup> “The Beauties of Learning”, *Royal Bank of Canada Newsletter*, March 22 1952

<sup>15</sup> Sidney Katz, “The Crisis in Education”, *Macleans*, March 1 1953

<sup>16</sup> Miller, “The Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 6 (Feb. 1952) p. 2

<sup>17</sup> Ken Osborne, “Introduction” in Rosa Bruno Joffe ed., *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993). p. 10 For more on the role of industrialists in the creation of public education in Canada in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century see: Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Bruce Curtis, *Making the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London, ON: Althouse, 1988)

joined the chorus of groups who requested that the government appoint a Royal Commission to study the education system and make recommendations for its improvement.<sup>18</sup>

Just as those on the inside of the education system generally saw an archaic system in need of new ideas and radical reorganization, those on the outside advocated sweeping changes in the very nature of the education system itself. Newspaper editorials echoed the statements of those within the department in assuming that the education system was currently backward and outdated and in need of immediate change. The *Winnipeg Tribune* declared that "education in Manitoba has been on the decline for a score of years or more...it is not doing a complete job of fitting the young of the community to take their rightful places as good citizens of a progressive society."<sup>19</sup> This statement in a sense epitomized the dominant point of view among Canadians regarding education's role in reconstruction in the immediate postwar era. Education was widely judged to be on the decline and in need of significant attention. C. Rhodes Smith, minister of education from 1949 to 1950, wrote in his inaugural address to the *Manitoba Schools Journal*, "Never in the history of our land has there been a greater demand for education than that of today."<sup>20</sup>

In the darkest days of the Twentieth Century, the survival of liberal democracy seemed quite far from assured. For those, such as education officials, who saw education

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<sup>18</sup> "Urges Probe of Education", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 19 1956

<sup>19</sup> "This Year of Disgrace". *Winnipeg Tribune*. April 13 1944

<sup>20</sup> C. Rhodes Smith, "A Greeting from the Honorable C. Rhodes Smith, K. C. Minister of Education", *Manitoba School Journal* 10, no. 6 (Feb. 1949) p. 2

as the secret to postwar success, both Communism and Fascism represented very real threats that could gain support among an unhappy and improperly educated population. In 1942 the city of Winnipeg staged an event known as "If Day", in which citizens were given a hands-on demonstration of what to expect if the war were lost and Fascism were to take over Canadian society. Actors representing Nazi troops carried out mock arrests of political dissidents, priests and the city's mayor, placed them in concentration camps and banned all forms of religious worship and the teaching of democracy in the school.<sup>21</sup> Such an exercise not only carried the message that life under the occupation of the enemy would be intolerable, but conveyed the theme of "it can happen here" which was frequently used to amplify fears of Fascism and more commonly as time went on, Communism. Both the media and the public education system promoted the notion that the only alternative to liberal democracy was totalitarianism and that failure on the part of individuals to obtain an appropriate education would lead to such a system. In a citizenship textbook, students in Manitoba were informed that, "Democracy, though difficult to define, can nevertheless be understood in terms of its basic concepts and by comparison with the totalitarian form of society" in which, "the people have no voice whatever in making the laws...they are slaves to the caprice of the dictator who is above the laws. The people live in mental and spiritual bondage."<sup>22</sup> An article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* warned readers that a recent wildcat strike in the automobile industry was a symptom of a wider trend in society of people breaking their word and thus showing a

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<sup>21</sup> Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 56

<sup>22</sup> *A Manual of Civics and Citizenship for Schools*, Manitoba, Department of Education, 1956, 10

lack of civic responsibility and democratic spirit. It went on to describe the ramifications of such a trend: "The military strength of the Communist countries is indeed a threat to democracy. But the greater threat to democracy is its own moral sickness. If that sickness is not remedied...our enemies will not need to drop one bomb...Democracy will have accomplished its own destruction."<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, the cure to democracy's sickness was a renewed program of education.

Educationists advocating sweeping changes to the system of public education after the Second World War were motivated not only by utopian visions of a new postwar consensus that could only be maintained with a properly educated citizenry but also by fears that should the next generation not be "educated for democracy" they would fall prey to totalitarianism. Educational philosophers of the time, in exaggerating their ability to shape the minds of young people, espoused a vision of human nature in which human beings were little more than empty vessels, waiting to be filled with whatever ideas were poured into them, able to be easily molded for good or for evil. Neville Scarfe, Dean of Education at University of Manitoba, wrote:

As a result of psychological studies, it is possible to show that people can be conditioned or indoctrinated in such a way that they will commit crimes or follow blindly an ideological hare. Behavior, beliefs, and performance can be modified for good or evil by cleverly contrived situations and instruction. The insidious influence of television, comics, movies on children and the enormous success of Hitler and his propaganda show how effective are techniques in modifying behavior.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Seeds of Destruction", *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 22 1955

<sup>24</sup> N. V. Scarfe, "Is Teacher Training Really Necessary", *Manitoba School Journal* 16, No. 1(Sep 1954) p. 8-10

In the era of hysteria surrounding Communist “brainwashing”, popular belief that the human mind could easily be manipulated by properly trained professionals was widespread. Hitler’s sudden rise to power in Germany, a supposed bastion of scientific rationalism, was attributed by many within the educational system to an all-encompassing “education for death program” employed by Nazi propagandists and foisted upon an unsuspecting population.<sup>25</sup> If education could be used to dupe a populace into supporting the most appalling regime in world history, however, it could also be used to prepare the population to resist fascism. For many psychologists, education was essentially a process of inoculating the mind against the unsavory influences of totalitarianism and preserving it for democracy. The goal of the school was to produce a “well-adjusted” individual whose belief in democracy would be strong enough to ward off any challenges.<sup>26</sup> In an address to the Manitoba Educational Association Convention, the Principal of United College warned the audience that Canada “must not succumb to the pressure of the Soviets (or Nazis) and be misled into attempting to emulate them by endeavoring to produce our own type of mass-man”, who was said to be very knowledgeable in science and technically skilled but lacked the ability to think for himself.<sup>27</sup>

For many, the postwar era represented a time when young people were more likely to fall prey to anti-social and possibly “undemocratic” behaviors than ever before. Mona

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<sup>25</sup> Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*, “Subcommittee for Education”, Advisory Committee on Coordination of Postwar Planning Files, GR1650 A0064, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba (hereafter ACCPP files)

<sup>26</sup> Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 17

<sup>27</sup> W. C. Lockhart, “Teachers Are People”, *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 9 (May 1956) p. 16

Lee Gleason has written that in the 1950s “Contemporary commentators in newspapers, in magazines, and on radio warned Canadians that the postwar world was modernizing and mechanizing too rapidly. Threats to the solidarity of the family were said to be everywhere: mothers’ paid employment, marriage breakdown, divorce and juvenile delinquency.”<sup>28</sup> The fear of family breakdown further fueled fears of the breakdown of democracy and the threat of Communism since psychologists envisioned the family, along with the schools, as the only sources of a proper instruction in democracy. In an article entitled, “It’s a Tough Time to be a Kid”, *Macleans* writer Sidney Katz addressed the public panic surrounding “juvenile delinquency” that occurred in the early 1950s: “the word teen-ager has so often been associated with words like ‘vandal, hoodlum, irresponsible, brutal and delinquent’ that many adult Canadians suspect the teen-agers of today have about the same standards of behavior as the folks of Sodom and Gomorrah.”<sup>29</sup>

Numerous commentators claimed that neither homes nor schools were up to the task of turning irresponsible young people into capable citizens. Walter Dinsdale, former teacher and Conservative MP for Brandon, remarked,

We now know that the critical formative years of the individual are the years of infancy in the home, and the early years of schooling. Indeed, because of the failure of so many homes to provide the right atmosphere of affection, love and security, many youngsters are well on their way to becoming problem individuals by the time they reach school. It is from these problem children that we recruit our juvenile delinquents and chronic alcoholics, the larger number of young people who are in our jails and penitentiaries, the growing number of the mentally ill people who break down under the stress of later crises in life, the immature adults who will find themselves after marriage in divorce courts, contributing to

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<sup>28</sup> Gleason, 7

<sup>29</sup> Katz, “It’s a Tough Time to Be a Kid”, *Macleans*, January 15 1951

the rapidly increasing number of broken homes.<sup>30</sup>

Dinsdale's frantic tone was typical of the anxieties expressed by many who believed in a developmental model of psychology in which all criminal or antisocial behavior later in life could be traced back to early childhood. Thus, if the post-war world were to succeed, delinquency would have to be nipped in the bud.

The same people who described the dire consequences of not preventing delinquency enthusiastically claimed that it could be easily prevented if experts on the subject were obeyed. Although teenagers were described by psychologists as being inherently "in a confused and disturbed state"<sup>31</sup> and adolescence itself was often portrayed as a pathology, Canadians were reassured in the multitudinous popular magazine articles written about delinquency, "no child is born a delinquent. But children do learn from the world that surrounds them: first in their homes, later in schools, churches, communities."<sup>32</sup> Child psychology in the 1950s was enamored with environmentalism in some of its crudest forms; and few childhood behavioral problems seemed to exist for which blame could not be placed directly at the feet of parents or teachers. A *Chatelaine* article entitled "how much freedom should a Teen-Ager Have?" proclaimed that, "If parents haven't done a good job of bringing up their children, they might as well relax; and if they have done a good job, they can relax too. Because either way there's not

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Dinsdale, "The Proper Study of Mankind", *Education for Better Human Understanding: Forty-Seventh Annual Convention. Manitoba Educational Association*, (Easter 1952) p. 15 Department of Education Publications, Instruction Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, "It's Time to Grow Up", *Chatelaine*

<sup>32</sup> Sidney Katz, "It's a Tough Time to Be a Kid"

much they can do to alter the situation once the children are in their teens.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, an individual’s entire psychological future was decided in childhood and depended upon the guidance of parent and school.

In an article published in *The Manitoba Teacher* entitled, “Who’s to Blame”, a junior high principal discussed the case of “Jack Jones” a fifteen-year-old “gone wrong” who had committed eleven burglaries in his young criminal career. After a lengthy discussion of the particulars of the case, the author concluded, “One thing was wrong, however. Jack was not the real delinquent. That very society itself, which looked the other way while the forces of evil went to work on Jack’s good native clay - it was found guilty today. It was the real delinquent.”<sup>34</sup> Such extreme cases of simplistic environmentalism were quite common among “experts” in discussions of juvenile delinquency.<sup>35</sup> Essentialist interpretations of childhood were promoted in which children were seen to be naturally “gregarious” and energetic. Children were neither blank slates, nor were they naturally virtuous or depraved. Rather they were unendingly active intellectually and willing to jump headfirst into new experiences. Delinquency was the result of society failing to channel these “natural” energetic urges into appropriate pastimes. In the words of a *Chatelaine* writer, “If they can’t find a normal outlet for their energies and interests, they satisfy their egos by getting into trouble”.<sup>36</sup> *The Manitoba*

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<sup>33</sup> Dorothy Sangster, “How Much Freedom Should a Teen-Ager Have?” *Chatelaine*, December 1951

<sup>34</sup> Ralph C. Smith, “Who’s To Blame?” *The Manitoba Teacher* 24, No. 5 (Mar-Apr 1946) p. 77-78

<sup>35</sup> See for example June Callwood, “Will Your Youngster Turn to Crime”, *MacLeans*, September 15, 1954

<sup>36</sup> Lotta Dempsey, “What are the Causes of Juvenile Delinquency”, *Chatelaine*, June 1946

*School Journal* summed up the general conclusion when it came to juvenile delinquency by stating, "A disquieting number of boys and girls gets into trouble, but few if any of them are *really bad* or have an inherent predilection for doing wrong. Their lapses spring rather from surplus energies in need of direction along right channels."<sup>37</sup> The most obvious institution for guiding these surplus energies was the public school. Schools were enlisted in the prevention of juvenile delinquency and by extension the creation of a generation of law abiding, democratic citizens.

In Manitoba, as in all of North America, many educational officials increasingly turned to a body of thought known as "progressive education" in order to transform the minds of future citizens in ways that would avoid a return to the age of catastrophe and instead usher in a post-war utopia. For these educational planners, this utopia was imagined in distinctly political terms. In the new postwar society, labor and capital would act as partners rather than rivals and would, in conjunction with a benevolent Keynesian welfare state, create a prosperous future defined by mass consumerism, an enlarged middle class and the nuclear family as the central unit of consumption and socialization. This "new liberalism" became the dominant political vision of the postwar era and the underlying ideological project for those who advocated what was known as progressive education in 1950s Manitoba.

The connection between the new liberalism and the program of progressive education was made explicit in a report authored by the Canadian Teachers' Federation Reconstruction Committee, a special body created during the war for the purpose of

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<sup>37</sup> "Police Talks on Good Citizenship", *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 3 (Nov 1945) p. 6

preparing a coherent vision of how education could be used in the service of postwar reconstruction. This body, composed of representatives from all nine Canadian provinces and chaired by E. F. Willoughby, president of the Manitoba Teachers Society, aimed to pressure provincial governments to undertake educational reform that would usher in a new type of society. In the minds of these teachers, education in the postwar era was to have an explicitly hegemonic purpose. Their 31 page report, entitled "Education: The Keystone of Democracy" began:

If we are to plan wisely for the future of Education in the post-war society, it is first necessary to attempt to visualize the type of society we are likely to have in the post-war era in order to determine the kind of education that will best fit our future citizens for participation in that society.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the purpose of education was to assimilate the next generation into the political, economic, and cultural norms of Canadian society as it currently existed. The social and political order into which young people were to be assimilated was not to be that of the pre-war era, however, but a radically different model of Canadian society that I have referred to as the new liberalism.

The Canadian Teachers Federation report advocated sweeping changes to Canadian society based upon the fulfillment of the Atlantic Charter, a wartime document created by Churchill and Roosevelt that contained the blueprint for the postwar world order. The Atlantic Charter had guaranteed and extended to all nations Roosevelt's famous "four freedoms" which he used to justify American participation in World War II. Roosevelt claimed the war was an idealistic quest to guarantee to all of mankind freedom

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<sup>38</sup> Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*, "Subcommittee for Education", ACCPP files

of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. The Teachers Federation used the rhetoric of the four freedoms to argue for an abandonment of *laissez-faire* and an extension of government involvement in economic life and social welfare while still retaining the framework of a capitalist economy. They argued that freedom of speech and religion were already well established in Canada, but that freedom from want and freedom from fear (which was said to arise from want) could only be established through the elimination of poverty and the provision of “the good life for all” through direct government intervention and industrial legality.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, before writing a single word about pedagogy or the reforms necessary for schools themselves, the Teachers Federation report laid out a comprehensive program of government intervention designed to create a more prosperous and fair Canadian society in which all citizens would be assured of a reasonable standard of living and a share of postwar prosperity. In addition to such general pro-worker statements as, “We affirm the inherent dignity of labor and the right of mankind to work” and “In return for his labor man has the right to expect a fair share of the amenities of life” the report made numerous very specific policy recommendations for both federal and provincial governments, including the establishment of a legal framework for collective bargaining, an “adequate national minimum individual income” and the legislation of a shorter working week and paid vacations. The federation report also called for the provision of public housing and the construction of an “all-inclusive plan of Social Security for all citizens” including unemployment insurance, family allowance, workers compensation, government pension

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<sup>39</sup> *Education: the Keystone of Democracy*

and free health and dental services.<sup>40</sup>

The Teachers Federation, however, made it explicit that it was advocating neither socialism nor complete government ownership of most industries. Rejecting *laissez-faire* capitalism by name, the report concluded that the best possible economic system for Canada was one in which the excesses of unfettered capitalism would be curbed by government intervention, allowing “individual initiative” to remain the driving force behind economic growth. Thus, the Teachers Federation program can best be characterized not as socialism but as a new liberalism, the sort of reform of the capitalist system that was increasingly being advocated by more and more labor and business leaders alike as well as politicians across the Western world. What made educationists unique in advocating the new liberalism was their belief that such a society could only survive in the face of external and internal threats if the public school system was reformed along lines that contemporaries termed “progressive”. The rest of the Teachers Federation report recommended the application of progressive pedagogical methods, a progressive curriculum and the overhaul of teacher training in order to create progressive teachers.<sup>41</sup> The Canadian Teachers Federation, however, was hardly alone in making the connection between the political agenda of the new liberalism and the body of educational thought known popularly as progressivism.

It should not be surprising that in the postwar era the idea that the new liberalism was the only solution to the problem of creating a prosperous and fair society and the

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<sup>40</sup> *Education: the Keystone of Democracy*

<sup>41</sup> *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*

belief that reforming public education along progressive lines was the best way of ensuring such as society's success dominated the thinking of teachers, school administrators and department of education officials. Like the individuals who made up the Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, Manitoba's educational authorities, including school inspectors, superintendents and deputy ministers shared remarkably similar backgrounds. Most had at one time been teachers in public schools themselves, but fairly early in their careers had obtained higher education, often at some of the most prestigious schools in the English-speaking world. R. O. MacFarlane, deputy minister of education from 1946 to 1953, for example, graduated from Harvard in 1933 and taught history at the University of Manitoba before moving into public education administration.<sup>42</sup> Prior to becoming Manitoba's Superintendent of Schools in 1953, W. C. Lorimer attained an MA and PhD in Education from Columbia before returning to his native Saskatchewan to teach at the normal school.<sup>43</sup>

These Ivy League educations set Manitoba's educational authorities apart from not only the majority of the general public, but the majority of teachers, most of whom had only a high school diploma and normal school training. The educational experiences of department officials would have exposed them not only to the general intellectual trends of the time which leaned toward some sort of Keynesian economic arrangement and away from *laissez-faire*, but also would have brought them into contact with the

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<sup>42</sup> Donald C. Rowat, "R. O. MacFarlane's Contribution to the Education of Public Administrators", *Canadian Public Administration*, Spring 1971, "MacFarlane R. O", Vertical Biography Files, Legislative Library of Manitoba, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

<sup>43</sup> Press Release, Oct 12 1973, *Manitoba Government News Service*, "Bateman, Scott", Vertical Biography Files, Legislative Library of Manitoba, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg Manitoba

current debates regarding education and pedagogy. In engaging in these debates, Manitoba's future educational authorities absorbed a set of beliefs and assumptions that would be labeled "progressive education" by both their supporters and detractors. While those in direct control of Manitoba's education system in the postwar era were to some degree simply reflecting broader public attitudes in favor of the postwar new liberalism, their own backgrounds made them likely to support such an arrangement themselves.

The career of B. Scott Bateman, deputy minister of education from 1953 until 1967, perhaps best represents the typical Manitoba educational bureaucrat in that his own life story is similar to virtually every man (or rarely woman) who worked within the department as an inspector or within the deputy minister's office.<sup>44</sup> Bateman was born in 1907, in Baldur Manitoba and attended normal school in Brandon at age 19 after completion of high school.<sup>45</sup> His rural background set him apart from many of his colleagues in the department but was typical of many who would become teachers within the public school system. However, both his gender and acquisition of further education would set him on a career path different from the vast majority of Manitoba's teachers. Bateman would obtain a Masters degree in education from University of Manitoba via summer school while he was teaching. After having taught at the primary, junior high and high school levels, Bateman's experience and education allowed him to become a school inspector for the Northern Manitoba divisions and eventually work his way up to

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<sup>44</sup> See *Manitoba School Journal* throughout the late 1940s. Biographies of Inspectors and other department officials were features each month.

<sup>45</sup> "Grass-Roots Administrator", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Aug. 19 1953; "Scott Bateman", Obituary, *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 13 1996

the position of deputy minister.<sup>46</sup> This career path prompted the *Free Press* to portray Bateman as a prototypical “self-made man” who rose from humble origins to attain a position usually reserved for those coming from more prestigious schools and more exotic locales. However, Bateman’s career trajectory was unattainable for the vast majority of Manitoba’s male teachers who possessed neither the time nor financial means to continue their education at the graduate or even undergraduate level.

For female teachers, attaining a position of power within the education system in Manitoba was an almost insurmountable challenge. The glass ceiling present in so many areas of Canadian society at this time as well as the expectation of retirement after marriage and childbirth cut short the careers of many women who, if male, might have followed Bateman’s path of career advancement. The career of Sybil Shack, the first female high school principal in Manitoba, demonstrates the sacrifices required for women to advance within the educational hierarchy and the limitations of advancement even when sacrifices were made. Shack, who was cited as a “legendary” figure within Manitoba at the time of her death in 2004, was born in 1911 into a Jewish Winnipeg family that was prominently involved in the labor movement. Her ethnicity and politics immediately separating her from the majority of young female teachers in Manitoba, Shack was further distinguished by her extraordinary scholarship which saw her obtain a university entrance scholarship at age 14 and complete her Bachelor of Arts at the age of

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<sup>46</sup> Press Release, Oct. 15 1977, *Manitoba Government News Service*, “Bateman, Scott”, Vertical Biography Files, Legislative Library of Manitoba, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg Manitoba

18.<sup>47</sup> Yet even this stellar academic resume was not enough to guarantee Shack employment after she graduated from normal school at the height of the depression and she would wait two years before finding a job in Foxwarren Manitoba.

In 1945 Shack returned to University of Manitoba where she won the gold medal in the bachelor of education program before completing her masters degree. In 1948 she became principal of Sargent Park School, the first of six different Winnipeg schools at which she would eventually hold that position.<sup>48</sup> For the next several decades, Shack would be a vocal supporter of progressive education and an important voice in almost any debate surrounding education in Manitoba. However, her voice would always be one coming from outside the corridors of educational power rather from within, demonstrating once again the homogeneity of those chosen to lead Manitoba's education system in the postwar era. Those in charge of education in Manitoba were to very closely resemble that figure who in 1950s North America was supposed to preside over the creation of the new liberalism: the male, university-trained expert.

The new liberalism was to be overseen by an array of scientific experts, the most important of whom would be psychologists. Mona Lee Gleason argues that psychology became a powerful tool in the 1950s for enforcing notions of normalcy that were intended to create social hegemony.<sup>49</sup> Psychologists assumed that a society based around the patriarchal nuclear family was "normal" and "natural" and that anyone who could not

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<sup>47</sup> Nick Martin, "Legendary Principal Mourned", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 24 2004

<sup>48</sup> "Dr. Sybil Shack", Obituary, *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 25, 2004

<sup>49</sup> Gleason. *Normalizing the Ideal*

find happiness and fulfillment within such a society was therefore pathological and in need of psychological guidance. Gleason argues that literature from the experts on the idea of what was “normal” did not simply use the term to describe the way in which most people behaved in reality, but instead represented an ideal of human behavior to which they should aspire.<sup>50</sup> While many Canadian and American historians have written about the postwar cult of psychology in reference to marriage manuals, childcare manuals and popular psychology, the education system also enlisted psychologists in the quest to make the Canadian population “normal” and thus able to properly enjoy, rather than challenge, the postwar consensus.

Canada’s most famous psychologist of the 1950s was unquestionably Samuel Laycock. From *Macleans* and *Chatelaine* magazine articles to nation-wide speaking tours, it seemed as though the average Canadian could hardly avoid hearing or becoming subject to some of Dr. Laycock’s advice on proper mental hygiene. Called the “Canadian Dr. Spock”<sup>51</sup>, Laycock was introduced by Manitoba’s provincial psychiatrist as “the most competent by experience and training to speak on the subject of Mental Health in relation to Education.”<sup>52</sup> He published fourteen books and over 700 journal articles on the subject of child rearing or schooling<sup>53</sup> and dispensed almost all of the prevailing themes regarding child psychology, arguing that children were inquisitive blank slates, that their future

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<sup>50</sup> Gleason, 10

<sup>51</sup> Gleason, 37

<sup>52</sup> T. A. Pincock, “Mental Hygiene in Education”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 8 (April 1946) p. 16-17

<sup>53</sup> Gleason, 39

“normalcy” was shaped by their early environment and that failure to become “normal” or “well-adjusted” would lead to individual pathologies later in life that could collectively present a serious challenge to the future well-being of Canadian society. For Laycock, and most other child psychologists, almost all children were sick. He explained in an article in the *Manitoba School Journal* that “the end-products of mental maladjustments which find their way to mental hospitals, mental hygiene clinics and penal institutions suffer only in greater degree the same maladies that are found among the ordinary population and among school children”<sup>54</sup> and concluded that extreme cases of people in mental institutions who believed themselves to be famous historical figures, or God, “differ only in degree from the many citizens in every community who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think and from the lime-lighty child in school who has exaggerated self-importance.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, a fine line was separating most Canadians from a lifetime of insanity and institutionalization!

Psychologists in Manitoba’s schools agreed with Laycock’s portrayal of a population inundated with mental pathologies. Not only did they conclude that most children were likely to suffer from some form of mental disorder unless proper mental health guidance and training were provided by the school, but often they portrayed childhood itself as inherently pathological. A traveling child guidance clinic was dispatched to the towns of Dauphin, Swan River, Neepawa, Rivers and the city of Brandon in 1958, testing 363 children for psychological disorders. The results confirmed

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<sup>54</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Mental Hygiene in Education”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, No. 8 (April 1946) p. 16-17

<sup>55</sup> Laycock, “Mental Hygiene”

psychologists' claims of widespread mental disorder among Manitoba schoolchildren and by implication the population in general. Of the 363 children tested, 301 were deemed to have some sort of psychological problem with only 62 being described as having "Average" or "Above Average" intelligence and no other psychological problem. An astounding 93 students (or about 25%) were diagnosed with "behavior disorder", and 127 (35%) were classified as "defective" or "dull" in terms of intelligence. In addition, 6 were diagnosed with having an "Anxiety State", 9 with "Schizophrenia", and 3 with "Pathological Personality"!<sup>56</sup>

These statistics were interpreted by the department as a justification for the immediate creation of more "special" classrooms for "slow learners". They also indicate the variety of ways in which psychologists could classify students as being in some way abnormal, including the use of categories such as "Adolescent Maladjustment", "Speech Disorder" or even Epilepsy or Deafness which were included on the same list as psychological disorders.<sup>57</sup> Not only were Manitoba's children overwhelmingly sick (and therefore in need of the professional services of a psychologist!) but supposedly this sickness was more or less a natural outcome of childhood itself as evidenced by its prevalence.

Two university researchers, writing to Manitoba's teachers, concluded that "the transition to adolescence from early childhood is often a hectic, confusing and even

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<sup>56</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education 1959* (1959) p. 234

<sup>57</sup> *Royal Commission*, 234

frustrating period of life. All of them have problems".<sup>58</sup> The general introduction to the junior high curriculum began by describing the physical changes that adolescents would experience during puberty (which presumably would arrive during the junior high years) and then discussing the psychological implications of such natural physical processes. This curriculum included such sweeping statements as, "During this period (11 to 14 years) when the growth of the girl is greater than that of the boy, tall girls are frequently taller than the tallest boys of their own age, and short boys are shorter than the shortest girl. On this account these students frequently have difficulty making normal social adjustments" and "the main changes (of puberty) may be described in a single generalization; all the primary emotions are intensified, but not to an equal degree."<sup>59</sup>

The notion that adolescence is a difficult time certainly has remained a prominent one up to the present day. What made post-war views of adolescent alienation different, however, was the belief that it did not merely represent a "phase" which young people would inevitably grow out of. Rather, psychological experts claimed that psychological problems in young people would, if not addressed, continue into adulthood and create an entire population unable to properly "adjust". Laycock argued that the psychological problems of children could undermine the future greatness of Canadian society: "The best available data indicate that, if the present trend continues, out of every one hundred children in our schools, four or five will at some time in their life be inmates of a mental

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<sup>58</sup> H. H. Remmers and Lyle M. Spencer, "All Young People Have Problems", *Manitoba School Journal* 11, No. 9 (May 1950) p. 10-11

<sup>59</sup> *General Introduction to the Curriculum for the Junior High Grades of Manitoba Schools*, Department of Education, Government of Manitoba, 1959, 11-17

hospital...one or two will commit some major crime or delinquency and spend some time in a gaol or other penal institution, three or four will suffer from such serious mental difficulty that without training they will not become self-supporting or self respecting citizens, and of the rest thirty to fifty will suffer from minor but crippling mental traits which will impair that degree of happiness and efficiency which they should have in life.”<sup>60</sup> Laycock concluded that only a “positive program of mental hygiene in homes and schools” could prevent such undesirable future outcomes. He stated, “Mental Hygienists believe, in view of the above facts, that the early treatment of minor mental disorders like temper tantrums, sullenness, sulkiness, self-pity, sensitiveness, shyness, lying, etcetera, can head off a substantial portion of those who otherwise would end up in mental hospitals or penal institutions.”<sup>61</sup> Provincial Psychiatrist T. A Pincock spelled out the situation in even blunter terms: “Seldom do we realize that none of us is free of mental disturbances...The new approach to mental health begins with the recognition that what happens to us in childhood for the most part determines the kind of adults we become.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, childhood had to become the major concern of psychology so that experts in the schools could “detect the symptoms of mental disorder before they have gone too far” and “help develop positive habits of mental health in the young generation.”<sup>63</sup> According to mental health professionals, they alone were equipped to take on this enormous task.

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<sup>60</sup> Laycock, “Mental Hygiene”

<sup>61</sup> Laycock, “Mental Hygiene”

<sup>62</sup> Pincock, “Building for Mental Health”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, No. 6 (Feb. 1946) p. 18

<sup>63</sup> Pincock, “Building for Mental Health”

Occasional visits by the child guidance clinic and subsequent referrals of problem students to experts outside of school were not enough, according to psychologists, to nip personality disorders in the bud. The entire school curriculum had to be revised in order to ensure that the school's primary purpose was psychological adjustment. The general introduction to the curriculum for Manitoba schools, from 1950 until its revision more than a decade later, stated that the purpose of education was to inculcate a "democratic philosophy" among students. This lofty (and extremely vague) goal was to be accomplished explicitly through the use of psychological expertise in order to create "a sound education programme...geared to the basic personality needs of children."<sup>64</sup> After presenting a detailed listing of these "basic needs" as outlined by a prominent American educational psychologist, the curriculum went on to tell teachers that "the basic personality needs are propelling forces behind human behaviour. These needs must be met through normal channels if children are to develop wholesome, well-integrated personalities...The functional effectiveness of members of a democratic society is largely dependent upon the manner in which both home and school meet the basic personality needs of children."<sup>65</sup> These needs themselves included "affection", "belonging", "likeness to others" and "social approval" as well as "harmony with reality" and "a fair balance between success and failure." In other words, the purpose of a school was not merely to provide students with an opportunity to learn "facts" and acquire basic literacy

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<sup>64</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Government of Manitoba, 1950, 6

<sup>65</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies*, 1950, 8

and numeracy skills, but it was to create an environment in which students would be provided with “affection” from both teachers and students which would lead to “status, recognition and acceptance” which in turn led to “personal integration”<sup>66</sup> into postwar Canadian society. Laycock reminded critics of the school’s newfound focus on mental health rather than solely academics, remarking that “even if the school’s goal were simply academic learning, this can take place effectively only when the child is reasonably free from emotional tension and when he feels accepted and secure in the classroom.”<sup>67</sup> Students were not going to school just to learn; they were going in order to be taught to feel good about themselves and thus avoid the calamity of psychological disturbance.

The creation of an environment conducive to psychological adjustment required a combination of physical changes to the classroom and the training of teachers in psychological knowledge. The reports of Manitoba’s school inspectors in the 1950s were dominated by assessments of the physical conditions of the province’s classrooms. This focus was no doubt in part due to the neglect of physical infrastructure in rural schools during the war and depression years, but also indicates a virtual obsession on the part of department of education officials with the effect of the classroom environment on mental health. The curriculum told teachers that, “arrangement of the classroom is important...Attention should be given to such factors as seating, heating, lighting, and ventilation. Orderliness, attractiveness, simplicity in decorations or exhibits of work and

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<sup>66</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies*, 1950, 7

<sup>67</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Should Teachers be Concerned with Mental Health”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 34, No. 2 (Sep/Oct 1955) p. 18-19

a well-organized, smoothly-running daily program react most favorably on a child's mental state."<sup>68</sup> Making sure that each and every schoolchild in Manitoba was learning in a modern classroom that protected both the physical and mental health of its occupants was a high priority for educational experts.

The teacher was to be responsible not only for maintaining the physical environment of the classroom but also attentiveness to mental health concerns throughout the day. The curriculum for the subject of guidance, which appeared for the first time in the 1950s, stated that guidance was not to be taught as if it were just another subject, with a specific period of time devoted to its study each day, but as an overriding concern that was present during the teaching of every other subject as well. As for what to do in the specific classroom time set aside for guidance, teachers were advised, "unlike other school programmes it is not limited to any specific aspect of the pupil's life. Its field is as broad as life itself. Any life problem to which other school subjects do not provide a solution may be the concern of the teacher of this course."<sup>69</sup> Specific recommended activities included regular one-on-one meetings between teachers and students to discuss their problems, as well as class discussions dealing with problems that affected all students. The guidance slot of the day was to be a type of therapy. If teachers were now to act as therapists and counselors, then presumably they also required training in the field of psychology which would, of course, be overseen by professionals in the field.

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<sup>68</sup> *Health Education and Nature Study Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1946, p. 22

<sup>69</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1958, 52

As Mona Gleason argues, teachers, who were overwhelmingly female, were not well regarded in a psychological discourse which was overtly misogynist and blamed “over-mothering” or “under-mothering” for a plethora of psychological disorders while rarely condemning men for similar behaviors.<sup>70</sup> As Gleason states, however, the formal training teachers received meant that they “were expected to know better and thus were doubly scolded by psychologists.”<sup>71</sup> Luckily for the unenlightened female teacher, psychologists were waiting in the wings to provide assistance. Manitoba’s Provincial Psychiatrist related the encouraging story of a “Miss Smith” who was provided with the opportunity for study in the field of guidance and as a result learned how to understand the problems of little “Joe” whom she originally dismissed as “another bad kid”. Miss Smith learned through her training that, “if Joe reads badly...she must know *why* Joe reads badly...Miss Smith tried to understand the “climate of affection” in which Joe lived.” Eventually she “stopped thinking of Joe as “lazy”...She knows about his querulous working mother, his fatherless home, the four younger children.”<sup>72</sup> Clearly the fictional Miss Smith had learned one of the central tenets of 1950s child psychology; that children’s problems are almost entirely due to the faults of their parents, usually because they failed to conform to their assigned gender roles. The author concluded that Miss Smith’s newfound training should “make her a better teacher for hundreds of children for

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<sup>70</sup> Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 13

<sup>71</sup> Gleason, 13

<sup>72</sup> Daniel A. Prescott, “Teachers are Studying”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 28, No. 2 (Sep/Oct 1949) p. 20-23

the rest of her career.”<sup>73</sup>

The notion perpetuated by the mental health profession that only increased use of experts such as themselves in the school system could save the future generation was not an uncommon one in the 1950s. Numerous historians have described the 1950s as the “age of the expert”, a time when public trust in social science and its professionals was at an all time high. One Winnipeg high school teacher remarked, “This is an age of experts - medical experts, science experts, golf experts. Today, education as a ranking profession hails its lengthening line of experts; the Psychologist, the Psychiatrist, the Psychometrist and the counsellor, all of whom are contributing definitely and distinctly to the education of our boys and girls.”<sup>74</sup> In the 1950s the correct answer to any vexing question was; “Ask the experts”. Mona Gleason argues that Canadians particularly turned to psychological expertise for answers to questions about daily life that previously were felt best left to family or clergy. Letters written to the Canadian Psychological Association demonstrated a population who “hoped to better understand themselves, their loved ones, or the world around them by applying psychological knowledge.”<sup>75</sup> But why had Canadians come to trust the experts to deal with the most intimate and personal of problems facing them? Partly the answer lies with the self-promotion of the experts themselves, but it also represents part of a broader movement within Canadian (as well as American and European) society toward a positivistic view of the world and an almost

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<sup>73</sup> Prescott, “Teachers are Studying”

<sup>74</sup> R. J. Cochrane, “The Teacher and Counselling”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, No. 10 (June 1946) p. 21

<sup>75</sup> Gleason, 4

religious trust in science during the immediate postwar era.

Psychologists and psychiatrists were certainly not shy in offering their services in a multitude of fields after the war. Gleason details how psychologists sought to “take psychology out of the university laboratory and into the homes of ordinary Canadians” and argues that their increasing claims to hold a monopoly over knowledge concerning the workings of the human mind were overtly self-serving.<sup>76</sup> Psychologists “proved effective at promoting themselves to the general public as experts, as evidenced by the spread of their popularized psychological advice in schools, magazines, newspapers, on the radio and in advice manuals.”<sup>77</sup> This self-promotion is plainly visible upon examination of Manitoba schools, with experts continually arguing that traditional authorities in the field of education, namely teachers, were completely unsuited to perform counseling tasks without significant supervision from themselves. An article entitled “What is counselling” in the *Manitoba School Journal* claimed, “it is folly to think that every teacher is capable of good counselling”, before asserting that both innate personality traits and proper training were required.<sup>78</sup> The author of the article continued, “there is grave danger that large numbers of individuals, both without and within the ranks of teachers, will set themselves up as counsellors without adequate training. Such persons often have no basic background in educational psychology on which to base their

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<sup>76</sup> Gleason, 4

<sup>77</sup> Gleason, 5

<sup>78</sup> Author Unknown, “What is counselling”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, No. 8 (Apr 1946) p. 10

training.”<sup>79</sup> It was not specified whether this “grave danger” was to the students themselves or just to psychologists who would be out of a job.

The province of Manitoba made increased use of Psychologists in an official capacity during the 1950s. In addition to the creation of guidance counselor positions at larger secondary schools, the department of education increasingly referred “problem” students to clinics outside the school system and for the first time required schools to keep detailed health records of each student which were to catalogue both physical characteristics such as weight, dental health, and appetite as well as more subjective characteristics such as “endurance” and “attitude”. Teachers were to make regular notes on the “appearance and behaviour of pupils” such as “works and plays with others of own age” or “is happy and responsive”. These health records could then be reviewed by the public health nurse or any other professional if necessary.<sup>80</sup> Psychological testing also became increasingly prevalent in Manitoba at all levels of schooling. For example, in the Brandon School District all children were given “mental intelligence” tests upon entering the school system by the staff of the Brandon Mental Hospital. After these tests were concluded any cases of “mentally abnormal” students were to be investigated and treated by psychological professionals from the hospital itself.<sup>81</sup> In the Winnipeg School Division, children were subject to IQ testing and classification and placement on the basis of test results. In urban graded schools which were large enough for several classes of the

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<sup>79</sup> “What is counselling”

<sup>80</sup> *Health Education and Nature Study I-VI, 1950*

<sup>81</sup> T. A. Neelin, “Report of the School District of Brandon”, *Annual Report of the Department of Education, Manitoba, 1947-48*, 84

same grade, classes could be divided by levels of "intelligence" as measured in standardized tests. In addition, "special" classes could be created for those pupils deemed unable to participate in a normal classroom.<sup>82</sup> When a teacher identified a child unable to keep up to the rest of the class, the Child Guidance Clinic's staff of 4 psychiatrists and 5 psychologists might be called upon by the principal to perform an evaluation of the student, after which time the student might be placed in one of three classrooms in the city of Winnipeg in which "forty-five children of very low IQ" worked at "whatever level they can."<sup>83</sup>

The diligent work by experts in psychology to promote their own discipline cannot by itself, however, explain the willingness of the school system and of parents to increasingly see psychological knowledge as essential in guiding the curriculum and the daily experiences of schoolchildren. The trust placed in psychologists by the schools must instead be regarded as part of a broader trend toward trust in experts that characterized the immediate postwar era. Len Kuffert argues that, although trust and belief in science were well-established phenomena in Canada during the first half of the century, the Second World War brought acceptance of science and scientists to new heights.<sup>84</sup> There existed widespread popular perception that science had won the war and saved civilization, not only by providing the weapons that defeated Nazi Germany, but also through management of human affairs.

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<sup>82</sup> J. C. Pincock, "Winnipeg School Division Superintendent's Report", *Annual Report of the Department of Education, Manitoba, 1946-47*, 71

<sup>83</sup> Pincock, "Superintendent's Report"

<sup>84</sup> Kuffert, *Great Duty*, 131

In both the American and Canadian militaries, psychologists had found a niche for themselves in testing, classifying and organizing large numbers of people in order to allow the military to effectively perform its task of winning the war.<sup>85</sup> After the war, many people, including psychologists themselves, called for the extension of the use of experts in this field to all aspects of life. An author in *The Manitoba Teacher* remarked, "If the Army and Air Force can apply modern psychological testing what is wrong with workers in the field of education?"<sup>86</sup> This sort of attitude toward the use of social science was widespread among Canadians. Calls for the application of science to daily life were frequent in this era of Canadian history in which scientific expertise was almost unanimously praised in the media as a route to progress both material and moral.

In Manitoba's schools, students were taught that perhaps the only problem with science was that there was not enough of it. A professor of natural sciences advised teachers reading the *Manitoba School Journal* that "scientific inventions and discoveries have not brought with them the full contribution of science to the thinking of the majority of the people. Widespread unscientific thinking can readily be discerned today in our Western culture, although the Industrial Revolution started more than a century ago."<sup>87</sup> The solution to this sorry state of affairs was, not surprisingly, education. Science

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<sup>85</sup> For more on the self-promotion of the psychological profession both during and after World War Two see: Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)

<sup>86</sup> Author Unknown, "Tom Has Done Well or A Parent Looks at School Reports", *The Manitoba Teacher* 22, No. 3 (Nov-Dec 1943) p. 13-14

<sup>87</sup> Gerald. S. Craig, "The Development of Science in Elementary Schools", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, No. 10 (June 1948) p. 20-21

education was no longer to be designed for “discovering children of exceptional ability in science and starting them on their way to become scientists. In a democratic form of government, public education must involve consideration of the potential contributions of science to all people. Therefore elementary science is designed for all the children.”<sup>88</sup>

Children were to be taught to revere science itself with an almost religious fervor. A series of radio broadcasts designed for schoolchildren frequently concerned itself with the problem of making children trust science and scientific experts. One broadcast entitled, “Science versus Superstition” was summarized this way:

Almost everyone you know can tell you of daily quoted superstitions. Most people do not believe in them, but once in a while you will meet someone who does. In our broadcast...you will find Joy and Glen visiting their grandfather, Dr. Mathews, who spent many years in the most primitive parts of Africa...Dr. Mathews tells them how many superstitions originated, which leads him to relating his experiences with savages whose lives are bound up with superstitions. Listen and you will hear how all superstitions had their beginnings in fear. And since fear comes from lack of knowledge you will realize that superstitions are the result of ignorance.<sup>89</sup>

This broadcast draws upon themes familiar in Anglo-Canadian imperialist thinking such as the supposed supremacy of British (and Canadian) civilization and the reasons for this superiority lying not only with the individual courage of members of the superior race but with the use of the scientific method in order to foster logical and rational thinking. Canadians, it was said, enjoyed their prosperous and morally sound way of life due to their reliance upon reason and their rejection of superstition. Another school broadcast

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<sup>88</sup> Craig, “The Development of Science in Elementary Schools”

<sup>89</sup> Author Unknown, “Summary of School Radio Broadcasts”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 1 (Sep 1945) p. 17

acknowledged the possibility that other influential figures in the child's life (parents perhaps) might question the value of science in light of the horrors of the past war before ultimately dismissing these concerns as misguided.

In this script we pretend there is a global parliament which introduces a bill to abolish science. Dr. Huston heads the representatives of science from all parts of the world who have been summoned to give their defenses before the bill is voted on. There follows scenes of intense debate on whether science is responsible for war or not. The Scientist describes a new discovery for preventing blood clots...In a final speech Dr. Huston says science is not responsible. It is the rulers, the state, and the people who are at fault. He says what you need is more science, not less to solve modern problems. Science is way ahead of the Joneses in developing new discoveries. It is the Joneses who must keep up with Scientific progress.<sup>90</sup>

In both radio broadcasts, the benevolent, kindly scientist takes the confused and uninformed individuals aside and explains to them why his expertise is needed and why science is the answer to their problems. Psychologists could have asked for no better description of what they hoped their role in the school system would be.

Despite their belief in positivism and claims that their expertise represented an entirely new and superior tool for understanding and shaping the development of the child, proponents of child psychology drew heavily on existing intellectual traditions. The social reform movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was quite similar to the cult of the psychological expert of the 1950s. Both were based upon the optimistic notion that human behavior could be shaped and indeed perfected through the creation of proper institutions. Both believed that the salvation of society was to be attained by the reform of deviant individuals. Both expressed a crude and almost naive environmentalism. Both saw individual actors, especially women, members of the working class, and non-Anglo

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<sup>90</sup> "Summary of Radio Broadcasts", 19

Canadians, as deeply flawed and unable to provide the proper environment which would allow for individual and thus social transformation. The pro-psychology movement of the 1950s simply substituted scientific positivism for Christian moralizing. Instead of working to ban the 'demon rum', as the social reformers of a few decades earlier had done, psychologists worked to ban physical punishment of children and promote a more permissive approach to raising children. Their specific prescriptions may have been quite different, but their goals were in fact quite similar; to remove negative environmental influences from society, and thus create a generation of individuals who were, in the words of psychologists, "better adjusted" to realities of modern life than the previous one. As with the moral reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the reformers of the 1950s believed that adult patterns of behavior were very difficult to change and that any meaningful social engineering had to begin at a young age.<sup>91</sup> In both eras they turned their attention to public education, hoping to use the state as a "collective parent" which would overcome the deficiencies of individual parents, particularly those who were working class or ethnic minorities. Thus, those who spoke of creating a new generation of citizens capable of preserving democracy and the post-war consensus through education and the use of psychological expertise supported the implementation of a new curriculum modeled on a concept popularly known as "progressive education".

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<sup>91</sup> Prentice, *School Promoters*

## Chapter 2: Child Centered Education: The Progressive Curriculum in Theory

Child psychology provided the educationists of the post-war era with both an educational philosophy and a way to justify specific policies carried out in the name of that philosophy. These reforms purported to represent a scientific approach to the education of children which was above criticism because the theory behind it was based on objective scientific knowledge, discovered by brilliant psychologists, of how the human mind actually worked. When postwar reconstructionists within the postwar Manitoba provincial government led by Stuart Garson sought such a scientific approach to the issue of public schooling in Manitoba, they turned to individuals within the department of education who were well-versed in the prevailing educational theories of the time. Progressive education, as it had come to be known, was perfectly suited to the needs of reconstructionists. It promised both the certainty of objective science and contained within it the rhetoric of democracy, expert guidance and utopian promise that reconstructionists who believed in the new liberalism found so appealing. Although many within positions of power in the department of education may not have understood either the intricacies of progressive education in theory or the multiple complex currents within this body of thought, among educational theorists within Manitoba there existed a broad consensus regarding educational theory.

Postwar educational thought in Manitoba owed a great debt to John Dewey, the pre-eminent philosopher of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century movement which became known as progressive education. Dewey represented perhaps the most firm connection between the post-war child psychology movement and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century social reform movement.

He was one of numerous American intellectuals of that time who struggled with the central contradiction of the modern industrial-capitalist era: that while capitalist industrialization had created almost unimaginable wealth and prosperity and given birth to technological innovations that revolutionized every facet of daily life, it had been accompanied by massive uncontrolled urbanization, widespread extreme poverty and an increase in class conflict. Progressive thinkers, who were almost entirely middle class, were not simply apologists for capitalism and industrialization but neither did they believe in socialism. They regarded class conflict and class politics not as solutions to the contradictions of capitalism but as unfortunate and potentially destructive occurrences that threatened the Jeffersonian ideal of a political community consisting of individual actors making political decisions on the basis of the collective good rather than narrow self (or class) interest.

American progressives generally saw the solution to the problems of capitalism as one of social engineering rather than political or economic reform. The problems of industrialism were to be solved by institutions, namely the state. However, the state should expand its role in society, not via direct economic activity (nationalization of industries etc.) but by setting up institutions that would allow each individual to better share in the material bounty that industrialization provided. For John Dewey, the institution best able to carry out this goal was the school. Education, for Dewey, as it was for many Canadians in the post-war reconstruction era, was a panacea that would fix society's problems by equipping each individual for success in the modern world. Problems such as poverty, crime and class conflict were blamed on the poor state of

public education, which produced not only an ignorant population without the necessary academic skills required for upward social mobility, but also a population that had not learned to value education itself and did not understand its relevance to the modern world.

Dewey's program for reforming society, thus, lay in reforming the schools. He believed, like many progressive thinkers of his time, that an informed and intelligent populace would be able to capitalize *en masse* upon the opportunities provided by industrialization, thus solving the problem of poverty. Dewey claimed that the current education system, however, was not capable of producing skilled workers and responsible citizens because it failed to relate education to life. Progressive education was to overcome the disconnect between what was taught in the schools and what went on in the world outside the schoolhouse.

Educationists in post-war Manitoba did not always acknowledge their connection to Dewey when faced with criticism, in many cases denying that they believed in either Dewey or "progressive education". This was perhaps unsurprising since many had not read Dewey himself but had come in contact with "progressive education" second or third hand through the writings of American and Canadian educational philosophers who had been influenced by Dewey themselves and whose ideas made their way into Manitoba through speeches, conferences and books.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Boyd H. Bode, *Progressive Education at the Crossroads* (New York: Newson and Company, 1938); William Heard Kilpatrick, *Philosophy of Education* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1951); Carleton Washburne, *What is Progressive Education?* (New York: The John Day Company, 1952) and Washburne, *A Living Philosophy of Education* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940) among others

The career of Neville Scarfe, Dean of the University of Manitoba faculty of education from 1951 to 1956 and one of Manitoba's foremost educational authorities and prominent believers in progressive education, demonstrates the complex and sometimes indirect way in which thinking on "progressive education" came to Manitoba and became accepted as the dominant educational discourse among those connected to public education. Scarfe was born in England and came to Canada for the first time after the war with impressive credentials, having attended an exclusive grammar school and graduated with an honours BA at the age of just 19. Scarfe had accumulated over twenty years experience as a school master and lecturer on both geography and education by the time he was given the position of Dean at the University of Manitoba.<sup>2</sup>

To the University of Manitoba he brought an educational philosophy shaped not only by the prevailing trends in England at the time, but by his exposure to the American school of progressive education from his brief time in North America between 1948 and 1951. This philosophy could be described as "progressive" because it accepted the principle that the school was fundamentally a social institution, designed not for personal intellectual edification but for creating positive social change. Schooling was to primarily concern itself with creating individuals, "with minds of their own" who would become constructive citizens.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Scarfe himself: "we want thoughtful people who are not fooled by propaganda who have been trained to study until they can understand

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<sup>2</sup> John Calam, "Neville Scarfe and Teacher Education", *Historical Studies in Education* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 75-83

<sup>3</sup> Calam, "Neville Scarfe and Teacher Education"

and use their knowledge.” Such an outcome could not be accomplished through “the parroting off of uncomprehended words, rules or idea” but through dynamic hands-on instruction.<sup>4</sup> In Scarfe’s relatively short tenure at University of Manitoba he attempted to design a teacher-training course which would reflect these progressive principles.

Scarfe, and others like him, came into contact with progressive education through reading journals, attending conferences and hearing speeches by the leading educational philosophers and psychologists of the postwar era. Whether they themselves had read John Dewey directly or not, they became influenced by a body of thought that was part of a diverse and complex intellectual movement known as “progressive education”. They adapted the parts of this body of thought which suited their own needs in terms of supplying the theoretical context which could be used to guide and justify their project of reconstruction through education. Through the acquisition and modification of this body of thought, post-war progressive educators in Manitoba espoused a theory of education which stated that learning was to be child-centered rather than teacher-centered, participatory rather than top-down, democratic rather than competitive and, above all, practical.

If, as Canadian educationists believed, the post-war era was marked by a battle between democracy and totalitarianism, then the key to educating for democracy was to focus upon the individuality of each child, in contrast to the Fascist or Communist systems of education which supposedly repressed individuality and sought to create a mindless mass of followers. The so-called “child centered” approach to education

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<sup>4</sup> Scarfe, quoted in “Education Dean Urges Advance in Schooling”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan 24 1952

represented a desire on the part of progressive educators to ensure that students did not leave school with the ability to recite a series of unconnected “facts”, but unable to form healthy relationships or become properly “adjusted” to life in a democratic society. As the *Winnipeg Tribune* put the issue, “Concentration on the individual rather than the mass, is one of the important policies followed today by modern educationalists.”<sup>5</sup> The Manitoba curriculum was revised in 1950 to reflect the principle of child centered education, laying out three “Basic Principles of Child Growth and Development” in its *General Introduction*: “Each child is a unique individual”, “Each child has his own growth pattern”, and “Wide individual differences exist among children.”<sup>6</sup> These general observations about child nature were designed to remind teachers that their goal in the new era of education was to prepare programs of education that were responsive to each student and did not assume a “one-size-fits-all” approach to instruction. Teachers were now responsible for stimulating interest in their pupils rather than simply teaching material and assuming that students would find motivation to learn from their desire to receive a passing mark. The Manitoba curriculum explicitly instructed teachers that learning could not be expected simply due to necessity, and that true acquisition of knowledge would only occur if students were properly stimulated. The *Primary Arithmetic* curriculum stated: “Skill in teaching is largely a matter of directing the present interests of children and creating other worthwhile interests. Stimulative power has long

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<sup>5</sup>“Personal Attention Present-day trend”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Aug. 9 1952

<sup>6</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1950

been recognized as the trait of a good teacher...The effectiveness with which pupils learn the skills and concepts of arithmetic, and the attitudes towards its values which they develop, depend almost entirely on the teacher's ability to motivate."<sup>7</sup> Educational experts drew upon the notion developed by child psychologists that the fundamental rule of child nature was curiosity. Students were imagined to possess boundless inquisitiveness and energy. Effective teaching was simply the process of directing these "natural" attributes in a constructive direction.

John Dewey criticized the traditional approach to education as ignoring the natural interests of the individual child entirely:

There is a certain accumulation of facts that every child must acquire or else grow up to be illiterate. These facts relate principally to adult life; therefore it is not surprising that the pupil is not interested in them, while it is the duty of the school to see that he knows them nevertheless. How is this to be done? Obviously by seating the children in rows, far enough apart so that they cannot easily talk to each other, and hiring the most efficient person available to teach the facts; to tell them to the child, and have him repeat them often enough so that he can reasonably be expected to remember them, at least until after he is "promoted".<sup>8</sup>

According to Dewey, the intended outcome of such a system was the creation of adult individuals who possessed, "obedience, docility, and submission", and lived in a state of "complete passivity."<sup>9</sup> This well suited children for life in an autocratic society, but left them ill-equipped to participate in their own affairs and take their places as citizens in a democratic society. The problems of a modern society could only be solved if the entire population was educated enough to participate fully in democratic institutions and if this

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<sup>7</sup> *Arithmetic Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1953

<sup>8</sup> John Dewey, *The Schools of Tomorrow* (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1915), 133

<sup>9</sup> Dewey, *The Schools of Tomorrow*, 303

participation was based around a concern for the common welfare and a sense of shared societal goals. Thus, the school had to instruct the child to “work from love of the work itself, not for the reward or because he is afraid of punishment.”<sup>10</sup> Just as the school child learned to love work because he or she could see a clear purpose to it, so too would adult workers avoid alienation from their labor, growing to see the grind of daily work, not as a burden for which they were ill-compensated, but as part of the greater project of creating a prosperous society. Presumably, this sense of purpose and fulfillment through work would lead to citizens electing officials who would find ways to overcome class conflict, poverty and other problems plaguing industrial society.

Dewey conceived of his program for education as nothing less than “a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized.”<sup>11</sup> If learning was to center around the needs of the individual student, then it followed that the role of the teacher was to cater to the intellectual and emotional needs of the student rather than attempt to impose her own agenda upon them. Luckily, according to progressives, the natural interest and curiosity of children made them receptive to this approach. Unfortunately, as anyone who has spent any significant amount of time around very young children will observe first hand, this interest was often self-centered, unfocused and abstract. The job of the teacher then, was to focus this natural interest in more

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, 298

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 51

constructive directions. Thus, teachers of junior and senior high English literature in Manitoba were told that, "the student should be brought to realize that *in studying literature he is studying himself*; then the study will not seem so alien and so remote from his own experience."<sup>12</sup>

William Kilpatrick, a former colleague of Dewey's and the progressive educationist most often cited by the Canadian Teachers Federation as the foremost authority on modern education methods,<sup>13</sup> referred to the theory that the chief purpose of the school was to direct the existing curiosity of the child as the "doctrine of interest". Under a child-centered program, the school's goal was to enhance existing interests and open the door toward the development of new ones. Since each child's interest was inevitably to be different from the next, educational programs had to be flexible and suited to each individual pupil.<sup>14</sup> One Canadian commentator called for the creation of specialized curricula for each student declaring, "it is not democratic to offer identical curricula for all children."<sup>15</sup> Toward this end, the postwar era saw the hiring of more adjustment teachers<sup>16</sup>, who did not teach any specific grade or subject, but instead designed special programs for children who were experiencing difficulties with or

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<sup>12</sup> "Program of Studies: The General Course", *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1948-49, 78

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*, "Subcommittee for Education", Advisory Committee on Coordination of Postwar Planning Files, GR1650 A0064, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

<sup>14</sup> William Heard Kilpatrick, *Philosophy of Education* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1951) 271-282

<sup>15</sup> Royal Bank Newsletter, "The Thousand Paths", *Manitoba School Journal* 8, No. 10 (June 1946) p. 21

<sup>16</sup> The modern-day equivalent would be Resource Teacher

excelling at the normal course work. Although adjustment teachers remained rare in small rural schools, the Winnipeg school district, which could afford such an expense, employed 15 full time and 20 part time adjustment teachers as of 1948, when a "Self-Survey" of Winnipeg schools, conducted by sociologists from the University of Chicago upon request of the school division, recommended that more be employed in order to better meet the goal of turning acknowledgment of individual difference as measured by standardized tests into practical programs for catering to such difference.<sup>17</sup>

Child-centered teaching, however, did not just mean adjusting the academic program to take into account individual interests and aptitudes, it also meant adopting a classroom management style that discouraged authoritarianism and encouraged democracy. Teachers were told to reject the supposedly authoritarian style of teaching that marked earlier eras of education and instead to adopt an approach that was more democratic. In the words of the assistant superintendent of Winnipeg schools, A. D. Thomson, "In a democratic society, it is important that life in the schools be parallel to life outside the school. If there is no democracy in the classroom we cannot assume that children will learn democratic procedure incidentally after school hours. Teachers should be leaders but not tyrants."<sup>18</sup> School inspectors, whose job was to travel to Manitoba's schools and evaluate each teacher's performance twice per year, remarked upon whether

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<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Directed Self Survey - Winnipeg Public Schools* (Chicago: Committee on Field Services, Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1948) Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 136-168

<sup>18</sup> A. D. Thomson, "Signs of Progress", *Education for Better Human Understanding: Forty-Seventh Annual Convention. Manitoba Educational Association*, (Easter 1952) p. 15 Department of Education Publications, Instruction Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

teachers were able to “make a study of a child’s shortcomings with a view of finding a remedy rather than resort too readily to blame or punishment.”<sup>19</sup> Teachers were to adhere to the principle of respect for the individual child by avoiding coercion whenever possible. American progressives of the postwar era argued, in building upon Dewey’s writings, that although coercion was permissible in cases of immediate danger to a child’s well being, in all other situations children were to learn to behave appropriately through the acquisition of proper self-discipline rather than constant external compulsion.<sup>20</sup>

In an era in which corporal punishment of children by teachers was increasingly frowned upon, classroom discipline was to take the form of using the carrot rather than the stick approach. In an article for *Macleans*, popular psychologist William Blatz dealt with the question of discipline both in the home and in the classroom. He argued that the purpose of discipline was not to obtain unquestioning obedience for obedience’s sake but to teach the child the purpose behind obedience in certain situations so that the child would discipline himself, not out of fear but a desire to interact with others in a healthy manner. Blatz used the example of writing, arguing, “a child is taught to write. He learns that he must conform to minimum rules of legibility and spelling if he is to be understood. But having accepted these minimum rules he can write how and what he wishes.”<sup>21</sup> Blatz then applied this approach to human behavior, stating: “the consequences of nonconforming behavior must be made consistent if the child is to learn

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<sup>19</sup> C. J. Muller, “Reports of School Inspectors - Division no. 26”, *Manitoba Annual Report on Education*, 1955-56, 69

<sup>20</sup> Kilpatrick, *Philosophy of Education* 304; Washburne, *What is Progressive Education*, 52-53

<sup>21</sup> William E. Blatz, “Discipline Again”, *Macleans*, Nov. 1946

the benefits to be derived from conforming. He must learn that he is expected to conform, not for the sake of conformity, but for the privileges that he derives from such behavior."<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the desirability of the goal of conformity itself was not questioned by Blatz or other psychologists. It was only the means of creating a group of children and thus future adults who *would* conform to society's dominant values and social norms which was in question. To be normal (ie. to conform) was once again not simply a descriptive term but a prescription for personal success and happiness.

Blatz and others argued that conformity to the rules of the group was to be achieved through the removal of the child from the group, a punishment that was presumably unpleasant enough to remind the child of the advantages of being part of the group in the first place. What was inappropriate was the deliberate causing of harm, either physical or psychological, to the child in order to attain conformity not by consent but simply to avoid further discomfort. Such methods of discipline led to either violent and resentful pupils and citizens who would threaten social order or passive and accepting ones who would unquestioningly follow any strong leader. The result of creating such individuals on a large scale was democracy being replaced by authoritarianism. Blatz claimed that the stakes in the debate over discipline were thus very high, remarking, "history records violent upheavals that have followed upon cumulative resentment of coercion...Conformity brought about through fear is a devastating technique. Fear is inhibiting, and down through the ages it has been used by

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<sup>22</sup> Blatz, "Discipline Again"

authority imposed from above...the total effect in human misery is appalling."<sup>23</sup> Teachers were advised to avoid being authoritarian in their classroom management so as not to provoke a resentful reaction among students who previously had become accustomed to the democratic approach.<sup>24</sup>

Part of being a "democratic" teacher meant ensuring that students were active participants in classroom activities rather than simply passive recipients of knowledge. The phrase, "teaching children - not subjects" was used to argue that the teacher should make sure that students were participating in their own education and perhaps even planning certain elements of it themselves. The Arithmetic curriculum cautioned teachers against the assignment of "busy work", and observed that students would develop dangerously passive attitudes toward schooling if such a practice were to continue.<sup>25</sup> The University of Chicago self-survey chided Manitoba high school teachers for "heavy reliance upon the lecture method...and the individual question-and-answer method", recommending instead "class activity such as group discussions, and problem-solving procedures."<sup>26</sup>

A professor of education from the University of Minnesota observed that "pupils were merely acquiring verbal learning without understanding, and were doing so most reluctantly, regarding it as a form of discipline or punishment imposed upon them by

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<sup>23</sup> Blatz, "Discipline Again"

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Cunningham and George H. Henry, "Classroom Climate", *Manitoba School Journal* 11, No. 5 (Jan. 1950) p. 5

<sup>25</sup> *Arithmetic Grades I-VI*, 5

<sup>26</sup> *Self Survey*, 215

authority.”<sup>27</sup> This professor’s solution to the problem of student passivity was to involve students in discovering their own local history. He pointed teachers to the work of John Dewey who himself had warned about children becoming “passive, receptive or absorbing” and argued that the “active side precedes the passive in the development of child nature.”<sup>28</sup> Manitoba educationists sought to implement active learning by instigating learning experiences that took place outside the classroom and offered students a chance to participate directly in activities not normally found inside the schoolhouse.

Extra-curricular activities were envisaged as an ideal way to implement the participatory side of the program of progressive education and received widespread support among department officials, administrators, teachers and parents during this era. In a 1948 survey sent to 1000 parents of children in Winnipeg schools, 98.2% reported that they approved of school time being used for sports activities, 95.2% for music festivals, 85% for school concerts and 79.9% for solicitation of advertising for school papers or yearbooks. Only 9.6% of parents expressed the view that too much time was devoted to extra-curricular activities and 75.5% felt that their children did enough homework.<sup>29</sup> Oddly enough, within less than a decade opponents of progressive education would be claiming that the vast majority of parents felt their children spent too

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<sup>27</sup> A. C. Krey, “The Place of Local History in Elementary Schools”, *Education for National Unity Manitoba Educational Association Forth-Eighth Annual Convention*, (Easter 1953) Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 11

<sup>28</sup> John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed”, *School Journal* 54 (January 1897), p. 77-80

<sup>29</sup> *Self Survey*, 231

much time engaged in extra-curricular activities and not enough time in study. Education Minister John Dryden encouraged schools to undertake a wide variety of extra-curricular activities which would foster student participation including school concerts, magazines, hobby clubs, and student self-government.<sup>30</sup> School inspectors added to this list of recommended activities enterprises that fostered child-centered learning such as safety patrols, morning assemblies, public debates as well as field trips to locations such as industrial plants, theaters, parks or the Winnipeg Art Gallery.<sup>31</sup>

Such activities were not only billed as experiences which would reinforce book learning with actual experience but also as ways to give students experience in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Student councils in junior and senior high school were particularly thought to be useful tools for fostering democratic attitudes among pupils. Democracy, it was said, could not be learned from a textbook, and only by students experimenting with self-government (over very limited matters such as the staging of school dances) could they learn how to be responsible citizens who would be equipped to participate in the Canadian political system when they came of age.

The concern with preserving democracy in peace after supposedly fighting to preserve it during war caused many school administrators to implement student councils. Teachers were continually urged to run the classroom more like a board meeting or a parliament rather than as a dictatorship. The junior high curriculum encouraged teachers to present their classes with a constitution and hold elections for the offices of president,

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<sup>30</sup> John Dryden, "Minister's Page", *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no. 6 (Feb. 1945), p. 2

<sup>31</sup> M. M. Brooker, "Reports of the School Inspectors", *Manitoba Annual Report on Education, 1951-1952*, 40

vice-president, treasurer, secretary, reporter, usher and monitor.<sup>32</sup> Although this council would hold little real power over most of what went on in the classroom, it would be in charge of peripheral issues such as enforcing the tidiness of the room, welcoming strangers to class and making rules for the class to abide by. Teachers were told that classroom discipline would be better accomplished by letting students decide upon their own rules (within reason) and plan the proper enforcement of them. The *Manitoba Teacher* contained a report from an American school in which students had been holding meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order during which they passed motions such as, "there shall be no loud talking or whistling in the halls", "we will walk one step at a time on the stairs", "we will not push people", and "if we forget any of these things, we will accept correction courteously from either teachers or students."<sup>33</sup> This was promoted to Manitoban teachers as a perfect example of both learning democracy through practice and discipline that fostered voluntary conformity rather than order through fear.

The ubiquitous Samuel Laycock, in an article entitled "Learning to Live", expressed the belief that children needed to participate directly in the running of their lives if they were to be expected to grow up to be psychologically well-adjusted individuals: "youngsters need to have many experiences where they exercise authority. Rural life, where children are given early a sphere of authority of their own -feeding the chickens, gathering the eggs, bringing up the cows from pasture, bringing in the wood etc. usually offers abundant opportunities for the development of the ability to exercise

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<sup>32</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1958, 59

<sup>33</sup> E. F. Miller, "An Elementary School Student Council", *Manitoba Teacher* 30, no. 3 (Nov/Dec 1951) p. 22-24

authority.”<sup>34</sup> Although children raised on a farm might disagree with Laycock’s contention that daily chores allowed the exercise of any significant amount of “authority”, Laycock was not alone in expressing anxiety in regards to how an urbanizing society in which fewer Canadians lived in rural areas could present opportunities for children to engage in participatory learning through the undertaking of vital family economic activities. Laycock stated, “City parents have to find the equivalent. They can do so if they are ingenious about the matter. Betty is responsible for buying and decorating the Christmas tree, Jean is responsible for the table arrangements and decorations for Christmas, Bob is responsible for the Christmas lighting. These are examples of how planning for family recreation can be made an exercise in handling authority and giving leadership.”<sup>35</sup>

Just as the family was supposed to, according to psychologists, become “democratic” during the 1950s, so too was the school to allow for students to take control over organizing their own activities whenever possible. The *Manitoba School Journal* suggested that teachers use questions such as, “what is the best temperature for our room?” as opportunities to study the weather and hold class discussions on where to set the thermostat.<sup>36</sup> Shop teachers were to delegate duties of cleaning and organizing the shop to their students just as a parent gave chores to his or her children in order to foster

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<sup>34</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Learning to Live”, *Macleans*, Feb. 1 1947

<sup>35</sup> Laycock, “Learning to Live”

<sup>36</sup> Author Unknown, “About Social Studies”, *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 1946) p. 10

responsibility.<sup>37</sup>

If the school of the postwar era was to become more like the family, it was also to adopt a key feature of family-life: cooperation rather than competition. Whereas school was once a cutthroat competition pitting students against each other in a contest to gain superior ranks and grades, in the postwar era school was to reduce competition between individual students in favor of fostering a feeling of group harmony and of struggle toward obtaining collective rather than individual goals. American progressive Boyd Bode argued that progressive education was best understood in terms of its rejection of competitive individualism and its embrace of the goal of cooperation. Interestingly, although progressive education promised increased attention and focus on the individual student, it regarded cooperation rather than competition as the most desirable form of human organization.<sup>38</sup>

Progressives expressed an ongoing concern with the possible psychological damage that competition could have upon children. Specifically, they worried that not attaining grades as high as their peers or even failing a grade would cause students to become frustrated and feel stigmatized by their failures. Laycock stated that psychologists across Canada were unhappy with the traditional report card which included a list of letter grades because it “often did damage to the child’s personality development. Report cards have often resulted in a child feeling emotionally insecure

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<sup>37</sup> *Curriculum on General Shop for Junior High Grades of Manitoba*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1947, 5

<sup>38</sup> Boyd H. Bode, *Progressive Education at the Crossroads* (New York: Newson and Company, 1938) 10-11

with his parents. That happens when his parents continue to indicate they are ashamed of him and that he is a disgrace to the family.”<sup>39</sup> This concern with damaging a child’s supposedly fragile self-esteem drove some psychologists and educational authorities to recommend doing away with formal letter grades entirely. When *Macleans* surveyed 33 superintendents from across Canada, 13 replied that they had replaced letter grades with “subjective” reports which consisted of comments made about the individual student’s progress without reference to other students or indeed any arbitrary objective standard.<sup>40</sup> The superintendent of Toronto’s public schools commented that, “expecting all small children to compete on the same basis is like forcing a Clydesdale horse to compete in the jumping ring against a trained jumper.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, because each child was thought to have a different inborn degree of intelligence, the only true measurement of a child’s success was how well he or she achieved to the best of his or her innate ability rather than how children achieved in comparison to each other. Thus grades revealed nothing about “over-achieving” or “under-achieving” and provided a flawed picture of true educational progress.

Progressives also argued that traditional methods of grouping children within graded schools should be re-examined. Carleton Washburne, one time vice-president of the Progressive Education Association in the United States, argued that since “there is a spread of at least four years in the mental levels of children in almost any classroom”, the

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<sup>39</sup> S. R. Laycock, “How to Make Teacher-Parent Conferences Effective”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 30, no. 5 (Mar/Apr 1952) p. 26-28

<sup>40</sup> Robert Fulford, “Who’s Winning the Battle Over Report Cards”, *Macleans*, Feb. 4 1956

<sup>41</sup> J. Z. Phimiser quoted in Fulford, “Who’s Winning the Battle”

traditional practice of expecting all students within the same "grade" to perform the same activities was flawed.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the placement of students into groups should be based much more upon the age and emotional maturity level of the child than their academic performance in comparison to their peers. Without the threat of "failing" a grade hanging over their heads, children would no longer feel "ashamed or disgraced because of not being ready to do more advanced work."<sup>43</sup>

Psychologists shared the belief that it was more important for a child to be surrounded with pupils of the same emotional maturity than with ones capable of the same level of academic work. An article in the *Manitoba School Journal* argued that children should be grouped according to age and maturity because "the child's social and emotional adjustment has much to do with his educational progress. Children who are well-adjusted socially and emotionally tend to show better and more consistent educational development than maladjusted children." Therefore, the author concluded, "repetition of grade has no special educational value for children. We used to think that repeating a grade would strengthen a child...this supposition has been shown to be false."<sup>44</sup>

Despite all of this rhetoric, most Manitoba schools did not abolish either formal grades or division of children according to academic achievement for the simple reason that outside of Winnipeg or Brandon few schools had enrollments high enough to become

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<sup>42</sup> Washburne, *What is Progressive Education*, 88

<sup>43</sup> Washburne, *What is Progressive Education*, 89

<sup>44</sup> Henry J. Otto, "Findings in Child Psychology Should Affect Grading a Promotion Policies", *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 1(Sep. 1951) p. 23

“graded schools” in the first place. Many of them were one room schoolhouses in which one teacher taught pupils who ranged from grades 1 to 8 and in age from 6 to 14 or higher. In larger centers, however, some division of children according to the results of aptitude testing, rather than completion of formal grades did occur. In Brandon all children were given the Binet-Simon IQ test upon their entry into the school system in order to judge their progress not against other students or the objective standards for each grade set by the department of education, but against their own supposed potential.<sup>45</sup> Manitoba School Superintendent C. K. Rogers supported this process: “success, after all, should not be measured in comparison with that of others, rather it should be measured by the degree to which he achieves the maximum of his own capabilities.”<sup>46</sup> Students were also required to complete IQ tests upon completion of grade 9 in order to aid with course selection and grouping of classes in high school, although the Directed Self-Survey critically reported that “grade placement and allocation to courses are still most often made by the principal on the basis of achievement alone”<sup>47</sup> rather than upon the basis of innate ability as allegedly indicated by IQ. Achievement merely demonstrated how well the student performed compared to others, a piece of knowledge that was of little importance in a non-competitive school system. Students with very high IQ, under a competitive system, could be wasting their talents by “underachieving” but still excelling in relation to their peers. Similarly, students whose potential was thought to be very

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<sup>45</sup> *Annual Report*, 1944-1945, p. 80

<sup>46</sup> C. K. Rogers, “Superintendent’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no. 10 (June 1945) p. 4

<sup>47</sup> *Self-Survey*, 264-266

limited could be made to feel inferior for not successfully completing grades when IQ tests showed them to be incapable of any high degree of learning in the first place.

For progressives, the reason for making school non-competitive was quite simple; schooling should mimic life as closely as possible. If school was to prepare young people for a postwar world governed by the cooperation of the new liberalism rather than the competitive individualism of *laissez-faire*, then school itself could no longer be a world apart from the “real life” that students were to supposedly enter once they had completed formal schooling. The entire purpose of the program of progressive education was to make public education into “education for life”; a program of practical instruction which eschewed purely academic knowledge and instead sought to relate all learning to the conditions of life which children would face once they left the school. Manitoba educationists sought to make the curriculum reflect the goal of teaching through experience and “hands-on” exploration of the world. Lecture and rote learning were no longer approved methods of instruction, not simply because, as previously mentioned, they were regarded as undemocratic and teacher rather than child-centered, but also because they were believed to inadequately prepare young people to apply knowledge directly to their future life experiences.

John Dewey frequently expressed his support for “learning by doing” with the phrase, “the only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life.”<sup>48</sup> To do otherwise, according to Dewey, was the equivalent of attempting to teach a child to swim

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<sup>48</sup> John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1959), 14

by “going through the motions outside of water.”<sup>49</sup> Not only would such a line of instruction fail to produce a person who could swim, but the child would not even learn to properly mimic the movements of a swimmer because his or her interest would not be sufficiently stimulated to arouse acquisition of knowledge of swimming movements.

Progressives argued that to learn in traditional schools was merely to memorize information for the sake of repetition of that same information at the proper time, ie. during an examination. Progressive education, on the other hand, would not fail to teach “facts” but, since, in the words of Washburne, “facts...only have meaning as they are related to life”, the acquisition of these facts would be in the context of their meaning and importance.<sup>50</sup> Students would not only learn the facts, but would learn why they were learning such facts in the first place. This method would ensure long-term retention of information because, according the introduction to the Manitoba curriculum: “Psychologists have found...that people do not...retain what they have learned” when rote learning techniques are used. Instead, “the learner goes over what he is given to learn in a way that is largely mechanical, and makes no active effort to understand it. After much effort the pupil may learn, but he is likely to learn without much understanding and to forget quickly.”<sup>51</sup> Only through the progressive technique of relating knowledge to life could there be any guarantee that information would be retained in the long term.

A major goal of the revised curriculum, therefore, was to find ways to get students

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<sup>49</sup> Dewey, *Moral Principles*, 14

<sup>50</sup> Washburne, *What is Progressive Education*, 148

<sup>51</sup> *General Introduction to the Curriculum for the Junior High Grades of Manitoba Schools*, Department of Education, Government of Manitoba, 1958, 21

to become interested in what they were supposed to learn. The curriculum laid out a rather bleak picture of life in grades six to twelve: "Junior and Senior High School pupils will almost invariably tell you that they see no real value in many of their subjects of study. In order to get them to work, they are frequently told that if they do not, they will not be allowed to go out for recess, to advance to the next grade, or to do something else that they wish to do. Impelled by such threats, they go unwillingly to work."<sup>52</sup> Decades earlier, Dewey had expressed the same sentiment in writing: "from the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself...That is the isolation of the school - its isolation from life."<sup>53</sup> Whether they acknowledged the intellectual debt or not, the creators of Manitoba's post war curriculum were echoing Dewey's ideas regarding education almost word for word.

What, then, was to be done with the group of bored, isolated and frustrated young adults who supposedly inhabited public schools? According to the Manitoba curriculum, students had to develop some "strong purpose" for their studies such as had been present during the war when "Men who were reported by teachers as being unable to learn mathematics or indeed any school found that mathematics was necessary to guide the flight of their planes...Impelled by a motive, they learned what formerly they could not learn."<sup>54</sup> Just as Keynesian proponents of government intervention in economic affairs

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<sup>52</sup> *Junior High Grades*, 21

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, *School and Society*, 89

<sup>54</sup> *Junior High Grades*, 21

argued for an extension of what worked to win wars to peacetime, so too did educational authorities. Obviously, the exact sort of motivations felt by soldiers to learn during wartime were neither possible nor desirable in peacetime. However, by demonstrating the practicality of the curriculum to students' future happiness and success, teachers could presumably motivate students to genuine learning just as the military had. Teachers were to adhere to the principle of child-centered learning, having been told that, "what has meaning for one pupil may not have meaning for another. It is necessary for the teacher to know his pupils well enough to be able to judge quite accurately the kinds of experience that can have meaning."<sup>55</sup>

Even the most skilled educator, however, was bound to have difficulty relating every single piece of content that had to be learned over the course of a year to the lives, current or future, of her students. If the teacher found herself unable to simulate the interest of pupils despite her best efforts then what was she to do? What would happen to the elements of the curriculum, for example Latin or calculus, that remained almost entirely academic and would not relate to the lives of most students in any direct or practical sense? These subjects were part of the Manitoba high school program, yet would only be of use to a student planning to enter a very specific career later in life. Advocates of progressive education favored eliminating parts of the curriculum which were deemed anachronistic remnants of a school system designed to appeal to an elite who sought a strictly scholarly body of knowledge.

The new school, according to Sidney Katz of *Macleans*, had adopted the

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<sup>55</sup> *Self Survey*, 133

philosophy that the goal of education was to make “not a scholar but a man”, acting under Dewey’s motto, “School is Life.”<sup>56</sup> In this new type of education, “everything had to make sense to the child and be related to his life and experience.”<sup>57</sup> Anything that did not, by implication, had to be abandoned. The writers of a Canadian history textbook employed by the province of Manitoba for the primary grades and intended for readers between the ages of eleven to twelve exemplified this philosophy when stating in their preface:

the authors of this book...have not attempted to write a formal history. They have...endeavored to present in story form those episodes of Canadian history that are of vital interest to children...No attempt has been made to sketch, except in the briefest manner, great constitutional changes or political struggles. Personalities and human and dramatic incidents have been given first place. No fixed body of information, which it is the teacher’s duty to impart and the pupil’s task to assimilate, has been suggested.<sup>58</sup>

This statement represents an example of the most “extreme” form of progressivism that would be attacked so mercilessly by traditionalist critics such as Hilda Neatby. If students did not enjoy something it simply would not be taught. History, according to the authors of the text, including well-known Canadian progressive Donald Dickie was intended first to excite and interest and secondly to provide a comprehensive chronicle of events and causes. Selection of relevant information, a vitally important task to the construction of a history textbook, was to be done on the basis of what was “exciting” rather than what formed a coherent chronology or allowed students to understand the

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<sup>56</sup> Sidney Katz, “The Row over the 3 R’s”, *Macleans*, March 15 1953

<sup>57</sup> Katz, “Row over the 3 R’s”

<sup>58</sup> D. J. Dickie and Helen Palk, *Pages From Canada’s Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: J. M Dent and Sons, 1951), 1

process of historical change.

The best way to make school subjects interesting to children, according to Manitoba educational authorities, was to relate lessons to the everyday experiences of childhood. The primary social studies curriculum explicitly instructed teachers that the work done in the classroom "should be very closely related to the child's experiences at home and school."<sup>59</sup> The social studies curriculum of the 1950s called for the organization of the school year into a series of "thematic units" in which study of a theme would result in the acquisition of knowledge and development of certain skills in a wide variety of areas. The themes selected for the primary grades were: Pets and Toys; The Home; The School; The Farm; Community Helpers; and Travel.<sup>60</sup> These themes were in keeping with the progressive philosophy of working from the pre-existing experience of children and then attempting to expand their knowledge base as the horizons of their own world grew.

If very young children were expected at the end of the year to have learnt the names and some basic characteristics of plants and animals, for example, then this goal would be accomplished through a method of instruction that began by asking children to name their favorite animals or bring specimens to class in order to relate the necessary facts to the experience of independently discovering nature outside of school. Thus, the University of Chicago's self-survey made careful note of the fact that half of the teachers in Winnipeg regularly brought flowers and insects into the classroom for the purpose of

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<sup>59</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 23

<sup>60</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 23

study and 80% encouraged pupils to do the same. Half were said to take their classes outdoors and half to take trips to museums for the same reason.<sup>61</sup> These hands-on demonstrations and field trips as well as the use of film strips were all intended to prevent what the department referred to as: "sheer verbalism - memorization without understanding."<sup>62</sup> The self-survey contended that Winnipeg teachers still had great room to improve in the area of relating the curriculum to real life. Most teachers surveyed did not make use of community resources such as guest speakers or trips to businesses or government institutions, resulting in the survey's report concluding: "Except in the guidance programs of Grades VII, VIII and IX, and in portions of the social-studies program, the curriculum is apparently not designed to promote an understanding of the contemporary world" and "is suspected of being academic and unrelated to life."<sup>63</sup> More trips to the park and collections of living specimens were in order.

For some subjects, providing a hands-on experience for pupils was simply a matter of effort and utilizing existing resources. For subjects such as mathematics and the sciences (other than natural science), however, creating an environment of hands-on learning was significantly more difficult. Practical experience with physics and chemistry often required the use of laboratory equipment which was not only dangerous for younger children but prohibitively expensive for smaller, usually rural, schools. For math the task was even more difficult. A teacher could bring leaves and small animals into the

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<sup>61</sup> *Self-Survey*, 152

<sup>62</sup> *Arithmetic Grades I-VI*, 8

<sup>63</sup> *Self-Survey*, 106-108

classroom for lessons about nature, but how could arithmetic be taught in a hands-on way which related directly to a child's everyday experience? The solution for the makers of the Manitoba curriculum was to switch from a method of teaching arithmetic that relied upon drill and memorization to one that instead utilized problems and the use of arithmetic to provide answers to questions grounded in real experience. The arithmetic curriculum stated that under the old system, "the child is expected to memorize facts and processes that are meaningless to him. Children frequently find themselves in a wilderness of symbols and meaningless names."<sup>64</sup> The solution to this problem was to switch from chanting or singing "four plus four makes eight", to attempting to discover the answers to such problems as how many candies little Johnny would have if he had four and his friend gave him four more.

The problem-based approach to learning was touted as the mark of a progressive teacher in an article which appeared *Macleans*. The profile of Jen Day, a grade one teacher, congratulated her on having her students use beads on a wire and rulers without numbers to figure out their sums rather than "reciting figures from memory as was the custom twenty years ago."<sup>65</sup> Science teachers were also expected to employ the "problem method" of teaching through the use of experiments and relation of factual material to daily life. Margaret Nix, Manitoba's director of health and welfare education, cautioned that health education, which was new to the curriculum of the postwar era, was not a

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<sup>64</sup> *Arithmetic Grades I-VI*, 8

<sup>65</sup> Robert Collins, "How a Progressive Teacher Works", *Macleans*, Sep. 17 1955

separate subject unto itself because: "we no longer teach subjects - we teach children."<sup>66</sup>

Thus health education was said to be more than just instruction in human anatomy and physiology because "knowledge of the construction and of the various parts of the body does not lead to healthful practices any more than knowledge of the laws of one's country naturally results in good citizenship."<sup>67</sup> Thus health education consisted of daily application of knowledge of human physiology to real world situations. Nix suggested that teachers use events in their community, such as accidents, epidemics, a new hospital being constructed, or even daily rituals of sanitation as ways to introduce health education into the classroom.

Many commentators, however, were unimpressed with the Manitoba education system's commitment to the problem method of instruction. The Self-Survey of Winnipeg schools claimed that 95% of questions in high school examinations tested the students' knowledge of "information alone" rather than their ability to solve problem-based questions.<sup>68</sup> A science teacher at St. John's high school in Winnipeg complained that the chemistry course was "planned as if it were to be the initial training of a person dedicated to Chemistry" rather than "the relating of theoretical chemistry to his well-being and his community organization."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the principal of Swan River Collegiate argued that alterations to the science curriculum were needed in order to

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<sup>66</sup> Margaret Nix, "Make it Live", *Manitoba School Journal* 10, no. 1 (Sep. 1948) p. 8

<sup>67</sup> Nix, "Make it Live", 8

<sup>68</sup> *Self-Survey*, 217

<sup>69</sup> Frank Harder, "Some Criticisms of the Chemistry Course", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 8 (Apr. 1947) p. 21

change the aim of high school science education from creating a few exceptional scientists to “the development in pupils of a scientific attitude.”<sup>70</sup> This was to be accomplished by abandoning the teaching and testing of facts learned through rote memorization and replacing it with the conducting of experiments that allowed one to discover the facts on one’s own.

Students in subjects outside of science were also expected to follow the same method of learning by experimentation and investigation. Progressive educators had long been promoting what was referred to as the “enterprise” or “project method” of teaching.<sup>71</sup> In Canada, the inter-war period represented the beginning of the enterprise system becoming formally accepted and adopted.<sup>72</sup> Under this system, which gained even more popularity after the war<sup>73</sup>, social studies and English language arts were supposed to be organized around the study of a series of central themes. A thematic unit on nature, for example, could be used to learn about the importance of conservation (geography), the history of the conservation movement (history), and to read and write stories about the beauty and importance of nature. One example of a school project approach to learning

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<sup>70</sup> H. H. Guest, “Objectives and Examinations in Science”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 8 (Apr. 1946) p. 6

<sup>71</sup> Washburne attributes the popularization of the term “project method” as well as the system itself to Kilpatrick. Donalda Dickie was this method’s most enthusiastic preacher in Canada and the adoption of what was termed the “Enterprise” method in Western Canada was largely due to the theoretical framework laid down by individuals such as herself.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 166-167

<sup>73</sup> The Canadian Teachers Federation included the enterprise method by name in their list of recommendations for reforms to Canadian public schooling after the war, contrasting its “democratic” nature to the “authoritarian” methods of the past. See: Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*, “Subcommittee for Education”, Advisory Committee on Coordination of Postwar Planning Files, GR1650 A0064, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

undertaken by a Manitoba teacher was a school beautification day. Students were organized into committees in order to decide what to do to make their school and school grounds more aesthetically pleasing, thus employing participatory, cooperative and child-centered learning. They then held a fund-raising carnival and used the proceeds to construct new curtains. This entire project not only provided a lesson in cooperation but required the skills of measurement and arithmetic as well as teaching the practical skill of sewing.<sup>74</sup>

Thematic units and class projects allowed for another aspect of participatory education that progressive educators held in high regard: interdisciplinary studies. The division of school into isolated subject areas was thought to be contradictory to the principle of making education practical, since real life provided no such clear divisions between branches of knowledge but called for good citizens to use knowledge in a variety of intellectual fields simultaneously. Just as some teachers feared that school was geared too much toward the production of scientists rather than citizens with some knowledge of scientific principles, others felt that it was geared toward producing pupils who failed to see the connection between what they had learned in separate classes. The American Ford Foundation, complained, "we are perhaps turning out too many graduate specialists who lack a sense of our society as a whole."<sup>75</sup> The University of Chicago education professors who produced the report on the Winnipeg self-survey reserved some of their harshest criticism of the school system for its lack of integration stating: "the typical

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<sup>74</sup> Ella Solberg, "School Beautification plus Learning", *Manitoba School Journal* 12, no. 7 (March 1951) p. 22

<sup>75</sup> Ford Foundation, "Advice to Educationists", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Sep. 30 1950

school curriculum is not well integrated. This is true in Winnipeg and it is true in schools generally. What relationships there are between the learning experiences of one field and those of another are largely accidental."<sup>76</sup> For some, the creation of social studies, to replace history and geography, was itself a partial solution to this problem of lack of integration. In the words of a University of Toronto professor of education, "Modern education introduced social studies when it became obvious that schools must do more to help young people understand the world. War and depression had raised critical issues for citizens and voters. The old courses in history and geography threw no immediate light on these issues because they were designed to make historians and geographers out of the few who continued such studies at a higher level. Social studies were designed to help all citizens."<sup>77</sup> Social studies sprang directly from the postwar concern for creating education that fostered democracy. If history and geography could not be related to each other and used to allow the individual child to understand the world and his or her place within it then what use were they in achieving this overall educational goal of fostering democracy?

Not only were schools accused of gearing themselves to the production of specialists in certain areas rather than citizens with a broad background of general education, but were also told they were focusing too heavily upon learning that would have no relevance in most of a student's life. Progressive education theorists argued that only a fraction of children would grow up to have a job requiring them to make use of

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<sup>76</sup> *Self-Survey*, 137

<sup>77</sup> Charles Phillips, "No - We are Educating for life", *Chatelaine*. Oct. 1952

complex mathematics, science or even grammar on a daily basis. All, however, would, on a daily basis, have to make decisions regarding their own physical and mental health, leisure time activities, and use of citizenship rights. Thus, should school not move beyond simply academic instruction and in fact teach children the "art of living" itself? For the creators of Manitoba's post-war curriculum the answer was a definite "yes". Therefore, new subjects were added to the school program, including health education and counseling. In addition existing subjects such as physical education, and industrial arts or home economics were given new emphasis. The emphasis on "life-education" school subjects was reflected in the time breakdown of a day in the primary grades (1-6) provided to Manitoba teachers. English language arts still occupied the largest single bloc of time, 120 minutes, but arithmetic was reduced in importance and given "not more than 40 minutes", whereas social studies, including nature study, was to take 60-70, music and art 30-40 and health education, "A minimum of 20 minutes."<sup>78</sup> In junior high, even more time was assigned to the "non core" subjects. Language arts were to take up 25% of the day, "The arts", including literature, music, home economics and shops were to be 20%. The rest of the subjects were given time as follows: physical education 10%, health and guidance 5%, mathematics 10%, science 10%, and social studies 12.5%.<sup>79</sup>

Health education in particular was considered a vitally important part of the day and conceived, not as a course in human anatomy or physiology, but in "the development

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<sup>78</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 14 Teachers were expected to adhere to this division of time, although the order of subjects was left to their discretion. Twice-yearly visits from the school inspector would allow the department to confirm that each individual teacher was following the recommended division of time sufficiently.

<sup>79</sup> *Junior High Grades*, 4

of a programme that encompasses all aspects of the life of the school.”<sup>80</sup> In practical terms this meant not only the inclusion of both “alcohol education” and sex education in the older grades but inclusion in the primary grades of instruction in daily habits of health such as the correct use of toilet and washing facilities, regular visits by public health nurses and regular inspections by teachers of their pupils’ health. Teachers were instructed to conduct an annual health examination of their charges, during which they would take a record of their height and weight, vision, hearing and posture as well as a “daily morning inspection” which would include observations of the health of their eyes, ears, skin, throat, teeth, hair and “muscular development.”<sup>81</sup> The teacher was now to inhabit the role of nurse as much as that of academic instructor. This new role was appropriate if schools were no longer aiming to turn out “the bookworm who neglects his physical needs” but instead trying to manufacture the “whole child” with “not only the mental capacity to earn a living but also the physical stamina to support a relatively long life of service.”<sup>82</sup> Physical education as a vital part of the program of school was predicated on the notion that students sitting in desks reading and writing all day would create an unhealthy generation with poor posture, and without the proper physical well-being to achieve either physical or intellectual goals in adult life.

Postwar education in Manitoba undeniably was intended to reflect the principles of progressive education even after that term became a dirty word in the late 1950s. As

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<sup>80</sup> Nix, “Make it Live”

<sup>81</sup> *Health Education and Nature Study I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1946, 11-12

<sup>82</sup> Manitoba, *Physical Education and Recreation in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Education, 1958), Department of Education Publications, Instructional Resources Unit Library, Winnipeg, 21

the creation of social studies demonstrated, education was to be multi-disciplinary and directly related to the conditions of life. Education minister C. Rhodes Smith, in introducing the changes to the curriculum which occurred for the 1949-1950 school year asked, "in what way is the new program better than the old?" The response was, in a single word, "relevancy."<sup>83</sup> Making the curriculum relevant to the lives of children was part of the project of making the school experience "child-centered", a process which also included the elimination of authoritarian practices within the classroom and their replacement with increased "hands-on" participation by class members. But progressive education meant more than simply changing the pedagogy of teachers. For progressive educators, the very idea of the purpose of school had changed. For them the *raison d'être* of the public education system was not to create specialists in certain academic areas, nor indeed to provide a rigorous academic program for those intending to pursue higher learning. Instead, the goal of the progressive education system was, in the words of the curriculum itself, to induce "the changing of behavior. Accordingly, learning may be intellectual, as in learning to solve an arithmetical problem; physical as in learning to walk or run; emotional as in learning to control outbursts of temper; or social, as in learning how to live co-operatively with others."<sup>84</sup> This overt statement that learning was essentially the creation of hegemony through altering human behavior (and the attitudes that underlie it) pointed towards an ideological agenda at the heart of the progressive education movement that will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>83</sup> C. Rhodes Smith, "The Minister's Page", *Manitoba School Journal* 11, no. 3 (1949) p. 2

<sup>84</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*. 1950

### Chapter 3: Education for Democratic Citizenship: The Postwar Curriculum in Practice

The men and women who influenced Manitoba's postwar public education system justified their adoption of progressive methods of education in terms of scientific progress. Progressive education, according to them, represented the adaptation of scientific knowledge, principally in the area of child psychology, to the real-life situation of the classroom. It carried no political agenda but was simply the most effective method for getting children to learn what was required of them by society. Only the most whiggish of historians, however, would agree with this interpretation of why progressive education became the dominant intellectual current among Manitoba's educational authorities immediately after the Second World War. Historians of education have generally argued that pedagogy is reflective of ideology. In other words, the method that one employs in order to foster learning is dependent upon which values and behaviors one hopes to instill in one's educational subjects through the use of a compulsory state education system.

Alison Prentice argues in *The School Promoters* that what in the 1950s would come to be referred to as the "traditional" method of education: rote learning, strict discipline and a focus on the "core" subjects of "reading, writing and arithmetic", was employed by the first public schools in mid-19th century Upper Canada because the individuals behind the creation of public education sought to create a generation of young people who would be accustomed to an industrialized world.<sup>1</sup> Such a world would be

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1977)

characterized by the division between public and private in both time and space, the division of labor, and strict discipline and regimentation in one's work experience. In fact, according to Bruce Curtis, the actual content of daily lessons was secondary to the "hidden curriculum."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the real "lesson" that children were to learn in the public school was how to sit in their desks the entire day, engage in repetitive tasks of someone else's choosing and be quiet. Public schooling was regarded as a success by its creators, not because it facilitated a great degree of literacy among the general population but because it reinforced notions of industrial work-time discipline and obedience to the state.

In postwar Manitoba, the utilization of one pedagogical method over another also stemmed from a broad ideological project on the part of educationists. In this case, progressive education was intended to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and habits that would allow children to succeed in a radically new social and economic consensus. In the minds of progressive educators, the upheaval of the Great Depression and World War II represented the failure of the western world to construct harmonious liberal-democratic societies. A repetition of this failure could only be avoided by constructing a radically different new consensus in the realm of economics and politics. Labor and capital would be brought together under the rubric of industrial legality, both accepting that mass consumerism would produce a level of economic growth that would result in higher profits and a bigger share of the economic "pie" for workers. Radical social reform would be excluded from the political conversation in return for a higher level of

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Curtis, *Making the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London, ON: Althouse, 1988)

material prosperity and social security for the majority of working-class Canadians.

This post-war consensus could only be preserved through the education of a new generation of citizens who would vigilantly work to defend it. The creation of such a generation was the task of the schools. Thus, the terms “citizenship” and “democracy” were euphemisms for the preservation of the postwar consensus in general. Progressive reformers who explained that the new education system meant “education for democracy” defined democracy as successful participation in a “new liberalism” political culture. In the words of Education Minister W. C. Miller:

The strength of democracy depends upon the level of literacy of the people and the extent to which certain attitudes and habits prevail in their daily activities. The citizens must be well- informed and they must be trained in the ways of democratic living. Literacy, as history clearly records, though essential for democracy, is not of itself a guarantee of it...In addition to broad literacy, therefore, deliberate training in the democratic way of life is also essential.<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian Teachers Federation Committee on Reconstruction agreed, stating in 1943 that “Events of the past few years have brought home to us the simple truth that the democratic way of life must not only survive but...people must be trained for citizenship in the democratic state; they must be conscious of living the democratic life.”<sup>4</sup> What was meant by “certain attitudes and habits” and the “democratic way of life” was never directly laid out in statements such as these. It becomes abundantly clear if one examines curriculum materials, textbooks and instruction given to teachers that “the democratic life” in the context of progressive education in the postwar era was a life governed by the

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<sup>3</sup> W. C. Miller in Manitoba, *A Manual of Civics and Citizenship for Schools* (Winnipeg: Department of Education, 1956) Department of Education Publications, Instructional Resources Unit Library, Winnipeg, 2

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Paris, “Looking in on the CTF Conference”, *Manitoba Teacher* 22, no. 2 (Sept-Oct 1943) p. 5-7

new liberalism, mass consumerism and the nuclear family.

Many progressives did not see their agenda as expressly political. They talked not of creating hegemony but of ushering in a utopian future in which “we shall learn to supersede politics by education”, thus solving the great questions of the day without political debate and potentially destructive conflict, but instead with consensus on the basis of a hegemonic set of values and beliefs held by everyone who attained a public education.<sup>5</sup> The necessity for creating a new program of education centered around citizenship and democracy was described in positive as well as alarmist tones. Education for democracy was the route to a utopian future. It was also the only way to avoid the calamities of war and totalitarianism. Both the past war and the coming cold war convinced educators that democracy rested upon very shaky foundations and since democracy was learned rather than innate, if the school system failed in its quest, the underpinnings of the post-war consensus would be lost. The member of parliament for Dauphin told the House of Commons in 1946, “that the people of the world were sitting on a powder keg, and that...only through education could the people of the world solve their problems. But if they allowed new forms of power to control them then the future of the world was very bleak.”<sup>6</sup> In order for the next generation to navigate a changed world, education too had to be changed.

Children in postwar schools were, in addition to being given the academic and social skills required to live within the postwar compromise, to be taught to perceive the

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<sup>5</sup> Paris, “Looking in on the CTF Conference”, 5-7

<sup>6</sup> Reginald Hardy in, “M. P. Sees Education as World’s Salvation”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 2 1946

fundamental ideological principals of this new type of Canadian society, not as a part of a radical new departure in the history of North American political discourse, but as universal and timeless “natural” truths. By accepting the tenets of postwar compromise, the next generation could be expected to fight to preserve them in the face of challenges from the right and the left. Both those groups who wished to return to a Canada more closely resembling that of the pre-war era, marked by policies of *laissez-faire*, and those who advocated a radical vision of social reform, would be regarded as fringe movements, outside of the acceptable political discourse of the postwar compromise. In the words of Gleason, “the goal (of postwar education) was to produce children who voluntarily reproduced the social status quo.”<sup>7</sup>

The Progressive method of education itself, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was intended to reinforce certain behaviors and attitudes among students. The methods discussed in the previous chapter, such as democratic rather than authoritarian teaching and cooperation rather than competition among children, were all regarded by progressive educationists as leading to the creation of adults well-equipped for the postwar compromise. Simply changing the method by which the information of the curriculum would be imparted into young minds was not enough, however, to carry out the ideological goals of those in the “progressive” camp. The content of school courses itself had to be changed in order to allow students to succeed in and defend the postwar compromise. To this end, virtually every curriculum and program of studies for Manitoba schools was updated in the late

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<sup>7</sup> Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 98

1940s or early 1950s with most of these updates consisting of fairly substantial changes. The high school program in particular barely resembled its prewar predecessor. The elementary and junior high curricula were also overhauled, however, albeit with much less fanfare and controversy than for the high school grades.

Rather than evaluating each subject area and grade individually, I will discuss several main ideological themes that ran throughout the content of the entire postwar public school program and were fundamental to the political project of the progressives. The new curriculum of the postwar era was marked by the themes of consumerism, conformity to proper gender roles, corporatism, psychological adjustment as a solution to problems, and a new Canadian nationalism. These themes, in their totality, represented an attempt to create a new cultural hegemony within Canadian society by inculcating young people with certain fundamental beliefs about the world around them and their place within it once they became adults.

Mass consumerism was central to the project of postwar reconstruction. In return for workers attaining collective bargaining rights came a tacit promise that the increased wages obtained by working class families would be used to purchase a wide variety of new consumer goods, from televisions and appliances to cars and suburban houses. Business, in return for settling for a "smaller piece of the pie" due to its paying higher wages and benefits, was promised that the pie itself would grow considerably due to consumer spending. As one American New Deal economist didactically stated, "A thinner slice from a bigger pie still means more pie."<sup>8</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, in describing

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<sup>8</sup> Chester Bowles, quoted in Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers Republic* (New York: Knopf, 2003)

postwar America as *A Consumers' Republic* argues that a broad spectrum of interested groups within American society, from "Strident anti-New Deal big businessmen" to "moderate and liberal capitalists" to organized labor and the left, supported the concept of mass consumerism as the route to prosperity in the postwar era.<sup>9</sup> For big business, the conversion from military production to production of goods for private consumption could only be successful if the glut of new products appearing on the market were affordable to a large strata of the population. Without the ability of workers to consume the very products they produced, the Canadian, and world, economies could easily return to the crisis of overproduction that caused the Great Depression of the 1930s. Thus, many business leaders were willing to allow a higher rate of wages and job security for workers so long as those workers used their higher standard of living to engage in consumerism.

As Canadian labor historians such as Craig Heron have pointed out, behind the right to collective bargaining which Canadian workers attained in this era lay a promise from labor that unions would hereafter limit their demands to the narrower areas of wages, benefits and hours, permanently eschewing the idea of control over the workplace itself.<sup>10</sup> In the words of Peter McNinnis, "In return for the promise of unprecedented wealth and stability, workers were counseled by management and the state, as well as by their union and political leaders, to consider only their pay cheques - and what they could purchase...Contentious issues of workplace control or class solidarity were shunted aside

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*

<sup>10</sup> Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1989)

in the rush to consumerism.”<sup>11</sup> Subjective identity was key to the preservation of this bargain in the long term. Canadians had to see themselves primarily as consumers rather than workers. Class identity was to be overcome through the idea of a “Consumers Republic”, or in Canada’s case perhaps, a Consumers Constitutional Monarchy. The shift of personal identity from production to consumption can be seen in the writings of leaders of the Manitoba Teachers Society. Their decision to treat MTS as a professional organization rather than a union and press for the attainment of professional status demonstrated the commitment of MTS to the idea of a consumption-based society.

Teachers were told that one of the goals of MTS’ quest for professionalism was to secure wages high enough to ensure that a teacher “should be able to meet the *normal expectations of adult life* , ownership of a home and maintenance of a family. In addition, there should be money for personal growth...travel, study, reading, drama, music and other phases of a broad cultural experience.”<sup>12</sup> The normal expectations of an adult life, according to MTS president Hilda Kinney, consisted of a standard of living which few members of the working class and fewer teachers, who had been some of the lowest paid white-collar workers throughout Canadian history, had been able to attain before the Second World War. Teachers, like other Canadian workers, were told that they could now expect as a matter of course a degree of material prosperity that had previously been reserved for a select few in return for their continued participation in consumerism and limitation, perhaps elimination, of their identity as workers.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 191

<sup>12</sup> Hilda Kinney, “The President’s Page”, *Manitoba Teacher* 26, no. 1 (May/June 1947) p. 4-6

Of course, the New liberalism consensus was an ideal rather than a reality and existed as much in the minds of the economists, industrialists, labor leaders and politicians who supported it as it did on the streets of Canadian cities and towns. Many business leaders remained firmly committed to policies of union-busting and laissez-faire economics, while more radical labor leaders called for radical social reform rather than compromise with business. Furthermore, as many Canadian historians have demonstrated, while hundreds of thousands of Canadians experienced upward mobility and began to live the “suburban dream”, many did not. The prosperity of the post-war era was unevenly distributed and gender and ethnicity acted as powerful barriers to upward mobility.

Although the suburban, consumerist lifestyle became portrayed as the dominant way of life in the mass media of the 1950s, it remained unattainable or undesirable for many Canadians. It was in fact this very weakness of the lifestyle of mass consumption that made those who championed it attempt to portray it as natural and timeless. Supporters of the postwar compromise in the public education system modified the curriculum in order to turn young Canadians into committed consumers at an early age. In the schools of postwar Manitoba, teaching children how (and why) to consume took place alongside teaching them to read and write. Furthermore, if children were to grow up as supporters of the new liberalism, they would have to come to believe that their personal happiness and fulfilment came not so much from the work they performed as it did from the consumption of goods and leisure that work enabled. The meaning of work and indeed the meaning of life were explained to the schoolchildren of the postwar era in

sharply materialistic and consumeristic terms.

Cohen argues that the idea of the citizen-consumer lay at the heart of the ideal of the consumers' republic.<sup>13</sup> Manitoba schools also promoted the notion that being a good citizen meant being a good consumer. Citizenship education, from grades one to twelve, was concerned with the idea of creating citizens who would respect each other's consumer goods and desire their own. For grades I and II, teachers were told to teach children to "have a place for their toys, to take out only the toys they need at a particular time, and to put away all toys when they are no longer needed. They should also be encouraged to take pride in having a neat toy corner or cupboard."<sup>14</sup> In other words, children were to learn that possessions were to be treasured and treated with respect whether they were one's own or someone else's because, according to the makers of the curriculum, "the training of the child to respect property...is one of the most important aspects of education for democratic citizenship."<sup>15</sup>

The curriculum made it explicit as to why teaching children to regard private property as sacred was considered so paramount to citizenship education: "the student who has learned by practice the necessity of obeying rules, of giving service, of playing the roles of leader and follower and of conserving school property will be ready to learn how to act in similar ways as a citizen of the community."<sup>16</sup> Teaching students to take

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<sup>13</sup> Cohen, *Consumers Republic*

<sup>14</sup> *Manual of Civics and Citizenship*, 21

<sup>15</sup> *Manual of Civics and Citizenship*, 20

<sup>16</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1958, 66

good care of desks, blackboards and windows, therefore, was described as requiring “constant attention.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, teaching democracy and teaching consumerism were fundamentally the same task. Learning at an early age to give value and meaning to one’s personal accumulation of goods was vital to developing subjectivities that would encourage proper economic and political behavior. Thus, not only did students have to get into the habit of respecting the sacredness of property but also seeing the care of property as key to their own enjoyment of life. The Grades I-VI social studies curriculum laid out a number of goals of the unit on “the home”, including, “to develop an interest in the proper care of clothing and other personal belongings” and “to develop a desire to make one’s home clean, neat and beautiful.”<sup>18</sup> Becoming interested in the acquisition and preservation of consumer goods was a first step to supporting a society in which labor was rewarded with material prosperity.

The Manitoba curriculum’s devotion to consumer education went far beyond teaching respect and veneration of personal possessions to introducing students to new life problems that could only be solved through the acquisition and proper application of consumer goods. Manitoba’s health education curriculum often resembled a soap or beauty product advertisement in following the tried and true advertising method of introducing a “problem” that threatened one’s personal hygiene, and thus ability to experience positive social interaction, and then providing a simple solution in the form of a new product. In the 1950s, a myriad of new cosmetics and toiletries were introduced by

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<sup>17</sup> *Manual of Civics and Citizenship*, 47

<sup>18</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1950, 29

companies seeking to capitalize on the expanding purchasing power of North American consumers. These products were almost always targeted to women and drew upon prevailing notions of femininity which suggested that the woman's proper sphere was the home and her most important role that of wife and mother. As Elaine Tyler May asserts in *Homeward Bound*, North American women in the 1950s were told by the mass media as well as psychological "experts" that the home, rather than the workplace, was the proper site of personal fulfilment. Domestic bliss, one could conclude from the advertisements, was only possible if a woman was able to present herself as physically attractive to a man. Thus advertisements offered women such pearls of wisdom as, "few are born beautiful but all can achieve beauty with the Elizabeth Arden beauty ritual" or asked frightening questions such as, "Which Hair Problems do you Have?" or "Does your husband look younger than you do?"<sup>19</sup> Luckily, such "problems" could be remedied by the purchase of the correct products!

While Manitoba's health education program was slightly less didactic than Madison Avenue, it nevertheless perpetuated precisely the same vision of the world. The junior high health curriculum, designed to promote hands-on learning by teaching healthy behaviors rather than human physiology and anatomy, included units such as "Presenting a good appearance" and "Cleanliness" which included such sub-units as "how should the hair be cared for", "how should the nails be cared for" or, "how does one judge soap?"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Beauty and Hygiene 1911-1956", Duke University Library Digital Collections, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/browse>

<sup>20</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance, 64; Health Education and Nature Study I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1950, 33

In learning about personal cleanliness, adolescents would be taught lessons in “the use and value of beauty soaps”, “the use and value of facial creams”, “the use and value of cosmetics” and “eliminating odors of perspiration”. Cosmetics companies could hardly have asked for a better introduction to their products! After students learned about “Shampooing - Methods, Frequency and Type of Shampoo to use”, they would move on to activities such as “plan a consumer guide for purchasing soap” or “make a collection of radio and magazine advertisements for soap”.<sup>21</sup> The curriculum thus followed the advertising industry in claiming that personal happiness was derived in large part from one’s ability to consume effectively. Moreover, learning about the wide variety of cosmetic products available emphasized that spending one’s time and mental energy engaged in consumerism was not only a worthwhile and rewarding task, but also a “natural” and “normal” part of adult life.

It was not only products that Canadians were increasingly consuming in the postwar era but leisure. Along with higher wages came decreased hours and more possible activities with which to fill those hours spent away from work. If leisure time was not spent productively, however, the output of workers and thus the profits of the company which employed them could suffer. Worse yet, time away from work could be spent in activities that were threatening to the social order. One commentator in the postwar era described the possibility of a four-day work week as a “ghastly prospect”, explaining to a Winnipeg audience that “businessmen, executives and other professional people...usually have some avocation to keep them from becoming bored. But...the great

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<sup>21</sup> *Health Education and Nature Study I-VI*, 33

mass of Canadian workers...have little to occupy their leisure time aside from passive interests such as television.”<sup>22</sup> The compromise struck between labor and capital led to a newfound concern with leisure, not just because of the increased amount of time that workers would now spend away from the job, but also because of the vital question of how work was to be rewarded. Implicit in the arrangement of workers surrendering power over all aspects of the work experience except for wages and benefits was an agreement that individuals were no longer to actively seek personal fulfilment through the process of work itself (which was now under control of management and not subject to negotiation) but through consumption of the goods and leisure-time experiences available because of the wages derived from work. In other words, it was the private sphere of consumption rather than the public sphere of production in which one’s personal “pursuit of happiness” was to take place. Thus, workers could only be expected to continue their support of the postwar compromise if they were in fact able to find satisfaction through the channels that were deemed appropriate, namely the patriarchal nuclear family and mass consumerism. Canadian boys and girls required education in leisure to ensure that as adult members of society they would indeed find fulfilment in a highly gendered, family-oriented, and consumer society.

Concern with the productive use of leisure time was often expressed by department of education officials. The Physical Education curriculum argued for an increase in the hours of physical activity performed by children because of the possibility that failure to learn to appreciate constructive pastimes such as sport would result in

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<sup>22</sup> Kurt Swinton in Bob Preston, “Four-Day Week Ghastly Thought”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, January 27 1958

recourse to destructive ones. The curriculum instructed teachers that,

Leisure only becomes a problem to those who are unskilled in its use. Lack of sufficient skill and stamina to enjoy vigorous physical activity forces individuals to seek other means of satisfaction. Aware of their shortcomings they seek to reassure themselves and develop personal security through displays of power, a souped-up hot rod, a switch blade, vandalism, and the like.<sup>23</sup>

This statement was both a phys ed. teacher's and psychologist's dream. According to educational authorities, anti-social behavior of all types could be explained in terms of personal inferiority complexes and solved easily through the provision of wholesome, vigorous physical exercise. Thus, progressive education's focus upon practical education and diverse subject areas allowed it to provide yet another service to help preserve the postwar compromise: teaching young people how to enjoy leisure. As a University of Toronto professor stated in defense of progressive education: "We no longer think it good enough for the great majority to be taught in the three R's in preparation for working a twelve-hour day. Ordinary people have leisure now as well as work. That is why modern elementary schools teach subjects like music and art."<sup>24</sup> Three of the eight stated goals of the Manitoba junior high program were related in some way to leisure. Furthermore, a section of the junior high curriculum entitled, "A summary for the busy teacher" explained that despite the large amount of academic content that teachers were expected to impart, above all pupils need to learn "to enjoy beauty, to develop recreational

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<sup>23</sup> Manitoba, *Physical Education and Recreation in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Education, 1958), Department of Education Publications, Instructional Resources Unit Library, Winnipeg, 22

<sup>24</sup> Charles E. Phillips, "No - We are Educating for Life", *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1952

interests” and “to live the good life.”<sup>25</sup> School was thus a preparation not for a life solely devoted to work, but one that afforded abundant opportunities for material comfort and satisfying leisure activities.

Many subjects later denounced by traditionalists as “frills” were justified by teachers and curriculum advisors as important because of their contribution to students’ uses of free time later in life. Neville Scarfe argued for the inclusion of industrial arts in the educational program of every student, rather than just those who intended to enter a skilled trade, because “schools are not primarily a means of training a young man or woman to enter a living; they are for training them to live more abundantly, particularly during leisure time...Modern times also require that each and every one can manage a house and family efficiently and happily and at the same time have a lasting constructive and absorbing leisure-time hobby.”<sup>26</sup> Arts and crafts education was justified on similar grounds.<sup>27</sup> Core subjects that existed before the advent of a “progressive” re-tooling of the curriculum were altered in order to accomplish the goal of education for leisure time. The University of Chicago self-survey recommended the development of a separate, modified English literature program for the majority of high school students who did not intend to pursue further education. According to their recommendation, “the chief purpose of such programs should be to promote wide acquaintance with literature adapted

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<sup>25</sup> *General Introduction to the Curriculum for the Junior High Grades of Manitoba Schools*, Department of Education, Manitoba, 1958, 6

<sup>26</sup> N. V. Scarfe, “The Place of Industrial Arts in a Full Education”, *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 3 (Nov. 1955) p. 8-9

<sup>27</sup> *Curriculum in Arts and Crafts: Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1946

to the interests and abilities of pupils whose formal education will terminate shortly.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, for students who could not be expected to read and appreciate Shakespeare, care could at least be taken to ensure that they were reading something, and preferably something that was not trash. The habit hopefully would continue into their adult lives.

While all students were to be educated to become more skilled consumers and thus happier individuals, this education was highly gendered. In fact, every aspect of the public school program was designed to perpetuate the assumption that the social worlds of men and women once they reached the age of adulthood would be vastly different. Indeed, Manitoba schools promoted the idea that men and women were fundamentally different both biologically and psychologically. This gender essentialism pervaded the ideological program of those who promoted the postwar consensus through education.

The postwar compromise promised workers a higher standard of living in exchange for organized labor’s agreement not only to restrict its demands to wages and benefits but also its promise to marginalize those who posed a threat to the compromise. This group included radical socialists, laissez-faire ideologues and, importantly, working women. The postwar consensus was founded upon the notion of the white male breadwinner and therefore called for a rollback of the newfound acceptance that women’s work had achieved during the Second World War, when the stereotype of the “Bren Gun Girl” was hailed by the government as a model to which women should aspire and advertisers increasingly portrayed the patriotic working woman as the archetypal

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<sup>28</sup> *Report of the Directed Self Survey - Winnipeg Public Schools* (Chicago: Committee on Field Services, Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1948) Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 194

consumer. In the post-war era, however, the working woman was increasingly portrayed by psychologists and the mass media as dysfunctional or narcissistic, a threat to the psychological well-being of the family, and an “unnatural” and indeed un-feminine deviant whose personal psychological pathology led her to reject the only role that could bring her true happiness: that of wife, mother, and consumer of domestic goods.

In *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May introduces the idea of domestic containment, an ideology which mirrored the West’s foreign policy of containment of communism. Domestic containment was a prescription for American women which stipulated that emotional, material and sexual satisfaction was only possible or appropriate within the framework of the nuclear family. The “American dream” was to be found only in the child-centered family with a single male breadwinner. In the words of May, “the most tangible symbol of that dream was the suburban home - the locale of the good life, the evidence of democratic abundance.”<sup>29</sup> In postwar Canada the idea of domestic containment can be clearly seen in the prescriptions given to women by popular media and psychologists. The Manitoba school curriculum was designed to prepare its female students to live this suburban dream. Domestic containment was alive and well in the Manitoba school system.

From their earliest experiences in school, girls and boys alike were taught to expect women to be found within the home carrying out domestic tasks. A guide to possible activities for teachers to carry out in a unit on “the Family” in the primary grades

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<sup>29</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 143

included a group discussion entitled, "what mother does". Appropriate answers to the question of what mother did included, "she cooks for us, she washes and mends our clothes, she cleans the house, she takes care of the baby." When it came to answering the question, "what does father do" children were to suggest a series of different occupations.<sup>30</sup> Another assignment for grades I and II asked pupils to make charts listing the rooms of their house and what their mothers did to make those rooms comfortable, along with another chart listing all of the items that "fathers help us get" including food, clothing, homes, protection, education and recreation.<sup>31</sup> The implication of these lessons could not be clearer; children were to expect to find a world in which men provided the resources of the good life and women oversaw their implementation in the home.

As Mona Gleason has pointed out, around a quarter of Canadian women, including a significant number of married women, continued to participate in the workforce outside the home in the 1950s.<sup>32</sup> It was only in the minds of those who created the curriculum that children's mothers would work exclusively inside the home, indicating that the curriculum was designed not to reflect reality but shape perception of it. Children who had a working mother were supposed to regard this state of events as unnatural, perhaps even immoral, and not a likely or desirable option for themselves when they grew up. A working woman was to be treated with pity, either for her poverty or her greed depending on whether she worked because the family "needed" her income,

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<sup>30</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 29

<sup>31</sup> *Manual of Civics and Citizenship*, 20

<sup>32</sup> 43.5% of women engaged in paid work outside the home were married in 1958. Gleason, 54-55

but not with admiration.

The most important school subject for reinforcing suburban domesticity in the minds of girls was unquestionably home economics. In arguing for the continuing presence of home economics in Manitoba schools, educationists developed two main goals for the subject. One was simply to reflect the reality that women were predominantly in charge of domestic tasks and thus to prepare students to perform these tasks via the teaching of specific skills. The other was to reinforce the idea that the “well-adjusted” woman should desire to make homemaking her sole career and look to the home as her exclusive source of fulfilment. Home economics education was often justified exclusively on practical grounds by individuals such as Frances McKay, director of home economics services at the Manitoba department of Agriculture, who argued: “The majority of women marry and spend the greatest part of their lives caring for a home and family, yet in their schooling were not given special training for this important job. It is only after they marry that they realize the immense task before them.”<sup>33</sup> An article in *Chatelaine* stated that three quarters of Canadian home economists believed that children lacked proper training in the skills of “household science”<sup>34</sup>.

Imparting necessary skills in sewing and cooking was not the only purpose given for extending home economics education to all female Manitoba students in junior and senior high school, however. The director of home economics for Manitoba wrote: “the art of homemaking...involves more than cooking and sewing skills, important as they may

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<sup>33</sup> Frances T. McKay, “Women’s Work”, *Manitoba School Journal* 14, no. 3 (Nov. 52) p. 9

<sup>34</sup> Helen Palmer, “Are Our Children Being Trained for Homemaking?”, *Chatelaine*, June 1952

be. The program is designed to meet the needs of adolescent girls in the areas of personal and family living...it seeks to develop those skills and appreciation which make for improved family membership."<sup>35</sup> Home economics, in other words, consisted not just of physical education but also psychological education. Girls were to be taught not only the physical abilities necessary to perform the role of homemaker but also taught that their role as homemakers was vitally important and in fact the most rewarding career they could choose. Thus, of the official goals of the home economics curriculum, only three of six dealt with outcomes related to attaining technical proficiency in domestic tasks such as sewing or cooking. The other half included goals such as, "to stimulate an interest in the study of home-making", "to develop ability to understand factors that make for satisfying family and community life" and "to teach the importance of the wise use of time, energy, materials, and money as related to the health and welfare of the family."<sup>36</sup> Because women were portrayed as the primary organizers of consumption in the family unit, consumer education was a major element of the home economics program. Girls were taught that they would have to "assume the responsibility for the physical and mental health of the family."<sup>37</sup> In other words, homemaking was not simply a physical occupation which most women happened to perform, it was an occupation involving psychological management that women were uniquely qualified to perform by virtue of their very nature.

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Janzen, "Home Economics", *Manitoba Annual Report on Education*, 1953-54

<sup>36</sup> *Homemaking Junior High Grades VII-IX*, Department of Education, Province Manitoba, 1956, 2

<sup>37</sup> "Home Economics Course". *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*. Province of Manitoba. 1955-56, 133

Girls in Manitoba were not only taught that their adult life would mean taking responsibility for the physical and mental health of the family but that this role was the most “natural” one for them to play due to their supposed innate differences from men. Home economists stressed that one of the most important tasks of a teacher in their field was to make home management appear to be a rewarding way to spend one’s life. One asked her colleagues: “Can we not make them (students) aware that homemaking in itself is an honorable profession?”<sup>38</sup> while another asserted: “One of our objectives in Home Economics should be to impress the importance of home and family living on the minds of our students.”<sup>39</sup> These statements demonstrate that girls were not, in fact, passively accepting the discourse promoted by teachers or curriculum planners who saw the only proper role for a woman as a life of home and family. Home Economics teachers were therefore not simply delivering a service to an enthusiastic population in need of their expertise, they were attempting to build cultural hegemony. The Home Economics teacher was part technical instructor and part proselytizer. The hegemonic aspect of Home Economics education was made clear by the subject’s program of studies for high school which told teachers that they would have achieved their goal not only when students developed technical proficiency in the areas of cooking, sewing, child care and financial planning but when they “have the idea that homemaking is the highest type of

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<sup>38</sup> Grace Gordon Hood. “Our Responsibilities for Promoting Professional Interest in Home Economics”. *Manitoba School Journal*. Vol. 8 No. 6 Feb. 1946 p. 7

<sup>39</sup> “Home Economics in Tune with the Times”. *Manitoba School Journal*. Vol. 20 No. 10 June 1959 p. 18-19

profession.”<sup>40</sup>

The ability of Home Economics to achieve its goal of convincing girls that their best chance at finding happiness lay within the realm of home and family was buttressed by an entire school curriculum that adopted an ideology of gender essentialism. The notion that there were fundamental physical and psychological differences between women and men that determined their personality and suitability for certain tasks was widespread among those who planned the Manitoba curriculum. Olga Anderson, senior nutritionist for the department of health and welfare confidently stated that the health and physical education programs should be organized around the “fact” that “boys are interested in muscle development in order to participate in athletics and girls are more interested in their appearance.”<sup>41</sup> The Physical Education program in Manitoba was almost Victorian in its assessment of the “natural” frailties of girls in comparison to boys and the psychological damage that could result if these differences were not addressed. In addition to female students participating in physical education separately from males, their athletic program was designed to be much less demanding. Long distance running was off-limits for female students because: “these events require great reserve force and...women and girls do not have this.” Furthermore, teachers were instructed not to allow teenage girls to participate in physical education while menstruating and told that “over-training is as bad as not enough training”. Girls were also to be “watched carefully

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<sup>40</sup> “Home Economics Course”, *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1955-56 p. 133

<sup>41</sup> Olga Anderson, “Health Education in the Elementary Classroom”, *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 1947) p. 8

so that extreme nervous tension is not being built up.”<sup>42</sup> Such concern with girls acting too “masculine” or boys becoming too “feminine” was rampant in the cold war era. If the entire basis of society (and supposedly the West’s defense against communism) was the gendered nuclear family, then anyone acting outside of the appropriate gender role was a grave threat not only to their own family, but to all of society.

This concern with children growing up without proper guidance in developing appropriate gender attributes and behaviors was reflected in a *Chatelaine* article addressing that classic issue that incited panic in the 1950's: juvenile delinquency. In the article the reader is introduced to “Jimmy Jackson”, a misbehaving nine year old who has turned to stealing. Thanks to the expertise of modern psychology we are told that Jimmy is not just a “bad boy”. In fact, according to the psychologists, he seems to bear no responsibility for his actions at all! Rather we are told that the problem is Jimmy’s parents because, “Jimmy’s stealing was a last desperate attempt to let his parents know he was disturbed in his relationship with them.” What exactly Jimmy’s parents were doing wrong was revealed when Jimmy drew a picture in his therapy session which depicted a soldier wearing a skirt. Jimmy told the psychiatrist, “that’s my mother. She’s a sergeant major with a skirt on. All she ever does is order, order, order”. Jimmy’s parents, it turned out, were exhibiting all of the inappropriate gender characteristics that worried promoters of the patriarchal family. Rather than being kindly and nurturing, his mother was domineering and overly “masculine”. Rather than acting as the “manly” authority

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<sup>42</sup> *Junior High Grades: Health Education and Physical Education*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1947/1958, 124

figure, Mr. Jackson was a weak, dominated man. Luckily for Jimmy, before the article was over his parents had realized their psychological dysfunction and taken steps to correct it.<sup>43</sup> This didactic article reveals the gendered thinking of the psychology profession which was held in such high esteem by promoters of progressive education. If issues of juvenile delinquency and other society-threatening dysfunction could indeed be traced back to issues of proper gender behavior, then it became vital that the public school system take steps to ensure children acted according to their supposedly biologically determined natures as men and women.

According to psychologists, the modern nuclear family was to be the model of democracy and efficiency. Every member of the family was to know his or her role and perform it to the best of their abilities due to their devotion to the shared interests of the family itself. Men were to be producers, in charge of the family's relations with the outside world. Women were consumers and their sphere of influence was the domestic world of the suburban home. Children were to obey the decisions made jointly by father and mother (with each holding special power over their own "natural" sphere) but were to be consulted on all decisions. The family meeting, promoted by psychologists as a way of bringing democracy to this previously autocratic institution, would allow for family harmony and unity. In other words, the family was to follow a corporate model of organization in which some were leaders and others followers but all subordinated their narrow personal (or class) interests to the common interest of the entire unit. In the family or corporation alike, each member was granted some degree of democratic input as

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<sup>43</sup> Joan MacKenzie, "When Should you Take Your Child to a Psychiatrist", *Chatelaine*, Aug. 1957

long as each also displayed loyalty to the organization, a belief in the innate fairness of their position within it, and a commitment to compromise and acceptance of decisions with which they did not personally agree.

That this conception of the family closely resembled educationists' prescriptions for society should come as no surprise. The corporate paradigm was used as the model for numerous forms of social organization in 1950s Canada. The experience of the war had resulted in a greater degree of respect and admiration for the concepts of planning and government intervention into the economic sphere than at any previous time in Canadian history. Government's expanded role in Canadian life had not only defeated Nazi Germany, but it had lifted the country out of the most crippling depression in its history and brought the beginnings of a social welfare state (family allowance, unemployment insurance) that would provide security in times of economic distress to all Canadians. Furthermore, it did so while both acknowledging the rights of labor and keeping profits high for business. In the minds of many Canadians, the central challenge of reconstruction was to maintain the wartime economic and political model without the war. If all of Canadian society functioned essentially as a corporation for purposes of winning the war, then perhaps this corporate model was the best to apply to peacetime, with Government in the role of CEO, citizens as shareholders, and workers and business leaders alike as workers within the "company", holding different jobs and rates of pay, but united in their pursuit of the common goal of national prosperity. This corporate ideal was, of course, a dream of certain post-war intellectuals rather than a reality, but it exerted a massive influence on the ideological content of the curriculum advocated by the

promoters of “progressive” education.

The first step to the creation of a group of future citizens who would admire and support the corporate model of society was the elimination of class identity and class consciousness. Students were encouraged to see the members of their society, not as members of different classes with inherently different or even opposed interests, but as individuals who were each working toward a higher goal of societal prosperity in their own way. A high school health textbook written by the deputy minister of Health for Ontario and the director of physical education for Toronto and used in almost every province in the country, including Manitoba, began by telling students that the human body was comparable to human society; “like a good citizen, the cell also co-operates for the benefit of its community...we find cells working together in a harmonious pattern that is little short of awe-inspiring.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the corporate model of social organization was emulating the harmony of nature itself. In order to further drive their point home, the authors continued:

Imagine yourself cast away upon a desert island with but one companion. You could go your separate ways, each doing his own hunting, fire-making and cooking, and each making a separate shelter for himself. However, such an arrangement wastes both human talent and nature’s resources...such individualism seldom endures for long. Even hostility grows before the necessity of combining for self-preservation, convenience, comfort and companionship. One man proves the superior cook, the other a superior hunter, and the responsibilities are divided on this basis...The hunter does a better job because he can concentrate on hunting, and the cook...remains by the campfire dreaming up new dishes. Thus by specialization and cooperation their lot is very much improved...Human improvement has been brought about by similar specialization and co-operation among the cells.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> J. T. Phair and N. R. Speirs, *Good Health* (Toronto: Ginn and Company, 1945) 6

<sup>45</sup> Phair and Speirs, *Good Health*, 6

This example not only provided a biological justification for the increased division of labor within a factory, but introduced the notion that, despite specialization, no single worker was more important than another, just as one cell was no more important than another, even though it might perform a different function. Taking the metaphor further, the entire human body could be compared to Canadian society. Certain cells controlled brain function while others were responsible for circulation, just as some people with expert knowledge and advanced education were rightfully the “brain cells” of society while others were more suited to tasks requiring manual labor and obedience rather than brainwork and leadership. None, however, were any less vital to society’s prosperity than any other and thus all were entitled to the basic provisions of the social welfare system and full rights of democratic citizenship. This society-as-human-body metaphor not only implied that one should be deferential to the expertise of others (the hand doesn’t question the decisions of the brain) but that divisions between individuals based upon occupational status were misguided and unnatural. Class conflict in this formulation became a cancer; a case of the body unnaturally fighting itself and destroying its natural harmony in the process.

In numerous subject areas, Manitoba’s public school pupils were bombarded with messages aimed at eliminating resentment based upon social class and fostering mutual identification between people who performed quite different types of occupations. In the grade I and II Social Studies program, the year was to be broken into units based upon different places in which adults lived and worked including “The Farm”. In this unit, teachers were instructed, “to develop in the city child a sense of the debt he owes the

farmer” and “to develop in the pupil an attitude of respect for an appreciation of different workers in the country.”<sup>46</sup> The introduction to the General Shop curriculum justified the inclusion of this subject not only on the grounds that it helped less academically inclined children begin the preparation for learning a trade, but also because, “as the student begins to acquire a thorough mastery (of shop skills), he comes to appreciate the skill of the skilled workman.”<sup>47</sup> Shop was useful for future white-collar workers, not because it taught skills that would have any direct practical value to their future occupations, but because it demonstrated that these skills were just as worthy as academic ones. Children were to overcome traditional divisions between city and country, blue collar and white collar or worker and management by adopting the metaphor of the human body as society and realizing that each occupation had something vital to contribute, without which no one could survive or prosper.

McInnis argues that in order to enforce the postwar labor consensus at the grassroots level, unions and management created Labor Management Production Committees or LMPCs which launched campaigns of propaganda aimed at encouraging the average worker to identify with the goals of the company for which he or she worked rather than engaging in class politics.<sup>48</sup> Workers were told that higher productivity, which could be achieved through workers eschewing strikes, “soldiering” or other disruptions in the speed of production, was in everyone’s best interest, as higher profits for the company

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<sup>46</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 2 / 33

<sup>47</sup> *Curriculum on General Shop for Junior High Grades of Manitoba*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1947, 3

<sup>48</sup> McInnis, *Harnessing Labor Confrontation*, 135

led to increases in the availability of consumer goods and higher wages with which to buy those goods.

Interestingly, this message of shared interests as a motivating factor for workers was not only reproduced in the Manitoba curriculum but can be found in the writings of John Dewey. One of Dewey's central criticisms of traditional education was that it failed to motivate children to work except out of fear of being punished or failing. At best, children were encouraged to work hard in life for narrow individual reasons such as passing rather than failing, winning promotion to higher grades and eventually qualifying themselves for a better job and higher salary. As adults, therefore, people would reproduce these same limited motivations for working. Dewey argued that much of the social conflict within his own world stemmed from this problem of worker motivation. In his words, there was no "vital social spirit" either in the schools or the workplace to create a sense of "collaborative effort toward a worthy group goal."<sup>49</sup> The solution to creating this vital social spirit was, of course, education. Dewey envisioned progressive education creating a world in which "some are managers and others are subordinates. But the great thing for one as for the other is that each shall have had the education which enables him to see within his daily work all there is in it of large and human significance."<sup>50</sup> Dewey claimed that the reason workers in the industrial era had become "mere appendages of the machines which they operate" was "the fact that the worker has had no opportunity to develop his imagination and his sympathetic insight as to the social

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<sup>49</sup> John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1959) 22, 31

<sup>50</sup> John Dewey, *School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900) 38

and scientific value of his work.”<sup>51</sup>

In other words, if future workers could be taught that their effort was part of a grand and noble production of societal betterment, they would no longer be alienated from the means of production, but would become attached, not only to their own work itself, but the new liberalism. Thus, the director of technical education for Manitoba, in justifying the inclusion of industrial instruction in the public school system, emphasized both its practical value and its capacity for the construction of the new liberalism, stating, “creative work can provide a form of vital stimulation which we might call play - a worker enjoying such activity usually describes it as JOB PRIDE.”<sup>52</sup> If children could, through education, develop pride in their own work and appreciation for the work of others, they would be on the road to becoming happy, well-motivated workers when they grew up.

Job pride, however, was necessary but not sufficient to create the perception of a classless society among students. Since the school system was not intended to eliminate *actual* differences in wealth or status but rather the perception of such differences as the product of social class, it was necessary to explain economic hierarchies without resort to the traditional language of class. Indeed, the most optimistic of progressive educators argued that through scientific management of the school program, social class as a product of differences in capital accumulation could be replaced by occupational specialization according to each individual’s interests and abilities. Thus, schools taught

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<sup>51</sup> Dewey, *School and Society*, 38

<sup>52</sup> R. J. Johns, “The Philosophy of Technical Education”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 6 (Feb. 46) p. 6

that society was, in fact, a meritocracy and that one's financial and occupational position later in life would be a direct product of one's innate abilities and aptitudes as measured by psychologist-trained experts such as teachers and guidance counselors. Progressive educators who promoted "democratic" education made it clear that their vision of a democratic society still included the presence of a clearly defined hierarchy. The difference in the new liberal society would be that such hierarchies would be determined by merit rather than social class. As one progressive educator stated,

Democracy, the most difficult form of government to operate, demands an elite. I know that this is a dangerous word, because it is thought to imply privilege, social status, or wealth. But democracy, of all forms of government demands leaders. I for one am certainly not prepared to be led by the least educated. Therefore, our best hope, as democrats, is to give the best possible opportunities to all children, including the able children as well as others, from any social background.<sup>53</sup>

Another educator remarked, "There is a mistaken view that democracy requires uniformity, when in fact the very essence of democracy is to allow for difference. Each child must be given the opportunity to develop to the limit of his capacity"<sup>54</sup> As Robert Stamp observed in regards to schooling in Ontario, "now the school was to function less as the great equalizer and more as the great selector, selecting the most talented for the higher level jobs, and selecting from the rest those destined for office and factory employment. In the past, much of this sorting process had taken place after young people had left school; now the school would predetermine these choices."<sup>55</sup> Schools thus took on perhaps the most vital role in constructing the postwar corporatist compromise: that of

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<sup>53</sup> John Wolfenden, "Democracy in Education", *Manitoba School Journal* 21, no. 5 (May 1960) p. 7

<sup>54</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education 1959* (1959)

<sup>55</sup> Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 84

determining whether children were best suited to be “cells” in the brain or the hand of the “body” of Canadian society.

Society would, like a corporation, depend upon the work of both leaders and followers. To determine who was suited to which task and train them appropriately would be the role of the education system. Thus, teachers were instructed that their duties now included classification of students into categories based upon not only achievement but potential as well as occupational guidance. The subject of Guidance was created in the postwar era in order to facilitate this new role of occupational selection.<sup>56</sup> In slots during which time was to be devoted exclusively to guidance, students were encouraged to form a realistic impression of their talents as well as interests and formulate a career goal and path to achieving it based upon such a self-evaluation.<sup>57</sup> They were also to study chapters in their textbooks entitled, “you and your future” and “success in the world of work” and perform activities such as selecting potential occupations, conducting studies of them and correlating these studies with their own interests and abilities.<sup>58</sup>

To steer the students’ self-evaluations in realistic and appropriate directions was to be the job of teachers, who were told that they should “take note of the likes and dislikes, abilities and disabilities of their pupils” in order to “have a fair idea of their inclinations and qualifications.”<sup>59</sup> Such subjective assessments of ability and interests

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<sup>56</sup> W. C. Miller, “The Minster’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 14, no. 4 (Dec. 1952) p. 3

<sup>57</sup> *General Introduction Junior High Grades*, 27

<sup>58</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance*, 71-72

<sup>59</sup> Don Swailes, “Education and Industry in Manitoba”, *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 9 (May 1952) p 7

were to be augmented by scientific testing overseen by trained professionals. A professor of education at the University of Manitoba declared that it was impossible for either students themselves or their parents to fairly assess the abilities and interests of the individual student since their dreams and goals would interfere with objective assessment. He believed instead that only dispassionate science could overcome the inherent biases of parents who recommended occupations which they held in high esteem but were not necessarily within the ability or desires of children themselves.

Thus, the education system was to employ intelligence tests, aptitude tests, "standard achievement tests, cumulative records, trained interviewers and trained analysts."<sup>60</sup> Although advocates of standardized testing admitted: "no one is exactly sure what intelligence is and opinions differ widely as to the degree in which it may be inherited or influenced by environment", they still maintained that testing could "forecast the probable future ability or capacity to handle academic subjects."<sup>61</sup> To this end, Manitoba junior high schools were instructed to administer IQ tests as well as aptitude tests for mechanical and clerical aptitude to students who fared poorly on the intelligence tests.

Matching academically inclined students with careers requiring significant brainpower was regarded as vitally important by those both within and outside of the education system. The *Ottawa Tribune* declared that "Canada is just waking up to the fact that her most precious resource - brainpower - is wasting away at an alarming rate".

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<sup>60</sup> Harry Stein, "Problems of Pupil Adjustment in the Secondary School", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 6 (Feb. 1948) p. 20

<sup>61</sup> *Junior High Grades: Guidance*, 74

According to the *Tribune*, two thirds of students with IQs over 100 failed to complete high school education, let alone proceed to a higher education which would allow them to attain the education necessary to fill positions of scientific, corporate and governmental leadership.<sup>62</sup> A similar article worried that the meritocratic ideal of the postwar era was failing and that class position continued to hold the key to higher education and attaining positions of social leadership. Its author worried that “many of the best qualified students are dropping out of school and many of the less qualified are going on to college.”<sup>63</sup> Others were more optimistic regarding the possibility of science superseding class as a determinant of social status. An article in the *Manitoba School Journal* declared, “here in Manitoba there is almost boundless opportunity for progress and self-realization for every graduating student...there is no need whatever for any square pegs to be fitted into round holes; no need for anyone to spend too much time in “dead-end” occupations...with the combined assistance of teacher and employment services, students can be given considerable help in choosing the fields in which they will work.”<sup>64</sup>

Such was the hope of progressive educationists in Manitoba. Graduates of Manitoba’s public schools would be content no matter what their working future held because they would, with the benevolent guidance of the experts, find a career perfectly suited to their abilities and interests and would thus regard the society of the postwar compromise as an infinitely fair one. The postwar world, thanks to the system of public

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas Leiterman, “Education Meeting to Study Brainpower Shortage”, *Ottawa Tribune*, Sept. 26 1957

<sup>63</sup> Forbes Rhude, “Eighty Percent of Top Students Miss College”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 13 1958

<sup>64</sup> Swailes, *Education and Industry in Manitoba*, 7

education, would become a meritocracy rather than a class society in which differences in wealth and status stemmed from inevitable biological differences rather than accident of birth or social injustice and where all were provided with at least a reasonable amount of prosperity and learned to respect those both above and below them in terms of wealth as being deserving of their position and vital to the prosperity of all.

The postwar compromise was founded on the promise of delivering “the good life” to the majority of workers in return for their renunciation of radicalism and adoption of the goals of corporations (higher productivity and profits) as their own. Thus, both labor and capital emphasized compromise and accommodation rather than confrontation. The vice-president of the Canadian Congress of Labor made a speech to the Canadian Club in which he stated labor’s support of consumerism and rejected the idea that organized labor presented a threat to capitalism, despite the postwar strike wave of 1946-47 which resulted in more worker-days lost than in any other year in Canadian history.<sup>65</sup> Paradoxically, at a time when more and more Canadian workers were using their position of power to fight for their rights, their leaders were eager to assure worried industrialists that these rights would be restricted to those which could be obtained within the structure of corporate capitalism. As McInnis explains, “labour’s leaders hoped that industrial unionism was now situated in the mainstream of political discourse.”<sup>66</sup>

Most Canadian newspapers expressed this same hope, arguing that organized labor had a role to play in postwar Canada, but harshly condemning “selfish” motives that

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<sup>65</sup> McInnis, *Harnessing Labor Confrontation*, 59, 99

<sup>66</sup> McInnis, *Harnessing Labor Confrontation*, 112

led to production-disrupting strikes. The *Winnipeg Tribune* praised unions when they worked for “a constructive and workable method of settling labor disputes without resort to the strike weapon” which they characterized as “a wasteful, obsolete device that, like any other dangerous weapon, ought to be used only with a clear realization of the public responsibilities involved.”<sup>67</sup> Another editorial praised the newfound “maturity” of the labor movement, declaring that it was the realization that “class warfare was costly and outdated” and the subsequent recognition of the common interests of labor and capital that entitled organized labor to increases in wages and job security.<sup>68</sup> Such articles claimed that the battle between labor and capital of the previous decades had been a misguided product of misunderstandings and prejudices on the part of both labor and capital. In reality, “this quarrel is a family feud - a feud between father and son”, caused by “primarily...a failure in communication. Neither group really understood the language, the aspirations, or the achievements of the other.”<sup>69</sup> Who better to overcome this mutual lack of understanding than the public school system which was in a position to instruct both future industrialists and workers in the art of compromise and democracy?

According to education officials, the ideal of capital and labor responsibly sorting out their “family feud” because of a shared realization of common interests was only possible if the next generation learned to become “democratic”. The term “democracy” was ubiquitous almost to the point of meaninglessness among the writing of almost

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<sup>67</sup> “A Promising Idea”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Sep. 23 1952

<sup>68</sup> “Toward Greater Maturity”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 10 1958

<sup>69</sup> “Bridging the Chasm”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 24 1953

anyone concerned with progressive education in 1950s Canada. The goal of “education for democracy” was used to justify or condemn the inclusion or exclusion of almost anything from the curriculum. However, what “democracy” meant within the context of the progressive movement might be better termed “corporate democracy” or the creation of a system which allowed for grassroots debate and decision-making regarding key issues of governance so long as debate was kept within certain acceptable parameters, deference was given to proper authority, decisions were made with the “common good” in mind and individuals valued compromise above confrontation. Perhaps a simpler formulation of the tenets of corporate democracy as taught in the public schools came from a Manitoba textbook’s discussion of sportsmanship which stated:

Sportsmanship in work and play is a distinguishing characteristic of a good Canadian citizen. In everything he says and does he recognizes the “rules of the game” and abides by them. He is willing to take his turn and does not always have to be on the winning team. The good citizen is a good winner and a good loser. He respects the rules in both victory and defeat. He does not find fault with the winners when he loses nor does not boast of success when he wins. He plays for the game - not for the reward or prize. Sportsmanship learned at an early age in work and play is the seed from which springs in later years that sportsmanship in all things which is the spirit of true Canadianism.<sup>70</sup>

The emphasis on sportsmanship in *work* as well as play indicates that childhood play was intended as a dress rehearsal for politics later in life. In the political climate of the postwar compromise, Canada was imagined as a single corporate entity geared toward the goal of economic growth and material prosperity. Just as members of a corporation needed to demonstrate loyalty to the company at all times, even when they personally “won” or “lost”, so too did political actors need to learn to accept their losses in the

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<sup>70</sup> *A Manual of Civics and Citizenship*

“game” of politics, knowing that the rules of the game were fair, and that the game was designed to benefit everyone and eventually bring about prosperity to all. Children who grew up with a proper sense of sportsmanship or “Canadianism” could be expected to remain loyal to the fundamental precepts of a Keynesian New liberalism capitalist society, even when their “team”, whether it was a political party, union, professional organization or any other group, “lost”. The postwar compromise was fundamentally based upon workers still believing in the “rules of the game” of industrial legality even when their union did not achieve as much as they hoped. To teach such attitudes to future workers was one of the main goals of a curriculum designed to foster what was termed “democracy”.

Creating “democracy” in the classroom, however, would require enormous changes to the way Manitoba’s schools were run. Progressives within universities claimed that the current system, and current teachers, were incapable of instilling a democratic spirit. One argued, “too many of us *talk about* the democratic way of life, and continue to *practice tyranny* in the classroom. Group thinking, group planning, and group action are ways in which we gain democratic experience.”<sup>71</sup> This observation was echoed by a school inspector who noted, “Democracy is not easily achieved in the classroom. It is so much easier to train them (children) to be blindly submissive and dumbly obedient, ready to accept, without thought or criticism, any suggestion by the teacher or by anyone in authority. Such a method of teaching produces ideal subjects for

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<sup>71</sup> M. P. Toombs, “Let’s Have Some Action”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 28, no. 2 (Sep/Oct 1949) p. 14-17

a totalitarian state.”<sup>72</sup> The corporate democratic state required subjects capable of thinking for themselves and making decisions based upon the collective will but also subjects who would restrict their actions to those that benefitted the organization of which they were a part. In “real” democracy, according to one progressive educator:

The pupil will learn to respect the rights of others, and will develop a sense of responsibility to the group, to realize the importance of each doing his task so well that it will make a worthy contribution to the school activity. The pupil will thus learn to respect the rights and opinions of others, and will develop the power to be willing to fuse the individual opinion into the collective conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, students had to learn to think for themselves in order to avoid being swayed by charismatic individuals, but were not to be given too much autonomy within the classroom lest they let “freedom degenerate into license” and lose their “respect for law as representing the collective judgement and wisdom of the group.”<sup>74</sup> “Democracy” for progressives consisted of being able to challenge certain types of authority (such as individual would-be dictators) and respect others (the majority opinion of one’s peers or the scientific conclusions of “experts”).

Teachers were encouraged to hold debates and discussions in their classrooms rather than give lectures but were warned that the important part of this democratic process was the eventual arrival at unanimous conclusions. If the class was unable to reach unanimity on the issue under discussion, “every care should be taken to record the

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<sup>72</sup> Chas Howitt, “The Place of Arts and Crafts in the Public Schools”, *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 7 (March 1948) p. 21

<sup>73</sup> Howitt, “The Place of Arts and Crafts in the Public Schools”

<sup>74</sup> Howitt, “The Place of Arts and Crafts in the Public Schools”

view of the minority, this is an important part of the democratic way of life.”<sup>75</sup> Although the views of the minority were to be respected and recorded, however, majority rule was to prevail and the minority was expected to accept this state of affairs without resentment. The real purpose of group discussion, however, was not to uncover new ideas or produce acrimonious disputes based upon differing ideologies so much as to foster feelings of self-esteem among students and confirm the hypothesis that the solution arrived at via compromise on the part of the group was always better than the idea of the principled individual who regarded himself or herself as correct in the face of popular opposition. The lessons that students were to take away from their participation in group discussions were that “we may learn from others, and others may learn from us...we may as a group produce a new decision or solution different from any of those previously held by individual members of the group.”<sup>76</sup> Such “lessons” would serve individuals well if they were to succeed later on in the culture of the corporate world in which the individual’s opinion was to be valued but the individual himself or herself was ultimately expected to act according to the will of the company on behalf of its interests.

The subordination of the individual to the will of the group was constantly emphasized in the Manitoba school system. The notion that in order to experience the benefits of the postwar compromise one had to “play by the rules” and always work within the system rather than fight against it was an important a lesson for young people, just as important as how to solve an algebra equation, according to progressive educators.

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<sup>75</sup> Toombs, “Lets’s Have Some Action”

<sup>76</sup> Toombs, “Lets’s Have Some Action”

From the earliest age, students were to be taught the idea of playing by the rules via real life examples: "If Bobbie in the kindergarten has the toy truck first, does Bill have the right to take it because he wants it? Does Bobbie have the right to keep the truck for the whole play period if there is only one truck in the room?"<sup>77</sup> At the primary level, children would be given greater freedom than previous generations of schoolchildren but would have to learn not just to enjoy it but to "accept freedom and use it responsibly."<sup>78</sup> The first four objectives of the Social Studies curriculum for grades I and II consisted of the development of respect among students for "Home and family life, people and property, the law and school regulations."<sup>79</sup> Hands-on activities or extra-curricular activities such as field trips were regarded as particularly useful for creating respect and led to events such as visits to the classroom by a member of the police force or fire department becoming routine occurrences from the 1950s onward.

Once they graduated to junior and senior high, children were assumed to have developed respect for the basic institutions of society and began to receive guidance for their lives in the workforce once they had left public school. Students were encouraged to regard their careers as the ultimate manifestation of their "responsibility for making a contribution to society."<sup>80</sup> Students were told that by playing by the rules they could

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<sup>77</sup> Wilhelmina Hill and Helen K. MacIntosh, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the Elementary School", *The Manitoba Teacher* 30, no. 1 (May/June 1951) p. 28

<sup>78</sup> Author Unknown, "Education for the Seven Freedoms", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 1947) p. 6

<sup>79</sup> *A Manual of Civics and Citizenship for Schools*, 14

<sup>80</sup> *Junior High Grades: Social Studies*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1958, 40

expect to achieve a level of comfort and prosperity never before seen in the history of human civilization. A letter from the President of Massey-Harris-Ferguson, published in the *Manitoba School Journal*, explained that,

In the Western world, the worker is an independent, self-sufficient individual, who wishes to live his own life in his own way, and he expects nothing from his employer but consideration, adequate remuneration, a fair deal, and opportunity for promotion and steady employment. He earns enough, together with all the social benefits...to look after himself and his family in accordance with his own tastes and fancies.<sup>81</sup>

The ability to indulge one's tastes and fancies, of course, came with a *quid pro quo*. The graduating class of the Manitoba Technical Institute, in their commencement address, received a reminder of both their good fortune to be living in the present era and their duties as workers in return for their standard of living. After being told that, "the present working conditions to the generation or so which preceded you, would have been, generally speaking, considered as bordering on Utopia", graduates were advised that in return for this utopia they had the responsibility to "Do the job well", "Be dependable", "Be Loyal" and exhibit, "teamwork or co-operation with others." They were cautioned that they should endure hardships at work without complaint so as to be good "team players" and support the goals of the corporation which would lead to everyone's eventual prosperity: "In the common experiences of everyday life in factory, shop, and office, conditions are not going to be perfect...You cannot expect perfection...You will have to learn to tolerate many things which will not be to your liking...You will even have

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<sup>81</sup> James S. Duncan, "Russia's Bid for World Supremacy - A Challenge to Western Thinking", *Manitoba School Journal* 18, no. 2 (Oct. 1956) p. 14

to put up with certain inconsistencies or idiosyncrasies of your boss.”<sup>82</sup>

Health textbooks went even further in instructing future workers that in exchange for their unprecedented high wages and benefits, they had to agree to allow employers to exert a considerable amount of power over them. Students were told that their employer might insist on them taking a physical examination in order to “protect his firm against the loss which follows when physically inferior help is hired.” In addition to physical health, employers would expect “respect for those in authority, and loyalty to the firm” as well as a healthy mental state among employees.<sup>83</sup> The task of the school system was to produce workers who would be committed to the tenets of corporate democracy. In return for their increased standard of living and personal freedoms they should come to regard the goals of the company for which they worked as their own and balance personal freedom with adherence to authority and obedience to decisions made by the majority. If Canada itself were regarded as being run like a corporation, then that meant that one’s duty as a citizen was to learn to successfully compromise and “play by the rules” which had been set up through the democratic political process.

The public education system not only preached cooperation and compromise between various groups in society, but increasingly practiced it in the field of curriculum development. For the first time in the 1950s, so-called “laymen” would be invited to help plan the school curriculum. In 1953, the government opted to enlarge the province’s Curriculum Committee, an advisory body that recommended changes to the curriculum,

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<sup>82</sup> H. B. Brehaut, “What an Employer expects of an Employee”, *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 1 (Sep. 1955) p. 16-18

<sup>83</sup> Phair and Speirs, *Good Health*, 8-9

beyond the usual collection of people directly connected with education.<sup>84</sup> The new curriculum committee would consist of 35 men and women and, in addition to educational officials such as principals and the superintendent of Winnipeg schools, school inspectors or trained experts such as the dean of the faculty of education at University of Manitoba or normal school principal, would include representatives from industry such as the managing director of Carnegie Finance and Investment and the personnel manager of Macleod's Ltd. as well as union leaders, such as representatives from the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Workers.<sup>85</sup> The inclusion of these individuals on this committee was intended not only to fulfill Dewey's goal of making the curriculum related more directly to life outside the classroom but also to provide a model of the postwar compromise in which business, labor and government worked together in a cooperative fashion for the benefit of Canadian society as a whole. This democratic arrangement was founded not only upon recognition of mutual interests but also upon notions of teamwork, compromise, and respect for the majority opinion. The same "democratic" values taught through a class debate or organized sporting event were to be modeled by those who created the very curriculum that sought to teach them.

But what of the individual who, for whatever reason, failed to find personal happiness and fulfilment from working within the corporatist society of the postwar consensus? Postwar psychology was quite clear in arguing that such an individual was not just unhappy with the current status quo but, because the new liberalism was based

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<sup>84</sup> "To Enlarge Curriculum Committee", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Dec. 2 1953

<sup>85</sup> "35 Named to New Curriculum Group", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 21 1954

upon newfound scientific knowledge of human behavior, was in fact suffering from a mental pathology which required the attention of professionals. As Elaine May argues in *Homeward Bound*, if psychologists genuinely believed that scientific evidence proved women were best able to fulfil their goals of happiness and personal fulfilment within the role of wife and mother rather than in the workforce, then any individual who rejected this role was not just exhibiting an ideological difference of opinion but was indeed the victim of some form of neurosis. Similarly, the worker who rejected the deal of complete management control of the workplace in return for higher wages and consumerism was acting in an illogical fashion which suggested his need for guidance in the realm of mental hygiene. Psychologists were more than happy to provide this guidance to both adults and children in order to equip them to be happy within the new postwar consensus. Psychologists stipulated that if individuals were unhappy with society, the solution to this problem was not to attempt to address their grievances, but teach them to “adjust” to the realities around them. This notion of “adjustment” as a solution to problems was omnipresent in the Manitoba school system of the postwar era.

At both the primary and secondary levels of schooling “adjustment” was named explicitly as one of the main goals of the Manitoba curriculum. The main goal of high school in Winnipeg schools was said to be, “personal health for satisfactory living”. After that came development of “fundamental skills...necessary to carry on successfully the various activities” that the student would engage in during adult life. Thirdly, the purpose of the high school was to prepare the student to “take part in the social life, first of the family and school, then of the larger world outside the school.” In order to

facilitate achievement of this final goal students were to learn how to develop “satisfactory relationships” as well as the ability to “extend the development of satisfactory relationships to new and larger social groups.”<sup>86</sup> Quite simply put, the purpose of school was to teach people how to get along with one another and with the dominant institutions of society.

Getting along with others was a prevailing theme in virtually every subject area’s program of studies. In the high school English course of the 1945-1946 school year, great emphasis was to be placed upon oral rather than written expression for the first time because “oral expression is a means of developing ease in social relationships”. As the curriculum stated, “in a democracy where public issues are settled by discussion, (training for public speaking and debate) is of first importance.” Oratorical skill, however, was not to be evaluated on the basis of one’s ability to persuade others to adopt one’s point of view but by way of more formalistic criteria such as posture, enunciation, pace of speaking, pitch and tone. Students were encouraged when engaging in self-criticism to ask themselves questions such as, “do you speak in a friendly manner?” and “do you deliver your address as though you enjoyed speaking?”<sup>87</sup> When it came to public speaking, enjoyment was more important than effectiveness and social harmony in the classroom more important than social change. Thus the oral expression component of the English program was designed to promote “increased efficiency in school work in

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<sup>86</sup> *Self Survey*, 128-129

<sup>87</sup> “English”, *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1945-46, 20-21

general” as well as “more satisfactory contacts with other people - in school and out.”<sup>88</sup>

These sorts of goals were the only ones which were desirable according to psychologists such as Samuel Laycock who continually argued that the primary goals of schooling should not be academic but psychological. Schools first and foremost were to turn out mentally healthy people. A mentally healthy person, according to Laycock, was an “adjusted” person, someone who appreciated and accepted the status quo and learned to accommodate himself or herself to it. Such a person would, of course, be ideal in the era of a postwar compromise founded on the promise of prosperity for all via corporatism so long as everyone knew their own place within the system and played by the rules. Laycock stated that the mentally sound individual “first of all feels comfortable with himself. He is not bowled over by his emotions of fear, anger, jealousy or love. He is able to deal with most of the situations which come his way without blowing up - that is, without having temper tantrums, dissolving into tears, having his feelings hurt, pouting, sulking, feeling sorry for himself or going to bed with a sick headache.”<sup>89</sup>

Mental health, in other words, was quite similar to good sportsmanship. Both required the individual to accept losing and not question the fairness of the result but assume one’s disappointments in life were either a product of personal failings or unrealistic and selfish expectations or ambitions. As Laycock stated, “when your child gets mad and quits playing because he has lost the game, you try to show him that he can’t win all the time - that others must get their turn too... You help him to take his

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<sup>88</sup> “English”, 17

<sup>89</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Should Teachers be Concerned with Mental Health”, *Manitoba Teacher* 34, no. 2 (Sep/Oct 1955) p. 18-19

beating like a man” so that “he’ll grow up to be a sturdy and wholesome personality - neither a Mr. Milquetoast nor a bully.”<sup>90</sup> Again extending the play metaphor to the world of work and politics, people in the postwar era had to learn that failing to achieve one’s political goals was no reason to doubt the fairness of the system and failing to find satisfaction in one’s work life, whether in paid employment or within the home, was a result of one’s own psychological maladjustment, not the innate undesirability of one’s career. Interestingly, Laycock did not advise the parents of the child who lost to encourage him to attempt to *improve* at his sport, but simply to accept his limitations, and the limitations of the “game” itself and find a way to experience enjoyment within these limitations.

Negative emotions, possibly the result of one’s disappointments in life, were a serious concern, however. Adjustment could only succeed, according to educational psychologists, if children learned to find a way to deal with the negative emotions that naturally arose as the result of failures. Luckily, however, just as science had cured physical childhood diseases, psychology had found ways to prevent mental pathologies. Laycock stated, “you can vaccinate your children against life’s little jolts and letdowns, the same as against smallpox.”<sup>91</sup> In the schools, this vaccination was to take the form of teaching self control as well as allowing children a degree of “emotional release” and greater self-expression in a carefully monitored environment. An article in the *Manitoba Teacher* stated: “Learning to get along with others is essentially the same process as

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<sup>90</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Learning to Live”, *Macleans*, Feb. 1 1947

<sup>91</sup> Laycock, “Learning to Live”

learning to play the piano, to type, to play tennis or hockey. It is in the main a matter of practicing the correct combination of movements, eliminating those that are wrong and correcting the faulty."<sup>92</sup> The "correct movements" in this case involved the practice of remaining calm and not allowing "emotional stress" to overcome the all important attribute of self-control.

Education both in art and literature was justified to skeptics because of its ability to provide "emotional release that will help (children) to develop well-balanced personalities."<sup>93</sup> Art was praised for its "value in building personality" and declared to be an important subject because, "psychologists stress the satisfactory nature of the release of energy through creative art, and note that ensuing enlargement of the sense of confidence and the gradual elimination of inferiorities."<sup>94</sup> Literature, similarly, was argued to be useful not because children would memorize certain passages as they had been instructed to do in the past or even because study of literature would help children develop their own English language skills but because an introduction to literature at an early age would lead to a lifetime of reading as a way of releasing emotions in a healthy manner.<sup>95</sup> Once again the concern with leisure time arose, this time in conjunction with leisure not being "wasted" but used to dissipate negative emotions that would stand in the way of proper adjustment.

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<sup>92</sup> T. A. McMaster, "Character Education", *The Manitoba Teacher* 24, no. 5 (Mar/Apr 1946) p. 51-54

<sup>93</sup> *English for the Schools of Manitoba - Grades I-VI Inclusive*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1942, 40

<sup>94</sup> *Arts and Crafts: Grades I-VI*, 2

<sup>95</sup> *English Grades I-VI*, 40

Release of emotions was only one method for vaccinating children against unhealthy reactions to adversity in life. Public education was also supposed to provide a boost to children's self-esteem which would allow them to overcome short term feelings of disappointment. Laycock advised teachers that the proper adjustment of students was their responsibility because children needed to "feel secure in the affection of their teacher...be accepted and liked by their classmates, and feel they 'belong' to the class and the school...insecure individuals are not efficient individuals."<sup>96</sup> Primary school teachers received instruction in this self-esteem building via curriculum guides that declared the opening of each school day was to begin with a ten to twenty minute period devoted to the delivery of a "friendly greeting" in a "natural way", or at least as natural as could be expected when a specific bloc of time was devoted to it. The first period of the day would therefore be "one of the happiest and most significant" experiences, putting children at ease and building up their confidence" before any further education was attempted.<sup>97</sup>

Throughout the day, teachers were to continue the process of building up self-esteem among their young charges. Critical comments regarding students' work were to be kept to a minimum and positive reinforcement was to reign at all times. Art teachers were advised to shift from critiquing their pupils' technical proficiency to using comments that turned ineptitude into cause for praise. Specific examples of phrases which could be used in this regard were even given to teachers such as, "you thought of

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<sup>96</sup> S. R. Laycock, "Towards Better Teaching", *The Manitoba Teacher* 28, no. 3 (Nov/Dec 1949) p. 14-17

<sup>97</sup> *General Introduction and Social Studies Grades I-VI*, 12-13

an interesting way to make a tree Jane”, “Those bright colours make your picture show up well”, or “I like the way you are filling up your picture Billie. There won’t be empty places in it.”<sup>98</sup>

The role of teachers in developing self-esteem in particular and social adjustment in general was regarded as paramount by educational psychologists. Only through the guidance of an astute teacher could children find “real fulfilment of their basic emotional or personality needs” and have the opportunity to “feel the taste of success and the joy of having his ideas and accomplishments.”<sup>99</sup> Failure to achieve results in the area of psychological adjustment would have catastrophic effects. Laycock stated, “all patients in a mental hospital are there because of failure in group living at the family or community level...Classrooms are laboratories in group living.”<sup>100</sup> If the “experiments” in these laboratories were not successful then the entire postwar consensus would be threatened by a generation of irresponsible individuals who had failed to adjust to the new postwar economic and social order.

In her study of postwar psychology in Canada’s schools, Mona Gleason concludes that, “because normalcy was a social construction rather than scientific fact, the schools promoted and reproduced the ideas, values, and priorities of a particular Canada: white, middle class, heterosexual, and patriarchal.”<sup>101</sup> This was also, however, a vision of

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<sup>98</sup> *Art: Grades I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1955, 7

<sup>99</sup> S. R. Laycock, “The Mental Hygiene of Classroom Teaching”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 26, no. 3 (Nov-Dec 1947) p. 21-24

<sup>100</sup> Laycock, “Mental Hygiene of Classroom Teaching”, 21-24

<sup>101</sup> Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 120

Canada based upon the historical post-war compromise calling for corporatism as the model for a Canadian society based upon compromise between labor, capital and government with mutual recognition that mass consumerism provided both the route to economic prosperity and the best chance for individual personal fulfilment. The hierarchies which Gleason identifies were all conceived as being vital to preserving the social order and thus the postwar consensus. Schools were to be “laboratories” for “creating democratic citizens”<sup>102</sup>, or in other words places in which the “new normal” was reinforced; where children learned that personal fulfilment was to be found through cooperation and compromise in the public sphere which would in turn guarantee a harmonious and prosperous society capable of delivering to every Canadian family a standard of living higher than anything experienced by previous generations and enjoyed within the context of a nuclear family composed of a bread-winning father and a home-making mother. Anyone who disagreed with this vision of society was pathological and in need of adjustment. Political activism itself was therefore labeled by psychologists as pathological. Laycock stated, “Many a man who all his life is ‘agin the Government’ comes from a home where he rebelled against the harsh authority of his father. On the other hand, too lax discipline will allow your child to grow up selfish and self-centered without any regard for the rights of others.”<sup>103</sup> In the postwar era, radical politics, like crime or one’s “failure” to marry and have children, was to be explained as a product of a bad childhood bereft of experiences which provided proper “adjustment”.

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<sup>102</sup> *Self Survey*, 48

<sup>103</sup> Laycock, “Learning to Live”

Thus the “progressive” school of education was more than a pedagogical fad. Rather, it contained an ideological vision for a new Canada. While progressive educators talked of child-centered education and increased freedom for children in the schools, their notion of education was still fundamentally adult-centric and represented no departure whatsoever from the idea of school as an institution which was utilized to perpetuate certain values among the next generation and in the process to create a cultural hegemony amenable to those who controlled the educational state.<sup>104</sup> While discussing the new public school program under the rhetoric of “creating democracy”, educational authorities held a quite specific notion of what “democracy meant”. As the report on the self-survey of Winnipeg schools concluded,

If they (students) fail to acquire experience and to develop habits of cooperation within the school hierarchy they will have acquired little basis for cooperation in the hierarchy of democratic government. The individual to be a good citizen must be able to take stock of his responsibility and authority as a citizen and must accommodate himself emotionally to a level of functioning on which he does not exercise authority in excess of his rightful responsibility.<sup>105</sup>

In other words, just like Communism or sexuality<sup>106</sup>, democracy and individual freedom had to be contained. Schools were not promoting a child-centered education that would foster critical thinking or even criticism of the basic tenets of the postwar compromise. Instead they were attempting to make students “good citizens in the true sense of the

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<sup>104</sup> See Bruce Curtis, *Making the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London, ON: Althouse, 1988)

<sup>105</sup> *Self Survey*, 48

<sup>106</sup> See May, *Homeward Bound*

word"<sup>107</sup>, or well-adjusted individuals who displayed a desire for consumerism and a respect for private property, state institutions, and the enterprise for which they worked. Such individuals would accept the role their gender had "naturally" assigned to them and would accept temporary setbacks as "part of the game" rather than injustices which needed to be remedied. They would regard the interests of labor and capital as the same and not display class identification but instead regard society as a meritocracy in which individuals would engage in different occupations and receive different monetary rewards according to their academic abilities and pre-ordained aptitudes.

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<sup>107</sup> "Education for Responsible Living", *Winnipeg Tribune*, April 8 1947

#### Chapter 4: The Traditionalist Backlash

Progressive education had captured the support of most educational “experts” within the system of public education itself during the post-war era. Psychologists, curriculum advisors, professors of education, school administrators and leaders of teachers organizations all pledged their support for the project of reconstruction through progressive education. By the late 1950s, however, the term “progressive education” had become a dirty word and opposition to it from outside the educational establishment had grown so raucous that it seemed the only time progressive education was discussed in popular media was in terms of vicious denunciations of it. The *Winnipeg Free Press* went as far as to claim that Progressive Education was “just about finished in Winnipeg” as early as 1953.<sup>1</sup> The so-called “traditionalist” response to the changes made to public school systems in Canada immediately after the Second World War became indelibly linked with Hilda Neatby, professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan turned critic of public education and author of the book *So Little for the Mind*, which from the date of its publication in 1953 created a firestorm of controversy around the issue of public schooling. From that point on, it became impossible to discuss the changes happening in the school system without discussing the “battle over education” or the “controversy over education” in some form. While promoters of progressive education initially envisioned their project of postwar reconstruction as a harmonious one built upon a broad societal consensus, their dreams of hegemony without opposition were quickly dashed.

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<sup>1</sup> “Spare the Prod, Spoil the Mind: Sketchy Schooling Scored”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 19 1953

Neatby herself was a relatively unknown figure in Canada until her participation in the Massey Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences from 1949 until 1951. A history professor at University of Saskatchewan, Neatby was able to gain a public profile by virtue of her participation in this commission which was itself an example of the postwar concern with reconstruction. Louis St. Laurent's Liberal administration, looking for a way to justify sending federal money to cash-strapped Universities and investigate broadcasting within Canada, initiated the commission and gave Vincent Massey free reign over its composition. Neatby's selection catapulted her to the national stage and allowed her to both develop and disseminate her views on Canadian culture and education. The Massey Commission did not specifically mention public education, which was a provincial responsibility. Instead, for the most part, it sounded the alarm about the increased influence of American cultural forms in Canada and the decline of "high" culture in the postwar era.<sup>2</sup>

Their work on the commission brought Massey and Neatby closer together over their shared opinion that Canadian education was deeply flawed and in need of serious reform if the distinct type of Canadian culture sought by the Massey Commission were to emerge. Neatby, in a 1944 article that biographer Michael Hayden speculates initially caught the attention of Massey, wrote that the current progressive style of education was "a dangerous sacrifice to democratic equalitarianism." She argued that "the insistence on pleasure in learning is a revolt against discipline" and would lead to "false notions of

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hayden, "A Short Biography of Hilda Neatby", *So Much to Do So Little Time: The Writings of Hilda Neatby*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983) 7-41

democracy.”<sup>3</sup> With Massey providing moral encouragement in addition to the money necessary for research, Neatby expressed their shared concerns with progressive education in *So Little for the Mind*. Neatby never imagined that this combative work, which had been initially rejected by two publishers as too controversial, would become a best-seller and create a firestorm within Canada, making her the champion of a growing traditionalist revolt against postwar education reforms.<sup>4</sup>

Although it was Neatby’s polemic that captured headlines and grabbed media attention, opposition to progressive education was not caused by nor did it originate with Hilda Neatby herself. Rather, she simply found herself at the right place at the right time, expressing in an articulate fashion what many others had thought but never dared to assert in print, using her social power as a university professor to lend the air of “expert opinion”, so important in the 1950s, to those who opposed recent changes in the school system. Neatby provided a discourse to those who sought to dispute the basic tenets of progressive education but who had previously lacked the necessary rhetorical tools or public profile. In doing so, she helped rally an extremely diverse collection of groups in Canadian society into a counter-hegemonic historical bloc.

Critics of progressive education were an even more diverse group than its supporters, who were far from a homogeneous group themselves. Like all historical blocs, they were not always united across lines of occupation, class, gender, age or even formal political affiliation. Rather, they represented a coalition of divergent interests

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<sup>3</sup> Hilda Neatby, “Education for Democracy”, *Dalhousie Review* 24 (April 1944)

<sup>4</sup> Hayden, *So Much to Do So Little Time: The Writings of Hilda Neatby*

who, for a number of reasons, disputed progressive education for much the same reasons that others supported it; namely that it was designed to “construct” citizens who would be suited to accept and participate in the postwar new liberalism. Just as progressive educators shared a broad ideological platform, traditionalists were united in their opposition to the postwar consensus and their desire to “return” to an idealized earlier era of Canadian society politically, economically and culturally. Traditionalists’ opposition to the postwar consensus stemmed from any number of possible sources. Some were believers in laissez-faire capitalism who watched in horror as most of the precepts of their faith were rejected by mainstream economists and all major Canadian political parties. Others were opponents of the increased role of social science and psychology in Canadian society and often were concerned that these disciplines were replacing religion in the school system and society at large. A third source of opposition to progressive education came from cultural conservatives who argued that the education system was creating a generation of philistines. In their minds, progressivism was creating a “false democracy” by promoting the notion that a highly educated elite was undesirable when in fact it was vital to the survival of Canada. Finally, opposition to progressive education came from cold warriors who argued that “softness” in Canada’s school systems was leading to Canadian society at large becoming “soft” and unable to muster the moral strength and technical know-how to defeat the threat of the Soviet Union, especially in the post-Sputnik era of the space age. All of these groups formed a powerful movement against progressive education and led to an all out war over the future of education in Canada, as seen quite clearly in the province of Manitoba.

In March of 1953, *Macleans* magazine launched a three part "National Report" entitled "The Crisis in Education". It stated that "in the days that lie immediately ahead, Canadians will be concerned not with the three Rs of education but with the three Cs - Crisis, Controversy, and Confusion...we are resting in the momentary calm at the heart of an educational hurricane."<sup>5</sup> Such hyperbolic language became the norm in the mid to late 1950s, as commentators across Canada claimed that public education had become embroiled in controversy and weighed in with their own assessments of the "crisis in education" and what could be done to fix it. One commentator noted in 1955 that the debate had already become almost wearily predictable: "This month the school bells and buzzers that summon children back to classes across the land are also bringing parents, teachers, school trustees and superintendents bobbing out of their corners like old prize fighters, ready to square off for another round in the perennial squabble over "progressive education."<sup>6</sup>

The origin of this perennial "prizefight" was generally dated to the 1953 publication of Hilda Neatby's attack upon the public education system in Canada, *So Little for the Mind*. J. W. Chafe, principal of Alexandra School, commented that one could pick up a magazine at any dentist or barber's shop and immediately be greeted with a discussion on whether public education was working. He blamed this state of affairs strictly on Neatby: "this (book) is a wowzer - a scholarly wowzer; and it's not just an attack on education, it's an expose a la Joe McCarthy of the educators themselves

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<sup>5</sup> Sidney Katz, "The Crisis in Education", *Macleans*, March 1 1953

<sup>6</sup> Robert Collins, "How a "Progressive" Teacher Works", *Macleans*, Feb. 4 1956

...Thrilling book! Anyone reading it who knows anything about education lays it down and, as with any other book of fiction says, "Whew, I'm glad that's not true."<sup>7</sup> Laying the blame for the movement against progressive education directly at Neatby's door was very convenient for supporters of the status quo in education as it allowed them to dismiss the firestorm surrounding the book and the words of support it received from so many segments of society as nothing more than the result of Neatby's ability to use fiery rhetoric to sway impressionable and ignorant minds. Unfortunately, the true origins of the traditionalist movement were not so simple and easy to dismiss.

The controversy surrounding progressive education had begun before the publication of Neatby's book and would continue for many years after. Nor was Neatby the only voice speaking up against the changes in curricula across Canada since the end of the war. A professor of education at the University of Toronto remarked in 1952, a full year before the publication of *So Little for the Mind*: "this year has looked like the big open season for taking pot-shots at the schools. University Professors, after-dinner speakers, editorial writers, businessmen and retired school inspectors have all been banging away at modern education."<sup>8</sup> In October of 1952 *Chatelaine* ran a feature article that spoke of a "great battle" over public education which had broken out in that same year.<sup>9</sup>

The debate over public education was framed by Neatby as one in which

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<sup>7</sup> J. W. Chafe, "Are the Schools Ruining Your Child?", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 12 1954

<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Phillips, "No - We Are Educating For Life", *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1952

<sup>9</sup> "Who's Right in the Great Battle of the Schools", *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1952

educators across Canada were already divided into two factions, “the self-styled “progressivists” and the other group, whom the first call, “traditionalists.”<sup>10</sup> As Neatby implies, although the Progressives shared some degree of pedagogical consistency (while still containing significant differences of opinion over key issues), the Traditionalists did not represent a unified and coherent school of educational thought so much as a reaction against the other school. What brought them together was not the homogeneity of their own vision but their shared rejection of any body of educational thinking considered “progressive”. As a movement defined by their opposition, the traditionalist school of thought was difficult to pinpoint. Often, traditionalists remained solely critics of public education and failed to provide a comprehensive alternative vision for post-war schools other than a return to some vaguely defined period before progressive education had begun. Nonetheless, traditionalists held in common certain fundamental beliefs. They shared the notion that Canada, in particular the provinces west of Ontario, had in fact become influenced to a great degree by “American” progressive education.<sup>11</sup> This influence, furthermore, had led to neglect of the so-called three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic, the inclusion of far too many “frill” subjects which distracted from the core subjects, and a misguided attempt to make schools “fun”.<sup>12</sup> All of this educational experimentation, according to traditionalists, had led to a decline in the academic standards of schools and consequently in the level of achievement of pupils as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Hilda Neatby, *So Little For the Mind* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1953), 7

<sup>11</sup> Christina McCall, “How “Soft” Are Our Schools?”, *Chatelaine*, Sep. 1959

<sup>12</sup> Katz, “Crisis”

fostering a lack of discipline and impeding the ability of young people to function after they left school. Simply put, according to one critic of the traditionalists, “they tell us that pupils leaving school can’t spell, can’t write a good sentence, can’t add, subtract, multiply or divide. They say that the manners and conduct of children are atrocious and that the ignorance of high-school graduates is appalling.”<sup>13</sup> According to traditionalists, public education was falling apart and taking the potential greatness of Canada with it.

Perhaps the most commonly repeated accusation leveled at the school curriculum of the post-war era was that it contained too many “frills”. Newspapers and magazines in the 1950s regularly contained articles denouncing various school subjects that had recently been included in the curriculum. Schools were condemned for “wasting” time that could have been devoted to academics by teaching subjects such as driving, alcohol usage, and personal hygiene.<sup>14</sup> One critic remarked that Canadian children, “learn in school how to drive safely, to drink moderately, apply lipstick neatly, how to march in rhythm, behave on a date and mix babies’ formulas” instead of learning how to read and write effectively.<sup>15</sup> Others criticized vocational education in areas such as home economics or typing as drawing attention away from more important skills such as the ability to write with perfect grammar, spelling and penmanship.<sup>16</sup> In response to a *Chatelaine* article criticizing frills in the education system, readers weighed in with a

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<sup>13</sup> Phillips, “Educating for Life”

<sup>14</sup> Joyce Meyer, “Not Here Say Educators”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 3 1958

<sup>15</sup> McCall, “How Soft”

<sup>16</sup> George Hardy, “Are We Educating for Ignorance?”, *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1952

number of responses, the majority in agreement with the notion that standards in basic literacy had fallen and a return to the core subjects was desirable. One ex-teacher declared that she was “appalled at the conglomeration of subjects that make up the curriculum. A smattering of everything and not much of anything”. Another reader declared that “the classroom is not the place to sample possibly interesting phases of life, it’s the place to get down to the serious business of learning a few fundamentals.”<sup>17</sup>

The idea that the modern education system was too laden with frills not only gained expression in the popular press but found its way into official government documents. The Manitoba Royal Commission on education of 1959 concluded that while some extra-curricular activities were more or less a necessary and unavoidable part of school life, “some activities which are highly commendable in themselves have been slowly creeping into the schools, distracting both pupils and teachers from their main purpose.”<sup>18</sup> Specifically mentioned were activities such as collecting money for charities or selling tickets for school events or magazines during school hours. A *Tribune* editorial writer, in assessing the impact of “frill” subjects, condemned the progressives as well-intentioned but flawed theorists who “cheated the children out of the honesty and intellectual discipline of the traditional subjects with a kind of formless, non-moral dogoodism.”<sup>19</sup>

The notion that frill subjects were not only a waste of time but were causing

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<sup>17</sup> N. Smith and B. C. Forrester, “Reader Takes Over”, *Chatelaine*, December 1952

<sup>18</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education 1959* (1959), 171

<sup>19</sup> “The Fads are Fading”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 4 1959

serious intellectual damage to the young people of Manitoba stemmed from the conviction that academic standards in schools were falling as a result of both the amount of time devoted to core subjects and the teaching methods employed by teachers trained by progressive instructors. It was bad enough, in the minds of traditionalists, that students were spending less time on the 3R's because of the proliferation of frills and soft options, but progressive methods of instruction involving child-centered education and relating the curriculum to the practical realities of everyday life were ensuring that, even when students were in a language arts or mathematics class, their learning would be seriously impaired. A minor firestorm erupted in the Manitoba legislature and the daily papers in 1957 over the results of that year's standardized high school final exams which had been leaked to the media and subsequently published. In their reports to the department of education, the head examiners of the 1957 tests had been particularly hard on that year's crop of students, remarking that "the answers were not adequate in most cases" and that in particular, "spelling and writing and sentence structure were not adequate."<sup>20</sup> Although politicians themselves acknowledged that such comments were nothing new (although their being publicized was)<sup>21</sup>, and examiners had for decades been convinced that students were not living up to expectations, this minor controversy provided seemingly concrete and scientific evidence for what many traditionalists had been claiming for years: that schools were failing to teach children the basic fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic.

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<sup>20</sup> "House Promised Debate Later On", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 21 1957

<sup>21</sup> "Examiners' Criticism Nothing New Says Bend", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 23 1957

Newspapers and magazines in the 1950s were full of horror stories about the lack of skills of young people. University professors stated that students were lacking in basic English skills necessary for post-secondary education, the head of the Canadian nurses association complained that one of her younger nurses had arithmetic so poor “she can’t calculate the correct fractional doses in medication,” and an Edmonton businessman was quoted as saying, “I wouldn’t trust my eighteen-year-old stenographer, a high-school graduate, to type a simple note on her own declining an invitation to dinner...It would be full of grammatical and spelling errors.”<sup>22</sup> This lack of skills was blamed directly on progressive methods of teaching that emphasized projects and hands-on experience instead of desk-work and drill. A professor of classics at the University of Alberta told the following story:

Some years ago, my youngest daughter, as part of a Grade VI “enterprise”, brought home a little sack of wheat. She ground it to flour between two stones and her mother baked a loaf of bread from it. All this was great fun, but she had to wait until University to discover what an intransitive verb was and she still wastes a lot of time looking up spellings.<sup>23</sup>

This story demonstrates the fundamental difference in what traditionalists and progressives believed the purpose of education to be. For traditionalists, the emphasis upon hands-on learning was a mistake because school was not supposed to prepare students for anything but a very narrow range of academic skills. Anything else could be learned at home, or perhaps did not need to be learned at all. This was a far cry from the progressive mantra that education should be “for life” and prepare young people for every

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<sup>22</sup> Sidney Katz, “The Row over the 3 R’s”, *Macleans*, March 15 1953

<sup>23</sup> Hardy, “Educating for Ignorance”

facet of their adult lives.

Even when the sort of skills, such as arithmetic, that traditionalists wanted to see taught were being taught, the method by which this learning took place left much to be desired. As one critic of progressive education remarked,

Instead of making eight-year-olds memorize that seven plus six is thirteen, a teacher will put six sad clowns with black hats and seven happy clowns with sun-yellow hats on the blackboard and get the children to count them up. Children learn facts, not by drill and memorization, but by using objects they find interesting. The system can backfire...When faced with a simple sum such as five plus four, he would stare with rapt eyes into space and come up with the correct answer four minutes later than his fellow pupils. It turned out that the child, before he could do the problem, had to line up in his mind five big oranges and four small apples, and then count them.<sup>24</sup>

The problem with clown-based math education, according to traditionalists, was that progressives were fundamentally mistaken about one of their key beliefs: that learning only took place when the student was enjoying himself or herself. One traditionalist called anyone who believed in the notion of “learning is fun”, “an ignorant namby-pamby with the mind of a permanent adolescent.”<sup>25</sup> Another traditionalist, this time a former teacher, principal and school inspector, bluntly stated, “Learning is never fun. If it’s fun it isn’t learning. Learning is hard work, especially when it deals with a subject in which one may not be particularly interested, or especially proficient.”<sup>26</sup> Despite almost lapsing into self-parody with quotations such as these, the promoters of the idea that learning by definition was unenjoyable were quite serious in their fears that in the name of making

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<sup>24</sup> McCall, “How Soft are our Schools?”

<sup>25</sup> Katz, “The Row over the 3 R’s”

<sup>26</sup> William E. Hume, “Are the Schools Ruining Your Child?”, *Macleans*, March 1 1952

school enjoyable, subjects which did not appeal to children were simply being discarded in favor of easy and “fun” activities. As a result, the average child was no longer challenged by the daily work of school and responded to this lack of stimulation by becoming bored or withdrawn. Graduates of the progressive schools, according to Neatby, were “ignorant, lazy, and unaware of the exacting demands of a society from the realities of which they have been carefully insulated...they do not care to learn. They lack an object in life, they are unaware of the joy of achievement.”<sup>27</sup> Other commentators went further and claimed that these ignorant, bored and lazy youths, as a result of their dislike of “sugar-coated” education that was “geared to the mediocre”, began to exhibit serious behavioral problems.<sup>28</sup>

Numerous individuals accused schools, particularly high schools, of failing to inculcate suitable discipline in their students as a direct result of progressive education methods that emphasized fun and democratic organization. The director of the Canadian Labor Congress accused high schools of becoming “adolescent playpens”<sup>29</sup>, while a former professor of philosophy and teacher at Charleswood Collegiate remarked, “discipline is the whole basis of civilization. Unless human beings control their animal impulses, their urges to cruelty and deceit and greed...we simply revert to savagery.”<sup>30</sup> Such a reversion had clearly been noted by many teachers, one of whom had an article

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<sup>27</sup> Neatby, “Education for Democracy”, 11-12

<sup>28</sup> K. R. Swinton, “Are We Fooling Ourselves”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Dec. 13 1957

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Forsey in “College Grads “Half Baked” High Schools Just Playpens”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 18 1958

<sup>30</sup> James Forrester, “Discipline”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 34, no. 4 (Jan/Feb 1956) p. 24-25

published in the *Manitoba Teacher* with an editorial note expressing complete support of his claim that "Pupils in my classes accomplish about one-third less than pupils in the same grade did ten years ago...to the old-timers in the schoolroom it is incredibly fatuous that children should have so much freedom before they acquire the education with which to guide them in the use of it."<sup>31</sup> Traditionalist teachers were not alone in their perception that progressive education had led to an erosion of discipline. Polls in the United States demonstrated that 65% of Americans agreed that discipline in their schools was not strict enough.<sup>32</sup>

The perception that discipline was eroding in schools was hardly a surprise considering the horror stories which appeared in magazines warning of the lack of discipline or morals of the younger generation. One such article in *Macleans* told of an experimental boarding school in England in which students were allowed to control every aspect of their school themselves, and where attendance at lessons was optional and students could "cuss and blaspheme, they can lie, cheat and steal. They can smoke and they needn't wash". Most shocking of all, boys and girls in this school were said to "share dormitories until they're 11 and bathrooms until even later" and "it's nothing to see a girl of 15 having a bath while carrying on a discussion with three senior boys." This article, accompanied by a photo of female teenage students in bras brushing their teeth, was clearly intended to be as salacious and shocking as possible to the Canadian reader. Furthermore the statement, "Summerhill is the most progressive of Britain's progressive

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<sup>31</sup> Author Unknown, "He's Had Enough", *The Manitoba Teacher* 28, no. 1 (May/June 1949) p. 69

<sup>32</sup> "The Fruits of Deweyism", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 7 1955

schools” could leave readers no doubt that the author’s intent was to imply that progressive education was a slippery slope that would ultimately lead to complete freedom for children and therefore laziness, dishonesty, and sexual promiscuity.<sup>33</sup>

Proponents of progressive education did not take such attacks lying down. They in turn attacked the traditionalists as being nothing more than disgruntled fossils who simply repeated the same tired arguments about children not being as good as they were in the “old days”. As Sidney Katz of *Macleans* argued, “Thirty years ago an Ontario high-school inspector tested first-year students in the three Rs and pronounced fifty-five percent to be bad or poor.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, attacking young people for failing to live up to standards was an old and entirely predictable pastime which had no real relation to the particular pedagogic method being used. Traditionalists were portrayed in this argument as simply being out of touch with modern life. Katz stated, “Fifty years ago, when Canada was a rural nation, life was simpler and most of the school’s time was devoted to the three Rs, with some geography and history thrown in...The child sat at his desk all day with the teacher doing most of the talking.”<sup>35</sup> He explained that while this type of education may have been acceptable in a “simpler” time, the complexities of modern life, particularly urban life, made this sort of learning anachronistic and progressive education essential. As Canadian society modernized and became more sophisticated, so did the schools.

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<sup>33</sup> Lester Matthews, “In this School, the Kids are Boss”, *Macleans*, Dec. 1 1948

<sup>34</sup> Katz, “Row over the 3 R’s”

<sup>35</sup> Katz, “Row over the 3 R’s”

Interestingly, most of the criticism of traditionalists consisted of characterizing them as either antiquated or just personally out of touch with what actually went on in schools. In defending their practices, educational authorities did not defend the idea of progressive education in name so much as abandon it and insist that the criticisms of traditionalists were off base because in reality the schools were doing everything they wanted already! Charles Phillips, professor of education at the University of Toronto declared the progressive school to be the “flying saucer of Canadian education”: “in my thirty years of professional experience, including visits to classrooms in nine provinces, I have never seen a “progressive school” - nothing, at least, that resembled the apparitions described by those whose minds are upset by progressive ideas.”<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, in elucidating his philosophy of education, Phillips professed adherence to almost every principle of education that John Dewey himself supported.

Whatever word Canadian educational authorities wanted to use to describe their educational philosophy, they were still committed to a way of thinking that was dramatically opposed to that of the traditionalists. The assistant superintendent of Winnipeg schools declared, “Whatever the shortcomings of Manitoba schools, no one can blame progressive education. It has made hardly any impression on methodology and it hasn’t made a dint in the program” but insisted: “Why cannot work be fun? We need less drudgery in our schools...Too much time is spent in constant repetition.”<sup>37</sup> Sybil Shack, a

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<sup>36</sup> Charles E. Phillips, “Educating for Life”

<sup>37</sup> A. D. Thomson, “Signs of Progress”, *Learning to Live, Living While Learning: The Forty-Fourth Annual Convention. Manitoba Educational Association* (Easter 1952), 15, Department of Education Publications, Instruction Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

Winnipeg primary school principal and one of progressive education's staunchest defenders, used the tactic of criticizing traditionalists by claiming that the school program was *already* traditionalist and thus any problems with the academic achievement of children were a result of not enough progressive education rather than too much. Shack concluded, "I heartily wish that we were doing more of the things for which we are being criticized. We'd be better teachers in better schools if we were."<sup>38</sup> Defending the schools by denying the presence of progressive education demonstrates that progressive education had become a "dirty word" in the 1950s and that even if in practice one's education philosophy was "progressive", it had to be defended using different rhetoric. This rhetorical shift in discussing education demonstrates just how powerful the traditionalist side of the debate had become.

If people had joined the progressive education camp as a result of their support of the postwar new liberalism and their desire to see it continue into the future, what was the ideological drive behind the methodological beliefs of traditionalists? The answer to this question was far less clear than it was for progressives. Certainly those who criticized progressive education from a traditionalist perspective tended also to oppose many of the changes occurring in Canadian politics and society in the postwar era. Quite prominent among this group were believers in laissez-faire economics who viewed the trend toward a Keynesian model as deeply damaging to Canada's future prosperity. Similarly, they believed that the school system was raising children who would not only support such an economic philosophy but become weak and dependent individuals who would lack the

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<sup>38</sup> Sybil Shack, "A Teacher Speaks Up to Parents", *Macleans*, Dec. 6 1958

initiative and competitive spirit necessary for true free market capitalism. The connection between laissez-faire economics and traditionalist education was not always made explicit, but arguments for one quite frequently resembled arguments for the other.

Among the many authors praising the creation of the Keynesian Welfare State and the creation of a new compromise between capital and labor in the postwar era, there remained a few commentators who were not swept up in the enthusiasm. Some framed their objections by asserting that the rights of labor, while legitimate to a degree, had already been taken too far, threatening the productivity of the nation. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, for example, rejected the federal CCF's call for a forty hour work week because "a halt must be called to the philosophy of working as little as possible for as much money as possible."<sup>39</sup> Many educational authorities agreed quite strongly with such sentiments. Walter Dinsdale, in prefacing his remarks to the 1952 conference of the Manitoba Education Association, stated, "today there is a tendency to move unconsciously toward the belief that the solution to our social and political problems lies in the direction of increasing government control. I want to say at the outset that I do not subscribe to this rather doctrinaire thesis."<sup>40</sup> Others agreed, claiming that the supposedly excessive demands of strikers during the postwar wave were not an aberration but rather stemmed from a deep seated selfish materialism and laziness that was threatening to overtake Canadians due to the creation of the new liberalism. Many of these

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<sup>39</sup> "Greenlay Speaks Out", *Winnipeg Tribune*, April 6 1953

<sup>40</sup> Walter Dinsdale, "The Proper Study of Mankind", *Education for Better Human Understanding: Forty-Seventh Annual Convention Manitoba Educational Association* (Easter 1952), Department of Education Publications, Instruction Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

commentators went on to connect the evils of the postwar consensus directly to calls for a more traditional program of education. If young workers were expecting the state to provide a broad social safety net for themselves then surely these expectations were being fostered by a progressive school system.

The supposed poor quality of high school graduates in the 1950s was blamed by some directly on the coming welfare state. During a panel discussion on the “crisis in education” at Glenlawn Collegiate in Winnipeg, a self-described “businessman” commented that “there is a general deterioration of society’s standards with the coming of the welfare state...I can’t understand the gobbledegook of the graduates of today. When they come into my office they can’t spell or write properly.”<sup>41</sup> Many traditionalist school inspectors agreed, and complained in their reports to the department that “not only are our standards in education slipping, but our easy-going attitude is having a damaging effect on the character of our students...The belief that it is possible to get something for nothing is spreading upwards and downwards in our age groups. In the school we see less and less effort; among our citizens we find an increasing demand for more pay for less work.”<sup>42</sup> This particular inspector’s solution to the problem was the elimination of “easy promotion” by making elevation to the next grade entirely dependent upon the results of province-wide examinations set by the department of education rather than allowing it to be decided upon by parents and teachers based upon non-academic factors such as

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<sup>41</sup> Wilf Queen-Hughes in “Panel Won’t Agree Whether there is Crisis in Education”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 24 1954

<sup>42</sup> B. Warkentin, “Reports of School Inspectors - Division no. 19”, *Manitoba Annual Report on Education*, 1950-51, 65

emotional maturity and the individual child's psychological state. The creation of highly motivated individuals in the schools, traditionalists hoped, would perhaps counteract the degenerative effects of the welfare state.

The creation of more rigid standards for student promotion was a popular proposal among traditionalists because of their belief that one of the main deficiencies of a school system designed to produce citizens who were "adjusted" to live in a new liberal society was its tendency to turn out, in the words of the director of the Ontario School Trustees Council, "a crop of academic bums". Such individuals had not demonstrated the work ethic or intelligence to complete their education but because of "the new educational philosophy which says that everybody must have an education" they were advanced through the school system anyway. Thus one traditionalist could conclude, "Featherbedding, it seems, is not confined only to the "make-work" rules of certain trade unions. It is found in the public school system of Canada."<sup>43</sup> Again, as evidenced by this statement, dissatisfaction with progressive education translated into dissatisfaction with the entire direction in which the political framework of Canada was heading. Just as the new liberalism of the postwar era had supposedly made life too comfortable for workers, progressive education had made school far too comfortable for children. The result in both cases was to reduce initiative, cultivate a culture of entitlement and thus threaten the ability of the next generation to maintain Canada's greatness as a nation, which in the minds of true believers in *laissez-faire* could only come from competition between individuals seeking self-enrichment. In its crudest form, this argument was expressed by

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<sup>43</sup> Percy Muir in "Academic Featherbedding", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 16 1957

geologist Franc Joubin who claimed in one of many *Macleans* articles regarding the “crisis in education” that only suffering could lead to greatness:

If you examine the life histories and the educational backgrounds of the brilliant minds in the fields of science, the arts, statesmanship, you will find that the overwhelming majority were subjected to great financial, racial, political or other handicaps. Most of the leading scientists presently in the fields of fission, fusion, and rocketry development have been imports from countries whose educational systems did not offer much in the way of chocolate milk, soft drinks, baton-twirling majorettes and genuflecting guitar players.<sup>44</sup>

If one accepted Joubin’s questionable assertion that the “brilliant minds” of the world always came from backgrounds characterized by great hardship, then the traditionalist school, which saw academic education itself as innately unenjoyable and full of necessary hardships, had to be listened to by those who planned the curriculum in order to protect Canada’s future.

Just as Progressive educationists employed a historical narrative in justifying their educational philosophy, so too did traditionalists. For progressives, recent history demonstrated the importance of scientific expertise and government planning as both had proven crucial to ending the great depression, defeating fascism and thus replacing the “age of catastrophe” with a new era of peace and prosperity. Progressive education would ensure that the future generation had the ability to live harmoniously with a rapidly changing Canada. The traditionalist historical narrative as laid out in a speech to an MEA convention audience of teachers, administrators, and trustees by Manitoba industrialist H. B. Brehaut, was vastly different. In this narrative, the “golden age” of Canadian, and

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<sup>44</sup> Franc R. Joubin, “Franc. R Joubin says Schooling Should Start Sooner, Be Tough, Weed Out Failures”, *Macleans*, April 12 1958

indeed Western Civilization was not the future or present, but the past, more specifically the high-point of the British Empire in the late 1800s. Brehaut explained that,

At the turn of the century, we were not in the morass in which we find ourselves today in almost every phase of life. Economically we were still experiencing the effects of the great Victorian Era; new areas were being opened up, our economy was expanding, the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire* was working. Organized labour had not yet come into being...the free-enterprise system was flourishing. A man could start from scratch in business, and in amassing money he could practically go as far as he liked. The sky was the limit.<sup>45</sup>

This romanticization of the era of capitalism unrestricted by organized labor or government involvement was behind many of the calls for a return to traditional education. If this had truly been a “golden age”, then returning to it was infinitely desirable. Unfortunately, this return was no longer possible unless the next generation rejected the postwar compromise, something which was unlikely if progressive education’s goal of creating a new political hegemony was successful. In the minds of traditionalists, even if the present Canadian government were to turn its back on the New liberalism and return to a *laissez-faire* model of society, the next generation would be unable to succeed due to the “softening” of their academic abilities and more importantly of their work ethic and moral fibre. The “Golden Age” could only return if economic and governmental change was combined with an overhaul of the education being given to young people.

For traditionalists, the “Golden Age” had ended because of overconfidence and complacency and the challenge of increased government control over society, both

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<sup>45</sup> H. B. Brehaut, “Some Aspects of Philosophy of Education from the Viewpoint of a Parent and Business Man”, *Manitoba School Journal* 20, no. 3 (Nov. 1958) p. 16-17

external in the form of Communism and Fascism, and internal in the form of the New liberalism. Brehaut stated that although Government control in times of war had been an unfortunate necessity, its continuation into the era of peace posed a threat almost as grave as that of Communism:

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Communist government has complete control over the lives of about 200 million people. In China, the People's Communistic Government is in control of the lives of some 500 to 600 million human beings...Even in the United States there is considerable social legislation and governmental control...In one province - Saskatchewan - we have a socialistic form of government.<sup>46</sup>

This supposed spread of Soviet-style socialism to one of Canada's own provinces was a grave threat according to those who used the red-baiting of the 1950s to attack the social welfare state. They argued that "the benefits of the scientific age have led us away from work and induced government intervention. The amenities of a high standard of living have removed discipline and sapped moral fibre." Nowhere was this more evident than in the schools, where teenagers had become "soft", the curriculum had been "watered-down" and discipline had been forgotten. Brehaut placed the blame for this sorry state of affairs on both the school system itself and the postwar consensus in general:

The common man today does not put as much emphasis on initiative and work as he used to. He knows the power of unionism and he realizes that government, by social welfare measures, has placed an economic net underneath him...[this] has made things so much easier for our young people that they do not want to work.

Worse yet, the school system allowed this erosion of work ethic to occur.

Progressive education refused to impose the sort of discipline and academic rigidity necessary to combat the loss of initiative in society. As a result, Brehaut concluded,

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<sup>46</sup> Brehaut, "Some Aspects of Philosophy of Education"

“schools today turn out graduates, many of whom do not know the fundamentals of expression in their mother tongue.” Thus in the traditionalist narrative, education was, as it was for progressives, a race between education and catastrophe, but for much different reasons than in the progressive narrative.<sup>47</sup>

Laissez faire traditionalists couched their arguments for the rejection of progressive education largely in terms of “individual initiative” versus “false democracy”. Progressive education, it was said, had carried out a well-intentioned but misguided quest to create “democracy” in the classroom but in doing so had neglected individual achievement, which was the path to “true democracy”, in favor of fostering a “false democracy” of forced egalitarianism. In the words of the headmaster of St. John’s Ravenscourt, a Winnipeg private school, “We have adopted a false doctrine in place of a true democracy in our schooling. Instead of saying that equal efforts and equal ability demand equal rewards, we say the rewards should be equal for all regardless of effort or ability.”<sup>48</sup> Another commentator remarked that “students today are being taught conformity, not democracy.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the progressives had misinterpreted rhetoric about human equality and democracy to mean that in the education system no child should be rewarded for greater achievement and no child punished for lack of achievement. A University of Manitoba engineering professor argued that the widely accepted democratic precept that “all men are created equal” did not and should not apply

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<sup>47</sup> Brehaut, “Some Aspects of Philosophy of Education”

<sup>48</sup> Richard Gordon, “Progressive Gains and Losses”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 13 1954

<sup>49</sup> Steward Reid in “One Body Per Empty Classroom”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 19 1957

to the economic realm and that school was the best place for children to begin to understand this principle:

In the field of sports, could there be anything more ludicrous than parents claiming, "My little Willie is as good as your little Willie and he has just as much right to be a champion?" Every little Willie has *the right to try* to be a champion, but if he fails, he is ruthlessly weeded out. But just let Willie fail in school and all hell breaks loose.<sup>50</sup>

Neatby expressed these same fears that the quest for economic and political equality might result in the erosion of the individual's ability to achieve, even if it meant doing so at the expense of others. She argued that there was a "herd" mentality emerging within Canadian schools and Canadian society: "the difference between the group and the herd is the measure of our humanity. The ideal group is composed of free and equal persons...The herd on the other hand follows the leader, or is perhaps merely driven by common instinct or mass emotion."<sup>51</sup>

In other words, if individual achievement was not encouraged by the schools, the possibility of a thriving society based upon capitalism and democracy would be lost. In its place a society would emerge that resembled that of the "organization man", a popular 1950s archetype popularized by William Whyte. This man was, in the words of Mona Gleason a "faceless, powerless, degraded white-collar worker", lacking the individualism and masculinity needed to resist Communism or other forms of authoritarianism.<sup>52</sup> Fears

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<sup>50</sup> G. A. Russell, "Education: The Real Problem", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 29 1958

<sup>51</sup> Hilda Neatby, "The Group and the Herd", *Learning for Thinking: Manitoba Educational Association Forty-Ninth Annual Convention*, (Easter 1954), 19, Department of Education Publications, Instruction Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

<sup>52</sup> Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 53

of creating the “organization man” and critiques of the progressive education system both demonstrated the concern that proponents of *laissez-faire* capitalism had about the postwar consensus. They distrusted institutions such as the public education system that allegedly reinforced this new consensus by turning out, in the words of Neatby, “self-centered little automatons” rather than motivated, competitive individuals.<sup>53</sup> A speaker addressing the Winnipeg Liberal Association in 1952 made this point abundantly clear, arguing that education was the only defense that believers in economic individualism had against the “collectivism or over-dependence on government” that *laissez-faire* ideologues regarded as the present trend in their society.<sup>54</sup>

Not all traditionalists were disgruntled believers in *laissez-faire*. What made traditionalism successful as an intellectual movement was not ideological uniformity but the ability of various groups, each with different reasons for opposing the changes in the education system, to find enough common ground to come together in pressuring for curricular change. Some disliked progressive education on grounds of its connection to psychology and reliance upon the guidance of “experts”. However, in both cases, opposition to progressive education was related to fears of the erosion of freedom of the individual, and concern with the role of large and seemingly distant institutions in the everyday lives of Canadians. In this sense, the concern that big government was destroying the individual initiative that made capitalism successful was related to the concern that the “scientific” knowledge of the psychological profession was becoming an

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<sup>53</sup> Neatby in Kuffert, L. B, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939-1967* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2003) 164

<sup>54</sup> “Education Only Solution Says Pigott”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 21 1952

almost religious movement that imposed itself upon those who were to be subject to its prescriptions.

The “religion of psychology” came under vicious attack by traditionalists as part of their attack upon progressive education. Although many historians, as noted earlier, have described the 1950s as the “age of the expert”, a time when public trust in scientific professionals reached an all time high, the cult of the expert also generated a massive backlash among those who were distrustful of the idea that empowering trained professionals would result in the ushering in of a new era of happiness and prosperity for all Canadians. The critics of the increased use of psychological expertise portrayed the experts, not as revered figures but as little more than charlatans, the modern day equivalent of nineteenth century patent-medicine peddlers or confidence men. Progressive educationists, in their view, were naive dupes, fooled, in the words of one former principal and school inspector, “by the specious arguments of a handful of psychologists with a distorted view of the world and some queer notions of how to cure its ills.”<sup>55</sup> A *Macleans* editorial rejected progressivism on similar grounds, claiming, “the Freudians...seized control of the schools and set them out on their dubious campaign to turn us into a nation of well-adjusted steamfitters.”<sup>56</sup> In addition to a large dose of white-collar snobbery, this editorial expressed what was quickly becoming a popular theme in the 1950s: psychologists were not to be trusted despite their claiming to have discovered incontrovertible scientific truths about the workings of the human mind. The editorial

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<sup>55</sup> William E. Hume, “Are the Schools Ruining Your Child?”, *Macleans*, March 1 1952

<sup>56</sup> “The Schools are for Schooling”, *Macleans*, April 1 1952

accused progressive educators of ruining the teaching profession by turning teachers into “amateur psychiatrists” and concluded, “the revolt of the reactionaries is long overdue and we wish them all success and honor.”<sup>57</sup>

The “reactionaries” did not take long to take up the gauntlet thrown down by Canada’s most read weekly magazine. Denouncing the power of psychology, particularly child psychology, became one of the favorite pastimes of many Canadian commentators. Psychologists were accused of promoting complete permissiveness in the schools and at home. “Dr. Williams”, a child psychologist, told *Macleans* that his profession had been taken over by a “lunatic fringe” who promoted progressive education.<sup>58</sup> Traditionalist critics of progressive education used scare tactics and exaggeration to appeal to a (hopefully) frenzied public. Within their exaggerations, however, lay a quite accurate observation: child psychologists, by promoting a radically developmental and environmentalist view of human nature and child development, had removed almost all responsibility for the future mental well-being of the individual from biological factors, the influence of peers, or the child itself, and placed it exclusively at the doorstep of the child’s parents (usually the mother) and teachers. This “blame the parents” idea, as seen in chapter one, provoked a fierce response from opponents of child psychology and progressive education. “Dr. Williams” explained the situation this way:

The average mother is bewildered...She is told that she is entirely and solely responsible for her children’s emotional future, that by her ineptitude she can ruin the child’s life. If her children don’t turn out to be perfectly adjusted, she’s to blame - either she hasn’t read enough or she has misconstrued what she has read.

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<sup>57</sup> “Schools are for Schooling”

<sup>58</sup> “Dr. Williams”, “Don’t let the Child Experts Scare You”, *Macleans*, May 14 1955

The efforts of a great many people to be modern well-informed “scientific” parents have left them frustrated, confused, and guilt-stricken to the point where the term “parental anxiety” had been added to the language of psychology...It’s time the parents stopped letting themselves be scared by the experts.<sup>59</sup>

Just as parents were subject to the prescriptions of the “experts”, so too were teachers. Some joined the revolt against the experts and questioned whether they were as unqualified to deal with their pupils’ psychological health as the experts implied. Many teachers argued that the experts were simply making work for themselves as guidance counselors by insisting that this role was beyond the capability of the average teacher. They argued instead that the most natural counselor was the teacher, due to her familiarity with the individual child and her “common sense” developed over years of hands-on classroom experience rather than formal schooling.<sup>60</sup> Even teachers who were heavily in favor of progressive education began to question the increased role of psychological professionals. Sybil Shack, a staunch defender of progressive education and vocal critic of Neatby, wrote an article for *The Manitoba Teacher* entitled “How to Tame Your Child’s Temper Tantrums” that rejected trying to apply the broad generalizations and “scientific” principles found in the writings of child psychologists on the basis that these tended to treat all children as fundamentally the same when in reality the key to classroom discipline was recognition of the uniqueness of each child and thus the necessity of a different approach for each one. Shack explained that while dumping a jug of cold water on one child who was having a temper tantrum worked for her in one case, in another,

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<sup>59</sup> “Dr. Williams”, “Don’t Let the Child Experts Scare You”

<sup>60</sup> Donald W. Berger, “The Teacher’s Role in Guidance”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 8 (Apr. 1946) p. 11

“the jug treatment would have been disastrous” as in this case affection and understanding were required.<sup>61</sup>

Although progressive educators often joined in on the attacks against what they perceived as an overly theoretical approach to teaching the management of student mental hygiene, it was traditionalists who generally used the revolt against the experts to score political points and attempt to bring people into their camp. In her preface to *So Little for the Mind*, Neatby explicitly noted that she was *not* an expert in education and had no formal training in this field whatsoever. She claimed that she had not attempted a “research project” nor undertaken a “detailed and documented picture” of the education system.<sup>62</sup> In attempting to address the disaffected parents and teachers of Canadian children directly, Neatby felt it first necessary to distance herself from the education system and the experts who guided it. Ironically, Neatby’s admission that she had no formal training in the field of public education became one of the chief criticisms levied against her book by progressive educationists. J. W. Chafe, principal of Alexander School commented “that a scholar, a specialist in one field at the university level, would naturally “know” about education for the millions in the elementary and high school” was a fallacy.<sup>63</sup> In criticizing Neatby for not being “scientific” in her approach and relying upon her own subjective experience rather than objective statistical data, however, Chafe and others were playing right into Neatby’s hands. Her very argument was that it was

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<sup>61</sup> Sybil Shack, “How to Tame Your Child’s Temper Tantrums”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 34, no. 4 (Jan/Feb 1956) p. 14

<sup>62</sup> Neatby, *So Little For the Mind*, (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1953) vii

<sup>63</sup> Chafe, “Are the Schools Ruining Your Child”

*because* of her rejection of the paradigms created by “experts” that she could be trusted. It was her outsider status that gave her pronouncements on public education weight. Ultimately, Neatby was rejecting the entire positivistic world view that underlay progressive education and the postwar consensus. Neatby expressed this general discomfort at the direction of society toward specialization: “I am disturbed at the apparent indifference of the experts to the disappearance of the old-fashioned concept of the ‘educated person’ who chose to rest his reputation on bearing and conversation, rather than on degrees and ‘research’”.<sup>64</sup> In other words, the battle between traditionalists like Neatby and progressives was, on one level, part of an ongoing debate over the scientific expert versus the “gentleman scholar”.

On another level, the debate was a turf war between psychologists and laymen that became a battle between science and religion. Several historians have attributed the rise of postwar psychology partially to the significant ability for self-promotion possessed by psychologists themselves. They have noted that during the Second World War, psychologists were quite willing to work within the military, conducting valuable fieldwork but also, by virtue of their later claim to have helped win the war, enhancing their reputation and establishing their claim to patriotism.<sup>65</sup> Several contemporary opponents of psychology made similar observations regarding the ability of the profession to provide business for its growing number of practitioners. A professor of classics at the

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<sup>64</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, vii

<sup>65</sup> See Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* and Herman, Ellen. *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995

University of Alberta explained: "I can't help thinking that there has been a boom in psychiatric cases and problem children" since the implementation of progressive education.<sup>66</sup> In other words, as the number of psychological professionals grew, they required a market for their services and, as in many other industries, they couldn't wait for the public to create this market on their own; they had to create it for themselves.

Increasingly, psychologists found themselves competing for the power to direct human behavior with a surprise opponent: religion. Many traditionalists, in attacking the use of psychology in the schools, openly advocated a "return" of religious instruction, (although it had never truly left) for many of the same reasons that progressives promoted psychology. Traditionalists, while rejecting what they referred to as social engineering in the schools, still acknowledged that the purpose of schooling should be, at least in part, to socialize children into the social and moral norms of society. However, they argued that the psychological approach to doing this was, like the curriculum, sugar-coated and watered-down. Neatby accused school administrators of ignoring "the virtues that are summed up for Christians in the doctrine of love; justice, kindness, sympathy and tact" in favor of "short-cuts, the special techniques or tools, so typical of our scientific age."<sup>67</sup> Thus she concluded, "we have courses in human relations, in mental hygiene and...courses conveying special recipes for "getting along" but no moral education that provides the traits necessary for people to actually "get along" outside of the school."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hardy, *Are We Educating for Ignorance?*

<sup>67</sup> Neatby, *So Little For the Mind*, 104

<sup>68</sup> Neatby, *So Little For the Mind*, 104

Neatby's criticism of science as the basis of moral education was echoed by many clergymen, including Reverend Daniel Matheson from Waskada, Manitoba who accused the public education system of teaching "the scientific search for truth without emphasizing the moral responsibility that scientific advancement must carry with it." In other words, pure science was amoral and, without proper guidance from Christian teachers, could be put to a variety of evil uses by the coming generation. Thus, Matheson concluded, "any system of education that develops in a one-sided way toward scientific inquiry and neglects the moral and spiritual emphases of life is not adequate."<sup>69</sup> Many traditionalists feared that, amidst the postwar adoration for the social sciences, the public education system had made the mistake of assuming secular rationality alone could provide a basis for children learning moral behavior.

Fears that progressive education, in its promotion of scientific rationality, had left a vacuum when it came to moral education led to calls by many for a revival of more overtly religious instruction in the school system. *Macleans* printed an article praising a private school teacher who "scorns child psychology" and instead provided strict religious instruction to her charges. The article approvingly stated, "her library doesn't contain a single book on child and teen-age psychology but it does include two hundred Bibles fingerprinted by her young students. The Bible is her textbook."<sup>70</sup> This teacher was quoted as stating: "Send the product of progressive education to me, and I'll straighten

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<sup>69</sup> Daniel Matheson, "Religions Education in the Schools", *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 4 (Dec. 1945) p. 6

<sup>70</sup> Shirley E. Mair, "Edith Read's Ungentle Formula for Raising Young Ladies", *Macleans*, March 2 1957

the brat out with little difficulty.”<sup>71</sup> Such a statement surely appealed to many readers who shared the widely popular belief that the current crop of school children had indeed been allowed to become “brats” thanks to the permissiveness and godlessness of progressive education.

The Manitoba government acted upon the call for greater religious instruction in schools, passing a law in 1955 which made religious exercises in school compulsory unless overruled by an individual school board via a by-law passed each year. This replaced previous legislation that stipulated these exercises were optional for all students and would take place only at the very end of each day.<sup>72</sup> According to the new law, teachers were required to read from the Bible at least once a week in grades 1-4, three times per week in grades 5-6 and daily in the higher grades. These Bible readings were to be at least 10 minutes in length and could not be conducted via a tape recording or intercom.<sup>73</sup> In 1959, the Royal Commission report, in one of its most publicized recommendations, proposed that private religious schools be given public funding, “so long as they are accountable to the department of education for certain standards.”<sup>74</sup> This longstanding reversal of the principle of one single, secular public education system which dated from the time of the Manitoba Schools Question demonstrates that there had been a sea change in some circles regarding private religious schooling. Whereas these

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<sup>71</sup> Edith Read in “Edith Read’s Ungentle Formula”

<sup>72</sup> Wilson, Keith, “The Development of Education in Manitoba” (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1967) 372

<sup>73</sup> “New Religious Regulations Slated for Manitoba Schools”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 22 1955

<sup>74</sup> *Royal Commission*, 181

schools were once regarded as a threat to the cultural cohesion of the province and an impediment to the progress of Canadian civilization itself, now they were seen by traditionalists as a bastion of common sense and good solid pedagogy amidst a sea of progressive experimentation. The Royal Commission report demonstrated that the pressure put upon the government from those advocating a greater role for religion in the public school system was achieving clear and tangible results.

While laissez-faire traditionalists charged progressive education with eroding the individual initiative at the heart of a successful capitalist society and anti-expert traditionalists called for the rejection of child psychology, a third group opposed progressive education on the grounds that it was eroding Canadian culture by creating a generation of uncultured and materialistic philistines. Cultural conservatives formed perhaps the most vocal group in opposition to progressive education and could be found in almost every major Canadian publication promoting their contention that, in the words of Neatby, "Progressivism is anti-cultural."<sup>75</sup> Of course the very notion that something can be "anti-cultural" relies upon one accepting a very rigid and exclusive definition of what "culture" is. Cultural conservatives defined "culture" exclusively as high culture, specifically Anglo-Canadian or Western European art forms in which they themselves could claim to be expert. This was an innately reactionary definition of culture that venerated the past and rejected almost any new media on the grounds of form rather than content. In other words, this was a definition of culture as "sweetness and light", with what was sweet and light to be decided by cultural elites who were well-versed in

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<sup>75</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 16

previously approved of cultural forms. When the public school system failed to conform to such a rigid definition of culture in its curriculum, it was accused by people such as Neatby of having “cut off many if not most of our pupils from any real enjoyment or understanding of the inheritance of western civilization; and certainly from any sense that the achievements and values of the past are a trust to be preserved and enriched for the future.”<sup>76</sup>

The portrayal of a once glorious cultural heritage of Western Civilization that was now fading with the coming of mass culture was crucial to the traditionalist critique of progressive education. The schools of the 1950s, by watering down the curriculum and filling it with frill subjects that were not sufficiently intellectually rigorous, were said to be failing to inculcate their students with an appreciation of the great art and literature which represented the high point of human achievement. George Hardy, professor of classics at the University of Alberta, complained that it was not until university that students gained exposure to “the thoughts, beliefs, events and ideas which are the mainsprings of western civilization.”<sup>77</sup> Since only a very small percentage of Canadians would ever attend a university, most children were completing their formal education without learning their proper cultural heritage. Instead, according to Hardy, in the interests of “fun” and promoting understanding of other cultures they learned a “hodgepodge” of information about “Laplanders, Eskimos, Incas and so on” instead of “learning arithmetic, spelling, reading, writing and grammar.” In a thematic unit on the

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<sup>76</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 16

<sup>77</sup> Hardy, “Are We Educating For Ignorance?”

Arctic Circle, Hardy charged, “everyone enjoys puddling around, making igloos out of flour and salt and acting out a little play to show how an Eskimo catches a seal. It’s learning by doing. It’s fun but just what definite knowledge comes out of it all?”<sup>78</sup>

Hardy’s critique of progressive education betrayed a xenophobic snobbery, but also a deep-seated assumption that non-Western cultures and non-written learning strategies were innately inferior. If British Civilization indeed represented the high point of mankind’s cultural advancement, then to instruct children that all cultures were equally worthy of veneration was deeply damaging to the future greatness of Canada. In addition to condemning children learning about igloos, Hardy also placed blame for the supposed sorry state of modern children on “Radio, soap operas, television, the movies, comic books, along with boogie woogie and the crooner.”<sup>79</sup>

It would be easy to simply dismiss Hardy as a humorous anachronism, a fossil out of touch with modern life and an anomaly in this new age of mass consumer culture. However, as other historians have noted, there were many Canadian intellectuals articulating this type of critique of postwar education and postwar society in general. In *A Great Duty* Len Kuffert convincingly argues that conservative cultural critics were a potent force in Canadian society in the 1950s. Numerous Canadian intellectuals displayed their disapproval of a society in which, they believed, “Modern education, mass communication, materialism and scientism...had subverted the reconstruction-era dream of developing responsible citizens and the apparent hedonism of the 1950s compounded

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<sup>78</sup> Hardy, “Are We Educating for Ignorance?”

<sup>79</sup> Hardy, “Are We Educating for Ignorance?”

fears of a generation ever more incapable of appreciating its rich heritage.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, cultural conservatives were not just men and women from a bygone era lamenting its passing and lashing out against that which they did not understand. Rather, they were as interested in reconstruction and the project of establishing a better Canada after the Age of Catastrophe as were the progressives. They believed, however, that this was best achieved by looking backward at the cultural heritage of Western, and particularly British, civilization rather than putting faith in science, technology and the new cultural forms associated with it.

Culturally conservative traditionalists spent as much time decrying mass culture in general as they did levying related attacks upon the education system. In the same article in which he called for formal education to start at an earlier age and for teachers to assign more homework, one traditionalist also condemned “lurid pocket novels” with “pornographic covers”, as well as “magazines with more pictures than print because too many people are bored with reading and thinking.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, if children were too busy with a never-ending pile of homework, perhaps they would not find the time to immerse themselves as Canadian adults allegedly had, in “the moving picture, the vulgar phonograph record, the comic strip, and the tawdry degrading magazine and book.”<sup>82</sup> This argument was a direct rebuttal to the “child-centered” learning promoted by progressives. According to traditionalists, if children were allowed to do only what they

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<sup>80</sup> Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 160

<sup>81</sup> Joubin, “Franc. R Joubin says Schooling Should Start Sooner, Be Tough, Weed Out Failures”

<sup>82</sup> Hume, “Are the Schools Ruining Your Child?”

were interested in, they would read, watch and listen to garbage as their parents did. Since teenagers did not possess the intellectual maturity to go “beyond the Elvis Presley stage” and “their idea of having fun is limited to getting drunk,”<sup>83</sup> according to one commentator in a Winnipeg paper, they could not be permitted to have control over the content of their own education. The result of progressive education, according to Clive Cardinal, a professor in the University of Manitoba German department, had been to allow the children to “rule the roost,” resulting in a situation in which “the average cultural level of the majority of our Canadian high school graduates has not advanced beyond the chronic imbecility of an Elvis Presley or Jayne Mansfield” and students were “permanently stuck at the mental age of a ten-year-old child.”<sup>84</sup> According to Cardinal, in the Soviet Union, children still learned “the great cultural tradition of Tolstoy, Mayakowsky, Hauptmann and Shaw”. The Russians, it seemed, still understood the importance of high culture. It was only unfortunate that their education system was “aimed at supporting a monolithic and belligerent dictatorship.”<sup>85</sup>

This sort of assessment of the effects of progressive education was not particularly unusual nor was it without support from a significant portion of the Canadian public. In an article in *Chatelaine* which elicited great response, mostly positive, from readers, a former teacher named Jack Blacklock launched into a bitter polemic against progressive education and its cultural effect upon children entitled, “Your Children Made Me Quit

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<sup>83</sup> Clive Cardinal, “Horizons End at Getting Drunk”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 11 1958

<sup>84</sup> Clive Cardinal, “Correcting a Few Misunderstandings”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 12 1958

<sup>85</sup> Cardinal, “Correcting a Few Misunderstandings”

Teaching.” Blacklock complained that teenagers in the 1950s had grown up with “soft” progressive education that never challenged them and catered to their every whim. The result was the creation of an adolescent who “lives in a world of entertainment, not of learning. Only in school is he without a jukebox, a radio, or a television set at his elbow. He is accustomed...to have his thinking done for him.”<sup>86</sup> After asserting that the minority of good students who had not succumbed to this philistinism were unable to get the attention they needed because of the time spent dealing with the disciplinary problems of the majority, he blamed new methods of child rearing promoted by psychologists, specifically the elimination of corporal punishment, for this lack of discipline. Most of the reader response to this article overwhelmingly supported Blacklock’s accusations, with both teachers and parents writing to agree with his assessment of teenagers and thank him for expressing what they had thought it not proper to state publicly. One reader even remarked: “I have one teen-ager, fourteen and I’m afraid I wouldn’t last one year of teaching a classroom full like him. He’s not a delinquent, just one of the crowd who are too lazy and can’t be bothered.”<sup>87</sup> This parent was certainly not buying into the popular notion promoted by psychologists that childhood mental pathologies were almost always the fault of the parents but instead placed the blame squarely upon the influence of popular culture and progressive education.

Canadian historian Arthur Lower, in a speech to the Ontario Educational Association, argued that progressive education was just another symptom of an overly

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<sup>86</sup> Jack Blacklock, “Your Children Made Me Quit Teaching”, *Chatelaine*, May 1957

<sup>87</sup> O. H. Sherman, “Letters to Chatelaine”, *Chatelaine*, June 1957

materialistic postwar era, stating: "the educated man must be lonely in Canada because 99 per cent of the people around him are Philistines; that is narrow minded and materialistic. He cannot expect to be rich, because his education unfits him for the crude, competitive world of commercialism."<sup>88</sup> The president of the Manitoba School Inspectors' Association reported that "observation tends to confirm the impression...that the general attitude toward life of the pupils in the collegiate is becoming more sophisticated and materialistic...There is too much accent on youth today. As a result they tend to acquire an undue sense of their own importance."<sup>89</sup>

Traditionalists were arguing that the children of the postwar era had everything given to them too easily, and were too concerned with narrowminded, selfish goals. This line of argument was similar to that used by laissez-faire traditionalists to attack the welfare state. For cultural conservatives, however, it was not just the increased presence of government in society or the power of labor which made life too comfortable and too easy, but the entire materialistic ethos of the postwar world. K. R. Swinton, traditionalist and chairman of the Canadian Conference on Education, remarked: "I sometimes think the Canadian family is becoming so eager in pursuit of soft living that it is in great danger of turning out a generation whose most intellectual pursuits consist of watching TV serials and reading the comic papers."<sup>90</sup> An Ontario government official, in promoting a "return to basics", commented: "In more recent years, the most commonly accepted signs

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<sup>88</sup> Arthur Lower, in "Academic Snobbery", *Toronto Globe and Mail*, May 2 1952

<sup>89</sup> "Report on Collegiate Departments and Collegiate Institutes", *Annual Report*, 1944-45, 38-39

<sup>90</sup> K. R. Swinton, "Are We Fooling Ourselves", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Dec. 13 1957

of advanced civilization are the invention of the labour-saving devices for ordinary people, and the reduction of the hours of necessary labor...Small wonder, then that young people readily believe that work is an evil, to be avoided if at all possible."<sup>91</sup>

For traditionalists, the solution to this societal decay lay in making school more challenging, even unenjoyable, in order to build a work ethic among students, and in revising the curriculum in such a way that it emphasized higher cultural pursuits rather than mass consumerism and material ease. Above all, education, according to cultural conservatives, should divest itself of a blind faith in science and scientific rationality which "had indeed brought unprecedented mastery over the forces of nature and has enriched our living with a bewildering wealth of material comforts and conveniences...Yet...brought us distress of mind and often the very terror of death."<sup>92</sup> Neatby declared: "what is needed is a renewal of faith and a renunciation of the false rationalism which implicitly denies the power of faith for good or evil in human society. In the excitement of the modern age and the pursuit of rationalism, democracy and materialism we have forgotten where we come from and what we believed in. Ours has become a rootless as well as a faithless society."<sup>93</sup>

One of the most prominent differences between traditionalists and progressives in terms of practical policy was the issue of promotion in the primary grades. Progressive

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<sup>91</sup> J. G. Althouse, *Education for Better Human Understanding: Forty-Seventh Annual Convention. Manitoba Educational Association, Easter 1952, 8*, Department of Education Publications, Instructional Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg

<sup>92</sup> Althouse, *Education for Better Human Understanding*

<sup>93</sup> Neatby, *So Little For the Mind*, 326-327

educators insisted that social promotion, or passing students along to the next grade for reasons of social adjustment even when they had not completed the academic requirements of the previous grade, was necessary to preserve children's mental health. Traditionalists, on the other hand, condemned this policy, arguing that allowing weaker pupils to proceed was not only hurtful to them but to brighter students who could no longer get the attention they deserved if their classes were filled with students who were unable to keep up with the assigned work. In such classrooms, rather than finding time to modify lessons to fit a variety of intellectual levels, teachers would simply make their lessons easier, thus allowing all students to succeed. Neatby observed: "It would seem that the teacher's principal task is to get down to or below the level of ability of the dullest pupils."<sup>94</sup> Robert Bend, Liberal MLA and former teacher also contended that "so-called progressive education meant teaching to the bottom half of the class and this practice discouraged brighter pupils."<sup>95</sup> The solution to this problem, according to traditionalists, was to do away with the belief that "democratic" education meant that everyone was entitled to rise through the ranks of public school and instead construct "a sound and strenuous liberal education for all who can take it."<sup>96</sup> Once again, individual excellence would be the goal of the school. This return to a system of competitive education pleased cultural conservatives who saw one of the main functions of education as the production of an intellectual elite who would safeguard not only Canada's political

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<sup>94</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 198

<sup>95</sup> Robert Bend in, "No School Equity Here: Roblin", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 14 1954

<sup>96</sup> Neatby in "So Little for the Mind Seen Report's Big Fault", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 25 1953

institutions but also its cultural heritage. Whereas, under progressive education's misguided attempts at creating democracy, the gifted child would have been "ignored" and "deliberately held back by a system which makes no provision for their unusual fast-learning abilities and allows their minds to be clouded over with mediocrity"<sup>97</sup>, a return to traditionalism would mean a school program designed to cater to the intellectually superior. If this meant that schools would be overtly creating an elite and rejecting the majority or that the trend toward more individuals finishing school would be reversed, that was acceptable to traditionalists.

Thus, the traditionalists reacted to accusations that they were promoting elitism not by denying it as perhaps their critics expected but by admitting that they desired the creation of an intellectual elite and arguing that this was not incompatible with the principles of a democratic society. In response to school inspector E. F. Sims, who criticized the creation of special programs for "gifted" students on the grounds that, "life in the adult world is not divided into little groups or streams...Pupils must learn to live and work with all types of their fellows"<sup>98</sup>, the superintendent of Winnipeg's schools replied that segregation into little groups was *exactly* what both the adult world and the high school world entailed. He argued that high schools were already segregated according to intelligence because gifted students tended to register for options that were more difficult whereas less bright students tended to pick easier options. Creating a series of "special classes" for gifted students would simply be an overt acknowledgment

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<sup>97</sup> "Escape from Mediocrity", *Calgary Herald*, Dec. 21 1957

<sup>98</sup> E. F. Sims in, "School Inspector Fears Aristocracy of Brains", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 25 1957

of what was already happening informally.<sup>99</sup> In terms of society, traditionalists argued that Canada functioned best when it was divided into “streams” with those suited for intellectual work and leadership holding certain occupations.

Cultural conservatives made no efforts to disguise their goal of creating an elite to lead Canadian society. They argued: “no society can survive, let alone prosper without such an elite.”<sup>100</sup> Arthur Lower, while insisting that he believed that everyone had the right to attend school, declared:

Families of great distinction have a vast contribution to make, for they carry along with them from generation to generation much of the apparatus of civilization...If a really rigorous standard were maintained in our universities, they would not be troubled with over-crowding. Many of those now in attendance would be following some other type of training and not merely cluttering up the classroom where more gifted students could wrestle profitably with the problems that perpetually perplex mankind.<sup>101</sup>

While such overt elitism might have struck some as undemocratic, (particularly Lower’s discussion of intelligence as running in certain families), Neatby and many other traditionalists did not believe themselves to be anti-democratic. Instead, they accused progressives of failing to understand the true meaning of the word “democracy” and of using it for political purposes, thereby rendering it “now almost useless except for uses of propaganda.”<sup>102</sup> In Neatby’s formulation, the type of democratic equality promoted by the progressives would lead to totalitarianism, whereas the traditionalist program of

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<sup>99</sup> “Educators Defend Classes for “Brains”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 26 1957

<sup>100</sup> William C. Graham, “Some Fruits of Controversy”, *Manitoba School Journal* 15, no. 8 (April 1954) p. 7

<sup>101</sup> Arthur Lower, “Does Our Education Educate?”, *Macleans*, Nov. 15 1948

<sup>102</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 3

education, by praising the noteworthy individual rather than rewarding conformity and mediocrity, would preserve true Canadian democracy. In *So Little For the Mind*, Neatby explained:

We have...in the west, striven to replace the aristocratic principle in society by a democratic equality. Much good has resulted and much more may result. Here, too, however, there has been neglect of the essential fact that men are not equal, and that they do not really desire equality...Their real danger has been the emergence of an equalitarianism which replaces equality. The danger of expressing democratic equality in terms of a dull level of mediocrity, the fatuous worship of the common man not because he is a man but because he is common, is too familiar to need emphasizing. Again, the reaction against it can be seen clearly in dictatorships with their countless ranks and grades, their innumerable badges and uniforms.<sup>103</sup>

In other words, mankind had a “natural” desire for some degree of hierarchy and elitism. If Canadian society failed to provide a limited hierarchy based upon academic achievement within the context of a democratic system of government, people’s natural desire for hierarchy would turn to extreme forms of authoritarianism. Soviet Communism’s authoritarian nature was therefore explained as a product of a misguided attempt to create complete equalitarianism. If Canadian society were to avoid such a fate itself, it had to replace progressive education and the postwar compromise it reinforced with a traditional approach to education and a return to a society based upon laissez-faire economics, cultural conservatism and a healthy scepticism regarding scientific rationality. The alternative, sometimes explicitly named but always implied, was to allow the Soviet model of society to overtake “Western Civilization” and turn Canada into a totalitarian dystopia.

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<sup>103</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 17

The Cold War figured heavily in the rhetoric of traditionalist critiques of Progressive Education. Just as Neatby used the specter of Communist Russia to argue for the creation of an intellectual elite via public schooling, others used the Cold War to argue for the urgency of the issue of public education itself. Western Civilization, it was said, faced a grave threat to its existence. This threat could be answered, not only with military force and the construction of nuclear arsenals but by the creation of an internally strong Canada with a future generation who possessed the moral fibre and intellectual know-how to build a society that could demonstrate its material and spiritual superiority to Communism. The Cold War was in one sense part of a strategy used by traditionalists to argue for immediate action based upon their critique of the education system. Traditionalists, however, were not just cynically using Cold War rhetoric to gain public approval and acceptance. Many of them genuinely believed the rhetoric themselves and thus "cold warriors" made up a separate fourth group of the diverse alliance of educational traditionalists.

While many traditionalist educationists had, since the beginning of the Cold War, used competition with the Soviet Union as justification for the elimination of progressive education and a return to a traditional public school system, it was only after the launch of Sputnik in October of 1957 that the Cold War became an issue that could be used to generate immediate public interest in education. The knowledge that the Soviets had developed the capability to send an aluminum ball less than two feet in diameter into space, within the already fear-infested climate of the Cold War, sent shockwaves through American and Canadian society. Suddenly, it seemed that no discussion of public

education in Canada would be complete without the mention of the word "Sputnik". American historian David Donahue argues that within weeks of Sputnik's launch, the media and public began to question how the Soviets could have possibly pulled ahead in the "space race" and almost immediately placed the blame on the differences in the school systems of the two countries. Observers quickly concluded that, whereas the Soviet Union had a highly disciplined and regimented system of education in which the brightest students were bombarded with advanced mathematics and science, the American system had become "soft", turning out high school graduates who possessed only a limited background in the hard sciences due to the progressive bent of education over the previous decade.<sup>104</sup> In Canada, the public interpretation of Sputnik was remarkably similar. Canadians were told that Sputnik was incontrovertible proof of the softness of education in their own country and a wake-up call to change if they were ever to catch up to the Communists. One Canadian scientist even contended that the launch of two Sputniks had been a "strategic blunder" on the part of the Soviets, since, "the firing of the two Soviet satellites into outer space awakened the West to the peril it faced as a result of Russian scientific advances."<sup>105</sup> Presumably, if the Soviets had kept their scientific superiority a secret, Canadians would not have been alerted to their own ineptitude and would have continued to fall further behind. Knowledge of how far ahead the school system of the Soviet Union was, the scientist concluded, would only lead to a

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<sup>104</sup> David M. Donahue, "Serving Students, Science or Society? The Secondary School Physics Curriculum in the United States, 1930-1965", *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1993)

<sup>105</sup> Gordon Shrum in, "Sputniks Could Backfire on Russians", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 9 1958

reform of Canadian education.<sup>106</sup>

Sputnik, like the publication of *So Little for the Mind*, unleashed a flood of new criticism directed against Canada's public schools.<sup>107</sup> In commenting upon the annual education week in Manitoba in 1958, the *Winnipeg Tribune* remarked, "overhead, the Soviet sputnik has added urgency to the perennial education debate."<sup>108</sup> The President of Carleton University warned that "Sputnik may be the prologue to new and ghastly weapons of destruction: it is certainly the beginning of a new age that will destroy old categories, and send the mind and imagination voyaging on strange seas of thought". He argued that Sputnik challenged Canada to "make sure that our highest intellectual resources in all areas of knowledge are developed and made available to the nation."<sup>109</sup> Most traditionalists, however, were very pessimistic about what kind of intellectual resources their country was capable of mustering in response to the Soviet threat. When they compared their own education systems within Canada to that which supposedly existed in the Soviet Union, their own systems were found sorely lacking.

This late-1950s Cold War rhetoric represented a radical break from attitudes being taught in schools only a few years previously. In 1945, before the escalation of the rhetoric of the Cold War, the Soviet Union itself was portrayed within the schools as a benign friend, rather than a grave threat to the existence of civilization. Educational films

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<sup>106</sup> "Russia May Come to Regret Sputniks", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 9 1958

<sup>107</sup> McCall, "How "Soft" Are Our Schools?"

<sup>108</sup> "Teachers and Sputnik", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 1 1958

<sup>109</sup> Claude Bissell, "Dr. Claude Bissell says Universities must answer Sputnik with higher standards", *Macleans*, April 12 1958

about Russia reflected the official wartime government propaganda which portrayed the Russians as intrepid fighters and good allies in the battle against the Nazis.<sup>110</sup> School children in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War were taught to respect the contributions and sacrifices made by the Russians and to regard the Soviet Union as an advanced and sophisticated society but one obviously inferior to Western capitalist society. Early 1950s accounts of the Soviet education system were not particularly favorable, as evidenced by the comments of one Manitoba professor of education that the Russians were largely an “illiterate” people and that, “it isn’t just greater resources that help the United Nations outstrip the Russians in the arms race - it is partly their better education.”<sup>111</sup> The Russians, and their system of education, were to be pitied rather than feared.

Within a few years, however, commentators on Soviet education had changed their tune. In 1956, the president of Massey-Harris-Ferguson told readers of the *Manitoba School Journal* that they had been underestimating the Russians “because of many outward signs of backwardness” when in fact the Soviets had not only caught up to the West in terms of engineering and science but had already surpassed them.<sup>112</sup> The reason behind this incredible transformation in Russian scientific achievement was said to be their education system’s almost single-minded devotion to the pursuit of academic

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<sup>110</sup> Descriptions of National Film Society films, “Pathway to the Future” and “Under Siege”, *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no. 5 (Jan. 1945) p. 17

<sup>111</sup> Neville Scarfe, “Education for the Future”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 30, no. 5 (Mar/Apr 1952)

<sup>112</sup> James S. Duncan, “Russia’s Bid for World Supremacy: Part I”, *Manitoba School Journal* 18, no. 1 (Sept. 1956) p. 22-33

achievement. Russian children, it was said, attended school for six days a week, took few vacations and were subject to extremely rigid discipline within the classroom. This academic rigor had led to a situation in which a Russian child had attained a better education in the sciences after 10 years than a Canadian child had after 12.<sup>113</sup>

In their assessments of Russia's supposed advances in education, commentators said less about the reality of Russian education than they did of their own prescriptions for Canada. The toughness of Soviet education was contrasted with the "diet of cokes and coddling" which traditionalists maintained Canadian children were given. Whereas Russian discipline had been designed to produce scientists who were fully committed to serving the state, the Canadian experiment with progressivism had resulted in neither scientific ability nor independent thought. The Canadian school system under progressivism, it was said, would not "produce the vigorous, independent mind which is the only hope against totalitarianism."<sup>114</sup> Traditionalists upped the stakes in the fight over education, claiming that, in the space age, not just the material prosperity but the very survival of Canada depended upon the elimination of progressive education. In the words of one traditionalist, "All the "life adjustment" that is practiced under the cult of progressivism won't be worth a hoot if the Russians take over the Western World. That will call for another type of adjustment that won't be pleasant."<sup>115</sup> The purpose of public education, then, was to provide a generation of Canadians with the moral and intellectual

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<sup>113</sup> James S. Duncan, "Russia's Bid for World Supremacy: Part II", *Manitoba School Journal* 18, no. 2 (Oct. 1956) p. 12-13

<sup>114</sup> Abraham Feinburg in, "Challenging the Mass Mind", *Toronto Telegram*, March 22 1957

<sup>115</sup> Carlyle Allison, "The Corner Cupboard", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 5 1957

resilience to combat the threat of the Soviet Union.

The most common reaction to Sputnik specifically and the cold war in general was to call for an increase in both quality and quantity of science education. In the United States, high school science textbooks that once used the progressive “problem solving” approach to science which attempted to relate all abstract scientific principles to daily experiences such as “how to cook a potato” were shelved in favor of a return to a more traditional form of science education that emphasized decidedly impractical subjects such as nuclear physics. This change in approach was a product of the call for the US to gear science education toward the discovery and cultivation of a few gifted scientists capable of producing research breakthroughs in areas with military applications such as nuclear physics or rocketry.<sup>116</sup> In Canada, there were also calls for an increased emphasis upon traditional science in the classroom. The “scientist-gap” that was said to exist between the West and Russia, traditionalists alleged, was not closing because the government had misspent its money on short term acquisition of military equipment rather than attempting to solve the long term problem of military advancement through reforming education from the earliest levels.<sup>117</sup> The heads of the Canadian Manufacturers Association and the Chemical Institute of Canada both called for more math and science education in the schools from the lowest grades onward in order to reduce the shortage of engineers and technicians that Canada supposedly was experiencing.<sup>118</sup> In their minds,

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<sup>116</sup> Donahue, David M, “Serving Students, Science or Society?”

<sup>117</sup> “Knowledge is Power”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 15 1956

<sup>118</sup> “Soviets Gaining Lead in Science”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Aug. 4 1956; “Canada Facing Education Crisis”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 5 1957

the creation of a few skilled scientific minds was more important than the creation of a population who understood the application of scientific principles to their daily lives.

In order to produce more scientifically-trained professionals, traditionalists also called for changes in the way science was taught to students. Progressives had hoped to create a system of science education that was geared toward giving everyone a broad introduction to the scientific method and educating children about some basic scientific principles that were related to most people's everyday experiences. This meant an emphasis on "life sciences" such as botany, zoology or geology. At the elementary level this meant that what existed in the way of science education was concerned with nature study and appreciation, or a hands-on discovery of the natural world rather than the exploration of scientific laws and theories. Traditionalists, in their quest to identify bright students and give them advanced training in preparation for certain careers, wanted the education system to focus more on subjects such as Chemistry and Physics that may not have been directly related to the lives of young children. The education of all children was not as much of a priority as granting "special attention to pupils of superior ability."<sup>119</sup> Traditionalists, chief among them university professors, recommended that, just as Russia did, Canada divide students according to intellectual ability at the age of 11 in order to provide the upper streams with more advanced scientific education.<sup>120</sup> Such a proposal went completely against one of the main principles of progressive education: educational equality. Not surprisingly, the proposal for streaming encountered opposition

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<sup>119</sup> W. W. McCutcheon, "Society's Greatest Resources", *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 9 (April 1956) p. 17

<sup>120</sup> "Our Undemocratic Education: Prof. Suggest Streaming", *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 15 1959

from many who feared that in emulating the Soviet education system because it produced more scientists, Canada might find itself also emulating Soviet authoritarianism. A *Macleans* editorial expressed the fear that the development of an ICBM by the Soviets might “frighten us into imitating the Soviet concept of education as an end, not to the growth and well-being of the individual, but to the protection and glorification of the state.”<sup>121</sup>

While many traditionalists called for the creation of a rigid education in science in order to meet the challenge of the Cold War, others worried that doing so would neglect the liberal arts and eliminate the differences in education that made young Canadians better citizens than their Russian counterparts. Some traditionalists warned against Canadians creating an education system that focused too much upon preparing students for specific professions and not enough on a liberal education in the humanities that was required so that Canadians could resist the propaganda of Communist states.<sup>122</sup> An editorial in the *Manitoba Teacher*, addressing the public panic over education that occurred after Sputnik, commented that despite the initial knee-jerk calls for more emphasis upon science, intelligent Canadians had come to realize “that our way of life was not built upon science, though supported by it, but rather upon certain moral, ethical and spiritual concepts, and that to concentrate upon science would be to destroy what we sought to preserve...Today we must realize that our main aim must be to develop the best

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<sup>121</sup> “In Copying the Russians’ Bomb Let’s Not Copy their Schools”, *Macleans*, March 2 1957

<sup>122</sup> Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 44

possible citizens in terms of our values.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, while some cold warriors in the traditionalist camp turned their attention to science, others called for a re-commitment to the sort of liberal education that many argued had been lost amid the frills of progressive education. The cultural conservatives such as Neatby were able to use the Cold War as a call for a rediscovery of the cultural heritage of Western Civilization within the public school system.

The cold warrior and cultural conservative threads of the traditionalist movement shared certain fundamental similarities. Both charged that progressive education had produced a generation of philistines capable of reading nothing more intellectual than a comic strip and who would be unable to take on the role of world leadership from the previous generation.<sup>124</sup> War against mass culture and war against Communism were two sides of the same coin and both depended upon the abolition of progressive education and a restoration of traditional education.

Traditionalists succeeded in acting as a powerful historical bloc that gained public attention and support for its critiques of the education system because of alliances such as the one between cold warriors and cultural conservatives. The various factions which made up the traditionalist movement certainly had many different ideological agendas. Some were believers in laissez-faire who saw progressive education as eroding individualism and promoting reliance upon and support of government intervention into economic affairs. Others were motivated by their concern with the increased role of

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<sup>123</sup> Author Unknown, “What Should We Teach Our Children”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 38, no. 5 (Mar/Apr 1960) p. 6-7

<sup>124</sup> F. D. Baragar, “Past President’s Address”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 26, no. 1 (May/June 1947) p. 12-16

psychology in the lives of Canadians and the proportionally reduced influence of religion. Still others were cultural conservatives worried about the protection of Canada's cultural heritage or cold warriors who felt that progressive education threatened to leave Canada unable to stand up in the face of the Communist threat. Despite these differences, however, they shared certain fundamental beliefs about education and about Canadian society. They believed that progressive education was eroding individual spirit and initiative, whether in terms of economics, culture or scientific achievement, and replacing it with a promotion of conformity and mediocrity. They believed that progressive education was fundamentally amoral, or perhaps even immoral, and in promoting "adjustment" and psychological well-being had neglected its role as moral guide for young people. Finally, they believed that progressive education had created a generation of "soft" individuals who would not live up to the standards of their predecessors, whether as scientists, cultural critics, capitalists or citizens. Traditionalists were able to translate these common beliefs into a movement against progressive education, and in doing so created a powerful antithesis to it. The dialectic of the debate between progressive education and traditionalism resulted in the development of an entirely new synthesis. This synthesis will be the subject of Part II which will examine how debates between traditionalists and progressives played out in the everyday workings of schools.

## Part II: The Battle Over the Schools in the Manitoba Public Education System

### Chapter 5: The Battle over Reading and Grammar

In discussing how the battle over the schools played out within the context of Manitoba in the late 1940s and 1950s, the specific political context of the time is important. Throughout the postwar period, Manitoba contained numerous individuals from both camps: those who considered themselves “progressives” and supported education that would foster the transition to the new liberalism and “traditionalists” who rejected such changes and perceived a more conservative role for public education in postwar Manitoba. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the period from 1942 to 1960 was one in which one particular side was consistently more powerful than the other. By examining the actions of the Garson, Campbell and Roblin administrations, we can see that Manitoba public policy by and large followed the public consensus regarding the battle over the schools throughout Canada. In both Canadian and Manitoban cases, there was initially a movement or support for reconstruction via progressive education in the late 1940s followed by a wave of criticism from traditionalists in the early to mid 1950s during which time education itself changed little but rhetoric surrounding it intensified. The conclusion of the 1950s saw a limited “victory” for traditionalists, both in terms of claiming control of public rhetoric and governmental policy. In Manitoba, the Liberal-Progressive Garson administration provided the postwar impetus for reform of the school system along progressive lines. During the Campbell years, the Garson reforms were by and large retained, but little was done in the way of pushing for further reform in a progressive direction. The

Conservative Roblin government that was first elected in 1958 had campaigned on a platform which stressed the issue of education and immediately sought to reform the public education system, eliminating many of the Garson-era changes and implementing a program that could best be described as a synthesis of progressive and traditionalist principles.

Stuart Garson first entered political life as part of John Bracken's Progressive, and as of 1931, Liberal-Progressive government. In fact, it was Bracken himself who is said to have encouraged Garson's initial foray into provincial politics in 1927 after hearing him give a speech in Ashern Manitoba.<sup>1</sup> Garson, however, was no political clone of Bracken. Whereas the Bracken years in Manitoba have been described by most historians as fiscally conservative and devoid of any major attempts at social reform, Garson's depression era work on the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations of 1937 and 1938 suggested more of a willingness to reconsider the role of government within Canadian society.<sup>2</sup> The Commission was regarded as crucial to Canada's successful recovery from the depression by those who considered the old policies of laissez-faire and limited government intervention as insufficient and who sought to break the constitutional and logistical impasse that hindered the creation of meaningful social reform measures by either the provincial or federal levels of government.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark E. Vajcner, "Stuart Garson and the Manitoba Progressive Coalition", *Manitoba History* 26, Autumn 1993; for more on Garson's political career, especially within the context of postwar reconstruction see: Gerald Friesen, "Afterword" in P. James Giffen, *Rural Life: Portraits of the Prairie Town, 1946* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> For more on Bracken see: John Kendle, *John Bracken: A Political Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979)

The notion that Garson favored a larger role for government in the creation of the new liberalism was corroborated by his actions after he succeeded Bracken as Premier in 1943.<sup>3</sup> Garson's administration, in their study of the issue of postwar reconstruction, concluded that the solution to finding lasting prosperity and stability in this era was the abandonment of the fiscal conservatism that characterized the Bracken era. Garson himself regarded full employment and the creation of a limited social safety net as the keys to successful reconstruction. Both of these goals, however, could only be accomplished through a degree of government intervention. Although the opposition CCF blasted Garson as being too conservative and not nearly aggressive enough in pursuing the creation of the new liberalism, Garson had clearly split from the right wing of the Liberal-Progressive coalition. The difference between Garson and the CCF, according to Garson biographer Mark Vajcner, lay within the area of "degree and method" rather than overall goals. Whereas the CCF advocated an aggressive program of reconstruction including nationalization of the banking industry to pay for sweeping social reform, Bracken advocated a much more cautious approach that emphasized the continuation of balanced budgets.<sup>4</sup>

Garson's own words confirm his preference for the creation of limited social welfare measures within the framework of a free market system. In a 1947 radio address, Garson reproached the CCF for calling for more government spending and the creation of crown corporations, arguing that public ownership of utilities could never generate as

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<sup>3</sup> Bracken left Manitoba politics to become leader of the federal Conservatives, re-dubbed the "Progressive Conservatives"

<sup>4</sup> Vajcner, "Stuart Garson and the Manitoba Progressive Coalition"

much revenue as taxation of the profits made by private companies and stating “instead of thinking that a panacea for our ills can be found in piling on higher and higher taxes to support more and more so-called free services, we believe that the burden on the taxpayer of providing adequate government service for all...should be kept at as reasonable a level as possible.”<sup>5</sup>

Garson’s cautious and limited approach to the issue of the construction of a social safety net was reflected in his policies in the area of public education. While rejecting more radical calls by those such as the Canadian Teachers Federation for complete overhaul of the education system, a project requiring massive increases in spending, Garson did commit his government to modest spending increases and the creation of the 1944 Select Legislative Committee to study the problem. As we shall see, most of the key recommendations of this committee, including the creation of a program of vocational high school education were followed, but when their implementation ran into opposition and threatened to cause the loss of political capital, as was the case in the plan to amalgamate school districts, they were often neglected.

Garson’s administration, however, also presided over what was perhaps the most significant step in the creation of a “progressive” school program designed to better accomplish the goal of reconstruction along new liberal lines through education: the implementation of new curricula in every level of education. As demonstrated previously, the curriculum revision of the late 1940s brought the progressive theories of

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<sup>5</sup> “How Free are the Free Services of Any Government”, Broadcast of Premier Stuart Garson, CKRC, Winnipeg, June 9 1947, “Stuart Garson”, Vertical Biography Files, Manitoba Legislative Library, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

educational authorities within the system into practice, or at least what was supposed to be practiced if teachers were doing their jobs correctly. That the curriculum was not seriously revised until the early 1960s, despite the firestorm of controversy surrounding education in Canada during the 1950s indicates that the Campbell administration which succeeded Garson in 1948, after the curriculum revisions were already in progress, was much less interventionist than Garson's.

Stuart Garson's cautious commitment to the new liberalism gave Manitoba's progressive educationists some room to place their stamp on the public education system. The Douglas Campbell administration that succeeded Garson in 1948, however, was much less inclined to allow either reform or public expenditure on education. In his memoirs, Duff Roblin assessed the education system which his administration inherited in 1958: "When we came to power in 1958, the state of education in Manitoba could well be described as benighted. The best that could be said is that it might have met the educational needs of Manitoba students of the 1930s. Obviously, this would not do in the 1950s and 1960s."<sup>6</sup> While Roblin's appraisal was obviously colored by the lens of partisan politics, his assertion that his Conservative administration sought to make extensive changes to a system which had been largely ignored during the Campbell years is well-founded. Campbell had largely turned away from the enthusiasm for reconstruction that marked the Garson period of the Liberal-Progressive tenure in government and opted for neither sweeping overhauls of curriculum in a progressive

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<sup>6</sup> Duff Roblin, *Speaking for Myself: Politics and Other Pursuits* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999) 113

direction nor the overt support of a “return to basics”.

In assessing Campbell’s tenure as premier, most observers have concluded that at best “fiscal caution” and at worst “excessive frugality” characterized his time in office.<sup>7</sup> Gildas Molgat, provincial Liberal leader after Campbell defended the financial legacy of the preceding administration by stating, “the Campbell government was careful, but it spent more money than any other government”, arguing that, if Campbell did not increase government spending relative to economic growth or inflation, at least he did not let it stagnate.<sup>8</sup> Campbell’s approach to public spending was assuredly far more conservative than Garson’s administration and represented the ascendancy of the conservative wing of the Liberal-Progressive party. Campbell himself denied that he opposed social reform outright, instead claiming: “I don’t believe in rushing into programs we can’t support”. He explained his conservative approach as a product of personality, describing himself as, “a scot and cautious” and “not the visionary that some folks are, I’m just a practical sort of fellow with average intelligence.”<sup>9</sup> Despite Campbell’s attempts to attribute his policy decisions to personality rather than ideology, his own words and actions demonstrate a lifelong allegiance to a *laissez-faire* liberal approach to government. In an election campaign broadcast in 1953, Campbell bragged of giving Manitoba the lowest taxes and

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Dafoe, “Quintessentially Manitoban”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 29 1995

<sup>8</sup> Gildas Molgat, “Campbell of Manitoba”, undated pamphlet, Vertical Biography Files, “Douglas Campbell”, Manitoba Legislative Library, 200 Vaughan street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

<sup>9</sup> Campbell quoted in Wally Dennison, “Campbell Ends 47 Years of Public Service”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 4 1969

“lowest-cost provincial government in the country.”<sup>10</sup> Years later, Campbell would join the Reform party at the age of 92 because he felt the traditional parties were too committed to maintaining the social policies from the 1950s which he considered to be “socialist” and believed needed to be abandoned in times of economic crisis.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps an appropriate indication of Campbell’s legacy in politics came from the Manitoba Taxpayers Association, a neo-liberal think tank which upon his death in 1995 eulogized Campbell as a debt-reducing, tax-cutting politician who should have been emulated by current leaders.

Campbell’s conservatism was reflected in his administration’s actions, or rather lack thereof, in the area of public education. Under Campbell, the Liberal-Progressives delayed the implementation of outstanding recommendations from the 1944 Select Legislative Committee and failed to undertake any major revision of curricula or convene a commission to study education in the province until 1957. Campbell’s stay-the-course approach to education, which some such as Roblin called outright neglect, was illustrated by his choice of education minister. W. C. Miller, education minister from 1950 until his government’s defeat in the 1958 election, was a former school trustee who originally joined Manitoba’s wartime coalition government as a Conservative, opting to remain in government when the Conservatives left the coalition in 1950.<sup>12</sup> Miller would remain one of the most conservative members of the Liberal party, however, making him a perfect

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Campbell, Radio Broadcast, May 11 1953 CBC, Vertical Biography Files, Manitoba Legislative Library, 200 Vaughan street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

<sup>11</sup> Marjorie Gillies, “Seniors”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Aug. 29 1989

<sup>12</sup> “Meet Your Member”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Feb. 14 1955

choice for a cabinet position in the Campbell government. Miller's tenure as education minister was not only marked by conservatism in education policy, however, but by almost continual controversies, some involving the department of education's policies and some Miller's own conduct as minister. Even Miller's *Free Press* obituary admitted, "Mr. Miller was not a popular politician. He was perpetually at the vortex of controversy, and often earned, he probably absorbed more criticism than any other public figure in Manitoba...He was constantly embattled in the house and frequently in hot disagreement with almost everyone."<sup>13</sup> That Campbell chose to allow a man with a such a reputation to continue in one of the most important cabinet portfolios throughout a period in which educational debates were causing waves all across Canada suggests that his government never attached as high a priority to education as did either those who believed that education was the path to successful postwar reconstruction or those who blamed progressive education for the many ills of Canadian society.

Under pressure from opposition parties and the traditionalist voices which increasingly held sway in the media, Campbell did consent to the creation of the Royal Commission on Education in 1957. Before the MacFarlane report could be published, however, Campbell found himself out of office and replaced by Duff Roblin's Conservative government. Perhaps attempting to gain political advantage by tapping into the ongoing public perception of a "crisis in education" in the post-Sputnik era, Roblin had specifically chosen education as the centerpiece issue of his election campaign and

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<sup>13</sup> "W. C. Miller", Obituary, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 5 1958

thus was committed to undertaking a series of reforms once in office.<sup>14</sup> Roblin initially embraced many of the recommendations of the report which promised to take Manitoba in a more “traditionalist” direction, such as the creation of public funding for private, parochial schools, the elimination of the composite high school and the creation of a merit rating system for teachers. Although the latter would be abandoned due to pressure from teachers, Roblin showed his commitment toward abandoning the Garson-era reconstruction project. Nonetheless, there was never a single moment in the history of postwar Manitoba when either progressives or traditionalists could claim that public education in the province was entirely to their liking.

Both progressives and traditionalists believed the stakes in the battle over public education to be enormously high. If the future greatness of Canada depended upon the ability of public schooling to properly construct the next generation of Canadians, then immediate reform was required either to extend the principles of progressive education or to discard them in favor of an immediate return to basics. The early years of the educational process were perhaps the most vital according to both progressives and traditionalists, since children would become used to certain methods of schooling and, if they did not receive the correct methods, would be hopelessly “behind” children in other provinces or countries and unable to catch up due to pre-established patterns of thinking. Thus, both groups in the battle over the schools sought to gain control over the content of schooling in the primary grades (1-8). Those responsible for planning and implementing

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<sup>14</sup> For one of many examples of Roblin announcing his government’s intention to run a campaign based around the issue of education see; “Education Aid Policy ‘For Voters to Decide’”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 19 1957

the curriculum found themselves assailed from within and without by commentators on both sides of the debate who were hoping to gain converts to their point of view who actually had the chance to implement either progressivism or traditionalism in practice. The debate between progressives and traditionalists, while in some way informing virtually every decision made in regard to public education in the postwar era, focused particular attention on certain key issues. In the primary grades, debates regarding how reading should be taught, and whether students should receive more or less formal grammar education demonstrate how the theoretical debates between traditionalists and progressives influenced the creation and implementation of the Manitoba curriculum.

In revising the 1946 Manitoba primary curriculum, the department of education reflected the immediate postwar trend toward progressive education by overhauling the means by which the school was to accomplish one of the most important and fundamental tasks of early childhood education: teaching children how to read and write. Department officials proudly proclaimed that the new method was vastly superior since it was based upon child psychology and was therefore both much more enjoyable and effective.<sup>15</sup> The new method of teaching reading and writing would no longer be based upon rigid instruction in formal rules of grammar but upon learning that language was an ever-changing entity whose purpose was to encourage self-expression rather than to confine it with a series of restrictive rules. In the words of the curriculum itself,

It is now generally agreed that the standard of correctness in language must be custom and usage. Since language according to this view is the expression of mind and spirit of a people, it must be ever changing. Some teachers fail to

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<sup>15</sup> A. D. Thomson in, "School Reading Today Called Fun, Not Task", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 27 1957

recognize this established fact. They think that it is their duty and within their power to “fix” English in its perfect form, ie. the form which they themselves use. When they attempt to do this the students often become perplexed. They find that language forms taught in school are not used by people outside of school...They are likely to think that the teacher is “fussy” and out of touch with life. Therefore they will be likely to discount much that this teacher teaches.<sup>15</sup>

Teachers were instead to focus upon instructing their pupils in how to use English in everyday situations and express themselves so that others could understand them rather than teaching them to conform to a pre-determined model of English grammar.

If too much emphasis upon rules and structure was harmful because it discouraged students from regarding reading and writing as fun and related to their daily experiences, then it was vitally important that learning to read and write be enjoyable. Child psychologists and curriculum creators expressed anxiety about the possibility of children being put off reading for life if they failed to form a positive impression of the experience at an early age. Thus, great pains were taken to ensure that nothing occurred during the process of learning to read that might cause either frustration or boredom. Constant testing of children’s reading levels was to take place to ensure that they were not working ahead or behind their proper level. For example, if a child was in a grade II classroom but was in fact able to read at the grade III level, then that child was to be given the grade III reader to use during class. Otherwise, progressives charged, children would become bored with the simplicity of their reading material. Similarly, if a child was trying too hard to challenge himself or herself by attempting to read at a level beyond what her or she was currently capable of, he or she was to be stopped from carrying out this allegedly

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<sup>15</sup> *Junior High Grades: English*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1947, 14

frustrating and discouraging experience. Manitoba teachers were instructed to set aside a period every day for “free reading” during which children could select whatever they wished to read so long as it conformed to the level designated by the teacher.

Furthermore, the teacher was not to assist in any way with the child’s independent reading, thus ensuring that the chosen reading level was appropriate. Reading at home was also frowned upon, as parents might not be either able or willing to discourage children from challenging themselves too much or too little.<sup>16</sup>

For very young children, reading of any kind might not be allowed at all! Again, progressive educators cautioned that attempting to read if a child was “not ready” could result in serious psychological damage occurring should they become frustrated by their inability to learn to read quickly. Thus before teaching grade I children to read, teachers were to evaluate whether or not they were ready, as evidenced by their having met certain benchmarks such as attaining a certain speaking vocabulary, being able to speak fluently, recognizing rhymes and having had “normal six-year-old experiences such as caring for pets, going on small trips, looking at pictures, listening to stories.” If students were judged not to be ready, they would be given a chance to have such “normal” experiences, as they would spend their day playing games, singing, telling stories, going on nature explorations and other such activities.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, a system designed to reduce frustration by not allowing students to read until they were ready might have actually produced the opposite effect as evidenced by the comments of one pupil of a Winnipeg

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<sup>16</sup> *English Grades I-VI: Spelling, Reading, Literature, Language Expression and Handwriting*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1946, 11-12

<sup>17</sup> *English Grades I-VI*, 20

primary school during the 1950s whose only vivid memory of grade I was the frustration felt when she went to school expecting to learn to read, only to find that her class was not allowed to do so while another grade I class was.

When students did learn to read, it was through what was referred to as the “word-recognition method”. In this method, students, instead of having to learn the sounds of each letter in isolation and then sound out words to decipher what they meant (the phonetic method), were encouraged to recognize parts of words (common letter combinations such as -ing endings) and then entire words, without having to sound out each letter separately.<sup>18</sup> Students would eventually learn to expand their vocabulary by looking for clues as to what words meant from the surrounding context, and then using their knowledge of letters and combinations of letter sounds to confirm that the word did indeed mean what they guessed it had from an examination of context. Through this method, it was hoped that students would learn that reading was not fundamentally a mechanical process of deciphering sounds without meaning and learning rigid rules of pronunciation but was about finding meaning and locating content. Two reading consultants on the Toronto Board of Education remarked that by implementing the context reading system, students would no longer learn to “read mechanically without understanding what they were reading.”<sup>19</sup> Those who tried to teach English by phonetics were doomed to fail, not only because English is not a phonetic language but because without learning to read by finding out what words *meant*, students would only

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<sup>18</sup> Thomson, “School Reading Today Called Fun, Not Task”

<sup>19</sup> Marian Harvie and Phyllis Todds, “These Educators Disagree: We Say Children Read Better”, *Macleans*, January 1 1955

experience reading as a “meaningless mumbo jumbo of syllables” and would become “soured on the printed word for the rest of their lives.”<sup>20</sup>

Traditionalists regarded the turn away from phonics-based reading instruction to an approach concerned with the enjoyment of the individual student as yet another frightening example of the necessary rigor needed for true academic achievement being watered down in a quest to make learning fun. Many individuals outside the education system in Manitoba made passing reference to the need to reintroduce phonics in the early grades. One Winnipeg couple launched a high profile campaign to get phonics back in the schools which they took all the way to the Canadian Conference on Education.<sup>21</sup> The promoters of phonics as a remedy to the supposed flaws of the context system of reading even had their own version of Hilda Neatby in famed American author Rudolf Flesch, who became a minor celebrity after his book *Why Johnny Can't Read* became a best seller in 1955. Flesch, who had a PhD in English, was perhaps the most articulate advocate of phonics, and used his gift for rhetoric to complain that changing the method by which children were taught to read was threatening Western Civilization itself. Just as cultural conservatives decried progressive education on the grounds that it turned its back upon the glorious British cultural heritage, Flesch claimed that by abandoning phonics, “we’ve thrown out 3500 years of civilization.”<sup>22</sup> He argued that the phonetic method of reading dated back to ancient Rome and represented a massive leap forward from the system of

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<sup>20</sup> Harvie and Todds, “These Educators Disagree”

<sup>21</sup> Bob Preston, “Our Fight on Phonics Goes to Ottawa”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 18 1958

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Flesch, “I Say Your Child Can’t Read”, *Macleans*, January 1 1955

using single symbols to stand in for entire words. By teaching children to recognize entire words at once, as in the current method, children were learning the “Chinese system” which left them unable to discover new words by sounding them out. Just like the cultural conservatives, Flesch was employing cultural chauvinism to argue that anything associated with non-western cultures was destined to erode the capability of young people to reproduce a successful society. Readers of Flesch were assumed to share his prejudice that the Chinese were backward and thus their methods of reading were completely inappropriate for Canadian children. Progressives countered traditionalist attacks on their reading methods by arguing that grammarians such as Flesch were not only conservatives but snobs who at heart wanted to maintain their own cultural authority by turning grammar into a regime which they controlled rather than an ever-changing descriptor of how people communicated in reality. In *Macleans*, a defender of the progressive school system countered traditionalists’ arguments, stating, “language reflects thought. As thinking changes, so language changes. Every effort to prevent language from changing puts a time lock on thinking.”<sup>23</sup>

The debate over how to teach reading and grammar mirrored the debate over education in general, with traditionalists questioning whether schools were becoming too easy and calling for a return to a supposedly glorious past of English civilization as a remedy and progressives condemning traditionalists as hopelessly out-of-touch snobs who let their own conservative biases stand in the way of scientific progress. Progressive

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<sup>23</sup> Edmund Carpenter, “For the Sake of Argument: Edmund Carpenter Says Grammar is Snobbish Nonsense”, *Macleans*, Jan. 5 1957

defenders of reading methods maintained that “dozens of studies confirm the effectiveness of modern educational methods” and that current techniques for teaching reading and writing were the result of “thousands of trained workers (who have) sweated out millions of hours in the last thirty years.”<sup>24</sup> The advance of educational methods was compared to industrial progress, as both were said to have been made possible by “long hard work of experiment, testing analysis and thinking.” For “armchair critics” to denigrate the current system of education was as much an insult to the educational experts as a person off the street claiming to know more about how to design a new model of an automobile than the engineers employed by Ford. Once again, the progressives’ strategy for defending their educational methods was to turn to science and expert opinion for support.

In the area of reading, progressives were for the most part victorious in the province of Manitoba. Throughout the 1950s and into the next several decades, the phonetic method of reading instruction was only supposed to be used by teachers as a supplement to the context method. School inspectors praised recent normal school graduates for their willingness to teach via the new method and chastised those who still insisted upon using the older phonics-based method. When students failed to measure up to standards, traditionalism, rather than progressivism was given the blame. An over-reliance upon rote learning was blamed by one inspector for the fact that half of grade IX pupils failed to read at the appropriate level.<sup>25</sup> The curriculum itself stated that

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<sup>24</sup> Charles E. Phillips, “In Copying the Russians’ Bomb Let’s Not Copy their Schools”, *Macleans*, March 2 1957

<sup>25</sup> Inspector W. C. Rhind, *Manitoba Annual Report On Education*, 1950-51, 43

“appreciation” and “inspiration” were the goals of the English literature program rather than grammatical correctness or a mechanical understanding of the English language.<sup>26</sup>

The department of education clearly believed that phonics education, while perhaps having a place to help some children who struggled to learn to read, was not a good basis upon which to teach most young children to read and keep them reading throughout their entire lives.

Not everyone was as satisfied as the Department of Education with the literacy level of pupils in Manitoba’s education system, however. Many critics from outside the department still insisted that standards had fallen due to the use of progressive methods. These traditionalists were eager to latch onto any evidence that suggested academic standards were falling in the postwar era. It is not surprising, therefore, that the remarks of a couple of examiners from the high school examination board ignited an acrimonious public debate in 1957. The controversy began when the annual report from the high school examination board to the minister of education regarding the past year’s province-wide standardized exams was drawn to the attention of the general public via the Winnipeg newspapers and opposition MLAs. The *Free Press*, having obtained a copy of this report, published portions of it that seemed to indicate that the University of Manitoba professors in charge of creating and administering the exam were deeply unsatisfied with the performance of Manitoba’s high school students. Opposition members of the legislature, in calling for the results to be tabled, implied that the

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<sup>26</sup> “Introduction to Course in English Literature”, *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1942-42, 7

government was withholding the report in an attempt to cover up evidence of how dismally Manitoba's education system had prepared young people for the future.<sup>27</sup>

The criticism of the exams themselves echoed typical traditionalist arguments that the creation of too many frill subjects and the use of new techniques of teaching (or perhaps not teaching) grammar had resulted in students who were unable to express themselves correctly using the English language. Examiners suggested that students were participating in far too many extra-curricular activities and had developed too many diverse interests, which left them with little time to get down to the difficult business of learning proper English grammar.<sup>28</sup> The exams in English composition and Social Studies came in for particular criticism. H. S. Crowe, a history professor at United College, University of Manitoba, and Grade 11 social studies examiner, wrote that the content of the answers given by students was acceptable but their ability to express themselves correctly was "absolutely appalling" and that a "desperate situation" faced Manitoba schools.<sup>29</sup> G. L. Boderson, Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences at University of Manitoba and the person in charge of the English composition exam, echoed these criticisms, claiming that students in Grade 12, "cannot even read with accuracy, let alone appreciation" and as a result were, in his opinion, functionally illiterate.<sup>30</sup> Worse still, both examiners stated that because of department dictates that examiners maintain a

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<sup>27</sup> "Prof Report Condemns 'Illiterates' in Grade 12", *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 11 1957

<sup>28</sup> "Not Worried", *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 13 1957

<sup>29</sup> "Charges Juggling to Hide Failures", *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 11 1957

<sup>30</sup> "If Pupils Can't Write Fail Them - Report", *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 11 1957

“reasonable failure rate” they were unable to fail as many of these illiterate teenagers as they desired. According to Crowe, the failure rate in social studies, which was 40%, should have been at least 60%. In English, 80% of the students who took the departmental exam would have failed had the department not established a maximum failure rate of 35%.<sup>31</sup>

Not surprisingly, the minister of education immediately shot back at the allegations that Manitoba’s high school students had been failing to live up to proper standards. W. C. Miller’s first response was a rambling editorial in which he questioned the literacy of people who wrote newspapers, complained that he had no personal control over the members of the examination board and somewhat bizarrely claimed that Boderson was not a member of the board at all! (He, in fact, was).<sup>32</sup>

Clearly this issue had touched a nerve with Miller, as it went straight to the heart of one of the most important issues related to public education: whether high school graduates had indeed received a proper preparation for adult life. Miller also attacked the exam itself, attempting to change the terms of the debate from the qualifications of students to the ability of examiners to create appropriate tests.<sup>33</sup> Examiners, according to Miller, were the only ones who had truly failed. Blinded by their traditionalist agenda, they had decided that exams would be marked exclusively upon the grounds of “technical English” and ignored all other possible criteria.

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<sup>31</sup> “Charges”; “Prof Report Condemns ‘Illiterates’ in Grade 12”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 11 1957

<sup>32</sup> “Miller Raps Papers’ Handling of the Report”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 16 1957

<sup>33</sup> “Report by Boderson Claimed Exaggerated”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 16 1957

Miller used one of the questions which had appeared on the exam as evidence of the examiners' apparent single-minded obsession with technical English at the expense of the other skills. In this question, students were to read a letter by a fictional teenager applying for a babysitting job and in twenty minutes put the proper punctuation in place for the letter. Miller questioned whether this was indeed a proper way to evaluate whether students had acquired all of the diverse skills taught in the high school English classroom.<sup>34</sup> Skills such as interpretation, creative writing, or appreciation of literature were certainly not being tested by such a question, and even the skill of implementing "proper punctuation" itself was a difficult one to test in such a rigid manner since the correct application of commas, for example, was not universally agreed upon. Thus, critics of the examination board such as Miller concluded that they had not genuinely desired to examine students' proficiency at using the English language but their ability to conform to an arbitrary set of rules established by would-be authorities on English composition. In doing so they had deliberately set an exam that would expose the current crop of students as illiterate and provide evidence to those who called for a return of traditionalism.

Miller found an ally in Sybil Shack, who, a week after the original controversy, took both the *Free Press* and *Boderson* to task for much the same reasons. Shack questioned whether English proficiency could, like mathematics, be measured in an entirely objective fashion with examiners able to distinguish clearly between a 49% and a

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<sup>34</sup> "He's Shocked by Bessie Bilgewater", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 16 1957

50% mark stating, "there is no absolute writing of English."<sup>35</sup> Shack defended the progressive English curriculum by denouncing the traditionalist view that "proper English" was a fixed category set by certain experts as elitist and ahistorical: "much of what is acceptable as literature today was discarded as utter nonsense fifty years ago or fifteen years ago" and pointing out that Shakespeare used double negatives, a practice now frowned upon and marked as "incorrect".<sup>36</sup> In asserting that there was indeed no such thing as an absolute standard for correct English, Shack suggested that any attempt to measure English proficiency via a standardized test was doomed to failure:

One examiner, for example, may place a high premium on imagination and creativeness in writing. He will not concern himself too much with the injudicious sprinkling of commas, or worry unduly when he encounters a run-on sentence or a misspelled word. Another examiner is a stickler for form. Every comma without a mate becomes a personal insult to his good taste. A dangling participle jangles his nerves. He prefers the measured phrase and the careful marshaling of facts. A sparkling imagination is secondary to him.<sup>37</sup>

Shack, therefore, went even further than the Minister and suggested not only that current examinations were too traditional and tested only the students' ability to conform to rules, but that all examinations were innately unfair, subject to the whims of examiners, and unhelpful in terms of accomplishing the most important goals of the education system. Once again, traditionalists and progressives were not so much debating as they were positing two completely different purposes for having an education system in the first place. For traditionalists, English courses, from the primary to high school level were

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<sup>35</sup> Sybil Shack, "The Free Press is 'Absurd and Irresponsible'", *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 18 1957

<sup>36</sup> Shack, "The Free Press is 'Absurd and Irresponsible'"

<sup>37</sup> Shack, "The Free Press is 'Absurd and Irresponsible'"

designed to produce a group of disciplined scholars who could master the memorization of a series of rules which would enable them to read and write according to an established standard. For progressives, reading and writing were foremost exercises in self-expression and personal fulfilment. The English program from its earliest stages, in their view, had to emphasize the enjoyment of reading and writing so as to encourage not only technical proficiency but happiness and all around psychological well-being.

## Chapter 6: The Re-Invention of the High School

Perhaps the most striking change to public education in postwar Canada was the increase in the number of years during which an average Canadian child attended school. Whereas only a few decades earlier secondary education remained the preserve of a very few and most students left public education forever after grade 8, if not sooner, by the 1950s secondary school attendance had become a more or less universal experience for Canadians. High schools, as they were popularly known, were no longer perceived as catering to a select few, namely members of the urban middle class, but were now expected to serve young Canadians regardless of social class, ethnicity, or gender and whether they lived on farms, in small towns or in large urban centers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the notion that high school was essential for all Canadian youths became widely accepted among progressives after the war, especially among those within the education system itself. Charles Phillips, professor of education and staunch defender of progressive education remarked, “modern education recognizes that all children have a right to more than an elementary schooling.”<sup>2</sup>

In Manitoba, the provincial government claimed that in extending the availability of high school to all children, particularly those who lived outside of towns or cities, they were simply following public opinion, which firmly accepted the notion that grade 8 education was “insufficient equipment with which to earn a good living or meet the

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Katz, “The Crisis in Education”, *Macleans*, March 1 1953

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Phillips, “No-We Are Educating for Life”, *Macleans*, Oct 1952

requirements of good citizenship.”<sup>3</sup> High school enrollments seemed to confirm the assertions of those within the system that there was a great public demand for secondary education. In 1910 there were 30 000 high school students in all of Canada. By 1921 this number had slowly risen to 85 000, but by 1952 had exploded to 300 000, an astonishing increase of 1000 percent in thirty years.<sup>4</sup> In Manitoba, by 1952, 75% of students who began grade 1 remained in school until grade 8, 63% to Grade 9, 46% to grade 10 and 34% to Grade 11.<sup>5</sup> In urban areas the increase was even greater as participation in secondary school became virtually universal in the 1950s. Although enrollment in some degree of high school had already been increasing in the city of Winnipeg, the rate of attendance became 100% by default in March of 1951 when the age of compulsory attendance for the city was raised from 15 to 16, virtually guaranteeing that the last schooling a child would receive would be at a level beyond grade 8.<sup>6</sup> This change was regarded as merely a formality as it had been recommended in 1945 by the Winnipeg Council on Rehabilitation and Postwar Reconstruction Committee on Education as vital to the product of education for reconstruction and faced no vocal opposition.<sup>7</sup> The *Winnipeg Free Press* claimed that very few pupils in the city dropped out at 15 anyway

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<sup>3</sup> “The Larger Schools Area”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 27 1946

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Katz, “The Row over the 3 R’s”, *Macleans*, March 15 1953

<sup>5</sup> Canadian School Trustees Association, *School Finance in Canada (LaZerte Report)*, 1955, Instructional Resources Unit Archives, Winnipeg, 22

<sup>6</sup> “Report of School District of Winnipeg No. 1”, *Manitoba Annual Report on Education, 1950-1951*, 94; “Bill Raising Schools Age to 16 Advances”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 24 1950

<sup>7</sup> “Memorandum Re: Education”, April 18 1945, “Subcommittee for Education”, Advisory Committee on Coordination of Postwar Planning, GR1650 A0064, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

and not a single person appeared before the legislature to oppose the change.<sup>8</sup> In the rest of the province, however, the school leaving age remained at 14. Although local school boards had the option to raise it to 16 if they saw fit, few did so, indicating that the idea that all children should attend high school was not as hegemonic as department officials claimed or hoped. Indeed, the extension of high school to rural Manitoba students would become one of the most politically charged issues surrounding education in the province throughout the 1950s.

Supporters of universal high school education often explained their support in terms of a narrative of educational and societal progress. They argued that in the postwar era Canada's economic progress was based upon an increase in the size of large companies and the use of technological innovation, both of which necessitated the creation of a more highly skilled white collar workforce. In other words, the creation of compulsory high school education was just another sign of a maturing or evolving industrial economy which now required more service sector employees, particularly ones with academic skills beyond what could be obtained with a grade 8 education. For Canada's young people, high school education meant a chance at upward social mobility and as one commentator remarked, "those who desert the classroom too soon will discover they have missed their chance, for while Canada is astir with opportunities the pick of the jobs go to the educated."<sup>9</sup>

Most historians of education during this era have accepted this whiggish narrative

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<sup>8</sup> "Winnipeg May Boost School-Leaving Age", *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 4 1950

<sup>9</sup> "The Most Important Job", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 3 1953

of the expansion of high school as a symptom of economic progress.<sup>10</sup> Much evidence exists, however, to cast doubt upon the notion that universal high school was simply a reaction to the working world's demand for a better educated workforce. Just as Alison Prentice argues that historians of nineteenth century Canada simply assumed compulsory public schooling was implemented due to a need for greater literacy among workers while ignoring the lack of factual basis for this assumption or the stated goals of those who promoted compulsory education, so too was the rise of compulsory high school in the postwar era much less about the needs of industry than a desire on the part of progressive educationists to create a new social hegemony. The first problem with the argument that a high school education was increasingly required in the postwar era because more occupations required advanced academic skills is that little evidence exists to suggest that the Canadian workforce was becoming more reliant upon skilled white collar workers. Although there was certainly tremendous growth in the decades between 1930 and 1960 in sectors such as finance, insurance and real estate or service, all of which may have required the skills derived from high school education, there was an even greater increase in the number of workers participating in sectors which traditionally did not require any great degree of formal public education such as manufacturing, "mining, quarrying and oil wells" or construction.<sup>11</sup> The booming Canadian economy of the postwar era and a

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) Stamp argues that high school expansion occurred after the 1920s because, "Industry now demanded more highly trained workers" and like most Canadian historians of education assumes high school extension to be part of a slow march toward educational progress

<sup>11</sup> F. H. Leacy ed., "Civilian persons with paid-worker jobs, by industry, 1 June of each year, 1931 to 1960", *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 1983, D316-328

rapidly increasing population created an overall upsurge in the number of people involved in the workforce, but did not seem to be creating jobs that required secondary education at a greater rate than at any previous time in Canadian history. A Canadian Education Association survey of the career paths of those who completed high school in the 1950s indicated that they were not for the most part finding new occupations that required a high degree of academic education but rather were replicating traditional workforce patterns. High school graduates, in other words, were not becoming scientists or professionals *en masse*, as only 11-16% went on to university. Nine percent of graduates entered the teaching profession and 33% of women graduates entered nursing. The vast majority who remained went into clerical jobs of the sort that required basic literacy, but had also existed before the sudden upsurge in high school attendance.<sup>12</sup>

If a high school diploma was indeed the path to upward mobility, as progressives claimed, then certainly the vast majority of Canada's students did not see it as such, as evidenced by the fact that 70% of them dropped out of school before they reached grade 12.<sup>13</sup> In a survey of their reasons for leaving school, these students cited, "disinterest in school", "inability to see any purpose in further education" and "little encouragement for schooling from home" as their primary reasons for dropping out, indicating that either most of Canada's teenagers were too stupid to take advantage of the golden opportunity provided for them through high school education, or were correct in rejecting the progressives' claim that all Canadians, regardless of class, ethnicity or gender, could find

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<sup>12</sup> "Graduate, but what then...?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 19 1953

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Willett, "70% Quit Before Grade 12", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 15 1959

upward mobility through continuing their education.

For women, this idea seems particularly compelling. In a world in which their occupational possibilities were strictly restricted to a few traditionally “pink collar” occupations such as nursing, teaching or clerical work, a high degree of formal education was more or less irrelevant since it did not allow women to break into previously male-dominated occupations or receive equal pay to men. Thus, it is not surprising that the dropout rate was much higher among female high school students. It seems that for most students, it was only the reality that remaining in school until a higher age was now a legal obligation that caused the surge in high school enrollment. Surveys showed that most did not believe that attending secondary education necessarily would bring them tangible rewards in the future. This idea was supported by the observations of school inspectors who reported that, after the raising of Winnipeg’s school leaving age, high schools were filled with “pupils attending school only because they are forced to, uninterested in the school and school work, and just waiting for the day when they can leave school.”<sup>14</sup> The Superintendent of Winnipeg schools directly contradicted the notion that high school education had any effect whatsoever on the future career paths of students, arguing that the majority of students currently in grades nine and ten were “non-academic students”, who “are most likely to find employment at the semi-skilled level” and would simply drop out of school at the completion of grade ten, at which time most would be sixteen years of age.<sup>15</sup> Whether “non-academic” was a term used to describe all

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<sup>14</sup> James K. MacKay, “Reports of School Inspectors”, *Annual Report*, 1956-57, 48

<sup>15</sup> W. C. Lorimer, “Report of the School District of Winnipeg No. 1”, *Annual Report*, 1955-56, 99

students who attained lower marks, or whether it referred to students from certain socio-economic backgrounds, it is clear that many school officials did not regard high school as being useful in economic terms for the majority of Manitoba's young people.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that the purpose of compulsory high school education was hegemonic rather than economic is that those who promoted high school implied as much or occasionally said so openly. Harry Stein, a University of Manitoba Professor of Education remarked that the larger proportion of young people in high school were simply remaining in school to pass the time until they reached an age at which they would be fully accepted into the adult world of business and industry.<sup>16</sup> The use of high school as holding area for people deemed too young to be holding a full-time job with adult wages and benefits was problematic, according to Stein, because such students would see no reason for working hard in school and thus be more likely to neglect their studies, become "maladjusted" and turn to anti-social pursuits in order to pass the time until they were considered adults. The threat of juvenile delinquency loomed if schools could not find a way to make these teenagers feel some sort of positive connection to their schooling. High school's job, therefore, was not necessarily to impart specific skills or academic knowledge, but simply to keep teenagers occupied and out of trouble until such a time as they were ready to enter the workforce as adults. In other words, high school was to be a sort of "holding area" where adolescents could be kept under guard and away from potentially damaging influences until it was safe to release

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<sup>16</sup> Harry L. Stein, "Problems of Pupil Adjustment in the Secondary School", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 6 (Feb. 1948) p. 20

them into society.

This conception of high school as a place for developing psychological maturity rather than specific skills was echoed by many commentators who argued that allowing young people to enter the workforce full-time as early as age 14, as had been the custom in earlier eras of Canadian history, exacerbated the problem of alienated youth turning to anti-social and threatening activities such as crime and sex. *Chatelaine* writer Dorothy Sangster argued that teenagers who went out to work “too early” instead of staying in school would become “out of control” with their newfound freedom once they were cut loose from the bonds of home and school. She stated, “the boy who has to leave school in second year high often abandons all hope of further training, and thus is free when his day’s work is over to use his evenings for entertainment and amusement, including sex.”<sup>17</sup> Allowing teenagers to work as adults did was not a desirable option since they would “grow up too fast” and get into trouble, envisioned in this case strictly in sexual terms. Remaining in high school, however, would keep teenagers from obtaining the premature freedom that a full time job offered and force them to remain under the moral authority of the school and the home since they would be unable to gain financial independence while still in school. Crudely put, the purpose of high school, according to Sangster, was to stop teenagers from having sex because “the boy who can afford to finish school...is likely to postpone his amusements - including sex - until he has more time for them.”<sup>18</sup> Although the notion that teenagers would indeed refrain from having sex because they

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<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Sangster, “How Much Freedom Should a Teen-Ager Have?”, *Chatelaine*, Dec. 1951

<sup>18</sup> Sangster, “How Much Freedom Should a Teen-Ager Have?”

didn't have enough time to fit it into their daily schedule might seem overly optimistic, the notion that high school education needed to be prolonged in order to extend the moral authority of the supervisory state was quite popular in postwar Canada.

High school was not only justified in terms of preventing negative outcomes, however, but also in terms of encouraging positive ones. Students would avoid becoming delinquents if kept in the education system longer, but they would also become better citizens. Progressive educators who believed that the purpose of the education system was to create a hegemony favorable to the perpetuation of the new liberalism consensus expressed a belief that such an education, to be truly successful, had to go beyond grade eight. They argued that, although statistics showed that only 20% of the population was "capable" of going on to university after high school, the rest of the students would benefit from a full high school education because it would provide "citizenship education" that in the long run was more useful than academic skills.<sup>19</sup> One promoter of compulsory high school education argued, "there are needs - both social and personal - that cannot be met by an elementary education...A high level of personal living and citizenship to-day requires more than an elementary education."<sup>20</sup> The production of "good citizens" (people who could successfully find happiness within the framework of the post-war consensus) required progressives to fundamentally change high school from a place in which a very few students received a traditional liberal education to a place in which all children received an "education for life" just as they had in primary school. As

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<sup>19</sup> M. P. Toombs, "After Grade VIII, What? Let's Take a Look at Our High Schools", *Manitoba School Journal* 18, no. 3 (Nov. 1956) p. 17-18

<sup>20</sup> J. C. Pincock, "Report of the School District of Winnipeg No. 1", *Annual Report*, 1948-49, 107

one supporter of such changes put it, "will knowing how to conjugate the Latin verb *facio* make me a better salesman or mechanic or help me decide how to vote on an election day?"<sup>21</sup> The previous incarnations of secondary education were thus criticized for being too academic, too traditional and too focused upon teaching skills that had no practical value. Schools were criticized for ignoring the sort of problems that the postwar Canadian citizen would grapple with on a daily basis such as, "mortgages, insurance, political parties...labor-union negotiations, foreign trade and the cost of living."<sup>22</sup> Such subjects were too complex to be taught satisfactorily in grades one to eight and too important to be left to parents, who could not be counted upon to teach them "correctly" if they discussed them at all. Nor could knowledge of such subjects be acquired merely by leaving school and participating in the working world, according to progressive promoters of compulsory high school. They had to be addressed via formal schooling in an organized and scientific manner.

Not surprisingly, most traditionalists disputed this interpretation of the purpose of high school education. They disagreed with the notion that high school should acquire any new role of citizenship education and indeed, many disputed the idea that the requirements of the Canadian economy necessitated any great increase in the number of people entering high school. Instead they argued that the solution to providing more skilled workers was to create a better system of identifying the best and brightest students and allowing them to obtain an academic education far beyond the level that most

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<sup>21</sup> F. K. Stewart in Fred Bosworth, "Why Half Our High School Students Quit", *Macleans*, Aug. 1 1950

<sup>22</sup> A. G. McColl in Bosworth, "Why Half"

Canadian children would achieve. J. N. Bulman, a Winnipegger and president of the Canadian Manufacturing Association, for example, argued that the current educational situation in Canada was producing a massive shortage of skilled professionals such as engineers, scientists and researchers. However, he called for the creation of a high school program in which all students who were capable of a certain level of academic achievement would be able to attend secondary and then post-secondary education rather than simply an increase in the overall number of Canadian children enrolled in high school.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Bulman called for the “weeding out” of students who performed poorly in the public school system, leaving the upper years of high school as a preserve in which those of superior intellectual ability would receive a more challenging program of education than currently offered.<sup>24</sup>

Hilda Neatby agreed with the assessment that public schools in Canada were failing to produce skilled professionals but also blamed the situation upon too much access to education rather than too little. Just as primary education had become less academically rigid due to the inclusion of frills and the lowering of standards in order to allow all children to succeed, high school had been “watered down”, according to Neatby, by the dangerous notion that all children had a right to attend it. She claimed that recent years had created “a vast increase in the intellectually incompetent in the high schools.”<sup>25</sup> Neatby also criticized the high school system in Canada for being designed around

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<sup>23</sup> J. N. T. Bulman, “Brainpower Crisis”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 5 1956

<sup>24</sup> “Industrialist Urges Poor Students be Weeded Out of High Schools”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 5 1956

<sup>25</sup> Hilda Neatby, *So Little For the Mind* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1953) 13

keeping “mediocre students” in school rather than allowing outstanding students to excel and go on to become professionals. She argued that all children should “receive education or training appropriate to their capacities”<sup>26</sup> meaning high school should not be designed to appeal to the mediocre students, who would find some sort of other training outside of the public school system, but to the minority of students who could handle a more challenging academic program. Thus, she criticized the progressive concern with keeping teenagers in high school, stating, “We should stop worrying about why our high school students quit. If they are offered abundant intellectual nourishment and if they prove themselves unable or unwilling to profit by it, they should not only be allowed to “quit”, they should be obliged to withdraw.”<sup>27</sup> If traditionalists had their way, the boom in attendance in Canadian high schools would not have occurred and legislation raising the school leaving age would not have been passed.

Neatby’s call for a toughening of standards to make high school more difficult and thus more suited to producing people with the skills to succeed in university and go on to fill Canada’s need for educated workers received support from university professors and newspaper and magazine editors. George Hardy, writing in *Macleans*, attacked the implementation of “mass education” at higher levels, arguing that it allowed “backward” students to continue with schooling, thus giving them false hopes of professional achievement while at the same time holding back those who had “superior intellect” by

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<sup>26</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 13

<sup>27</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 333

forcing them to work at the same level as those who were “backward”.<sup>28</sup> When schools in Calgary implemented a new system in 1959 in which high school students who were deemed “lazy” or “uncooperative” were kicked out of school, the decision was met with widespread approval from the Canadian media.<sup>29</sup> When 35 Calgary students were kicked out of school it made news across the country, with Winnipeg newspapers encouraging their city’s school divisions to adopt a similar policy and congratulating them when they did.<sup>30</sup> Some within the department of education itself called for high school to remain the domain of the few rather than the many so that the “highly gifted people” would be “given their chances free from the distractions of a hodge-podge of courses and the retardation of less gifted comrades.”<sup>31</sup> Canada’s obsession with making high school available for all was unfavorably compared by some to Great Britain, whose position of world power was attributed to the exclusive nature of its Grammar Schools.<sup>32</sup> In the view of traditionalists, Canada’s chance to evolve into one of the most prosperous and powerful nations in the world depended upon the creation of an education that sought to cultivate a highly educated elite rather than offering a watered-down program of citizenship education to all.

Of the two schools of thought regarding the future direction of secondary

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<sup>28</sup> George Hardy, “Are We Educating for Ignorance?”, *Macleans*, Oct. 1952

<sup>29</sup> Author Unknown, “Calgary Kicks Out Classroom Loafers”, *Chatelaine*, May 1957

<sup>30</sup> “35 Pupils Ejected for Wasted Effort”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 4 1959

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Moore, “Report on Collegiate Departments and Collegiate Institutes”, *Annual Report*, 1944-45, 38-39

<sup>32</sup> Moore, “Report on Collegiate Departments and Collegiate Institutes”

education, it was the progressive school that initially gained the support of those in control of Manitoba's school system. The special legislative committee on education of 1944, in its report to the Manitoba government, discussed vast changes to the secondary school program at great length. Most of the report, in fact, dealt with education at this level in comparison to primary education which received far less attention. The committee itself recommended broad and sweeping reforms in the area of high school education which were implemented slowly over the course of the next two decades. The new high school program was to fulfill two main goals: to make high school accessible to all of the province's youth and to make high school education useful for students who would not be entering university or pursuing careers requiring a high degree of academic education.

In order to accomplish the goal of accessibility, the committee recommended the formation of larger units of school administration. Instead of hundreds of small, local school districts, many of which covered only a few miles and a few thousand residents and thus were not large or prosperous enough to offer any type of secondary education, Manitoba would be organized into around 50 larger units comprising much larger geographic areas. The greater financial resources provided by amalgamation would allow for the building of high schools that served all areas of Manitoba, not just larger towns and cities, and for the transportation of students by bus to the nearest high school.<sup>33</sup> This would end the old system of numerous grade 1-8 one-room school houses scattered throughout rural Manitoba from which few students proceeded to high school, in large

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<sup>33</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Special Select Committee of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly*, (1944)

part due to the financial and logistical difficulties involved in the individual student traveling to a district with a secondary school.<sup>34</sup> Rural Manitoba would now become like the cities of Brandon and Winnipeg which featured larger schools with graded classrooms from grades 1 to 8 and high schools for grades 9 to 12. The legislative committee declared, “the present system of educational organization was developed originally to suit pioneer conditions”<sup>35</sup> and was thus outdated and unable to keep up with the “need” for universal high school education. Even in urban schools, however, high school attendance was not as high as the legislative committee had hoped and thus the government had to provide not only for access to high school education but also to change the program of studies in these schools in order to attract students who did not see the benefit of remaining in high school beyond the school leaving age.

Although a low high school completion rate was nothing new, in the postwar era Canadian commentators began to describe the high school dropout rate as constituting a major crisis. Not only did over 100 000 students leave high school every year in Canada, but only 22 of the 100 who began grade one would receive a high school diploma.<sup>36</sup> *Chatelaine* compared this situation to a circumstance in which “every year one of every two promising young Canadians was lost to his country through epidemics or wars.”<sup>37</sup> Not completing high school was apparently now a fate as bad as death! In the minds of

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<sup>34</sup> B. Scott Bateman, “Report of the Deputy Minister”, *Annual Report*, 1952-53, 10

<sup>35</sup> Bateman, “Report of the Deputy Minister”

<sup>36</sup> Fred Bosworth, “Why Half Our High School Students Quit”, *Macleans*, Aug. 1 1950

<sup>37</sup> Mary Jukes, “Don’t Let Your Child be a High School Casualty”, *Chatelaine*, Nov. 1950

those who supported compulsory high school, it was no longer a matter of debate whether high school for all was essential to the country's well-being, but a question of how to encourage teenagers to see the situation the same way. Even more concerning was the fact that those dropping out of high school were not, as had been previously assumed, those from poorer backgrounds who needed to supplement the family income nor those without the "natural" intellectual ability to succeed in school. A Canadian Education Association survey reported that one in four students with "above average intelligence" did not complete high school while over a third of the dropouts came from "better than average homes, many of them from two-car four-inch-steak homes."<sup>38</sup> That middle class children were not finishing school was particularly scary to commentators because it indicated that the major motivations for dropping out were as much lack of interest in school or failure to see its relevance to one's future life as economic imperatives. The Canadian Education Association survey claimed that 96% of the students they had surveyed stated that their reasons for dropping out were related to lack of relevance of the curriculum, or as one particular student put it, "what good are Latin, French and Algebra in helping me to get and keep a job?"<sup>39</sup> High schools across Canada were still intended to train only those intending to continue to university which meant producing scholars with a rigorous liberal arts education heavy on impractical subjects such as Latin and Classics and light on skills that might be used in a typical workplace.

The previous high school program in Manitoba assumed that the achievement of

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<sup>38</sup> Jukes, "Don't Let Your Child be a High School Casualty"

<sup>39</sup> Jukes, "Don't Let Your Child be a High School Casualty"

high school graduation was a path to further education rather than an end in itself and the high school experience catered to those planning to enter either university or normal school. The high school program was divided into three streams, the "general course", which did not lead to admittance into either normal school, university or training for professions such as nursing; the "university matriculation course" which could be completed to grade 11 or 12<sup>40</sup> and led to the student achieving both a high school diploma and admission to university; and the "normal entrance course" which was designed specifically for students planning to proceed to normal school to become teachers.<sup>41</sup> The weakness of this system, according to progressives, was that it provided virtually nothing for the majority of the population who had no plans to pursue any form of higher education. The general course was seen as watered down, and was virtually useless in terms of being recognized by either academic institutions or future employers. The majority of high school students, therefore, did not proceed past grade 10 unless they planned on attending university or becoming nurses or teachers.

The department of education, in order to provide a high school program that would keep the largest number of students in school for the longest possible time, reformed the system along the lines recommended by the legislative committee in 1944. The three streams were replaced with five, all of which would lead to the completion of a grade 12 education and a high school diploma, but only one of which would be solely

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<sup>40</sup> Grade 12 was considered equivalent to first year university and could be counted toward it. In other words, taking grade 12 in high school allowed one to skip a year at university. Taking first year university gave one credit for having completed grade 12.

<sup>41</sup> "Secondary Schools", *Manitoba Programmes of Studies*, 1942-43, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 52-56

academic in nature. What had been called the “general course” was eliminated and the two courses intended to lead to higher education were combined into what was now referred to as the “academic” or “general” high school program. For students intending to attend university or normal school, little had changed. The most radical change in the new high school course was the inclusion of four entirely new streams of high school education which signified an entirely new purpose for the secondary school. In addition to the academic high school program, students would have the option of taking one of four vocational streams labeled “commercial”, “home economics”, “industrial” and “agricultural”. Each of these was to prepare students for a specific career path while at the same time providing them with a “core” education common to all four of the high school courses. Half the time spent in school would be devoted to taking the core subjects: English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Health and Guidance, and the other half in vocational courses specific to one’s chosen stream.<sup>42</sup> Students in the academic stream would use the other half of their time to pursue academic options such as a second language or additional science.

Although each of the vocational options was designed to prepare students to gain “employment in a business office” or “employment in the trades of their choices” or to become “more efficient homemakers” or “more efficient farmers”, the overall goal for this new high school program was not to offer a *solely* vocational education, but to “develop better citizens by providing a higher standard of general education.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>42</sup> *Annual Report*, 1944-45, 13

<sup>43</sup> *Programmes of Studies*, 1955-56, 110

the department made clear that vocational high school was not formal technical training for a specific job *per se* but rather background that would make such training easier later on. A graduate of the industrial course, according to the department, would *not* be considered a journeyman nor obtain any formal credentials in a trade. Taking vocational high school, in other words, would not reduce the period of apprenticeship for a skilled trade by even a single day.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than learning a specific occupation in the industrial course, a future worker would have some idea of the sort of work his future job entailed and have learned some basic skills that would hopefully lead to success later on during the formal training period.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the purpose of teaching courses such as drafting, electronics, carpentry, printing and commercial art was not solely to produce trained workers who were ready to enter the workforce after high school but also to keep young people in high school for purposes of citizenship education designed to foster cultural hegemony. By appealing to their dislike of academic school subjects and their desire to engage in work related to their future career goals, students would be enticed to continue with their education. This purpose for creating the new “composite high school” program was made explicit by the *Winnipeg Tribune*, which stated that the new high school program was, “designed to be the groundwork for future cultural developments as well as to convey to the student at least rudimentary ideas of the requisites for practical living.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education 1959*. (1959), 214

<sup>45</sup> *Programmes of Studies, 1955-56*, 143

<sup>46</sup> “Toward More Practical Education”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 8 1948

The *Manitoba School Journal* commented that the purpose of the composite high school was, “to give boys and girls opportunities to prepare themselves for good citizenship...acceptable employment and a wholesome leisure life.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, teenagers needed to learn the art of daily living in a radically changed postwar Canada and therefore needed the type of “education for life” that was already part of the curriculum for grades one to eight. Thus, the core curriculum that all students would take for 50% of their day was imagined as the most essential, as it would ensure that all Manitoban students, regardless of social class, intellectual ability, or future career path received a common curriculum that would allow for the achievement of the high school curriculum’s self-described “primary objective”, “the training of free citizens in a free society”, or more accurately, the creation of a postwar new liberalism hegemony.<sup>48</sup> Courses in anything from “typewriting” and “farm management” to “child care and development” and “general shop” were simply ways of making the curriculum appeal to the interests of students so that they would choose to remain in high school for as long as possible.<sup>49</sup>

Planning a radical new program for high schools in Manitoba was the simple part of secondary school reform for the department of education. Finding a way to implement it across Manitoba in a democratic fashion with the consent of local communities was

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<sup>47</sup> R. J. Johns, “The Greater Winnipeg Technical Vocational High School”, *Manitoba School Journal* 10, no. 8 (April 1949) p. 4-6

<sup>48</sup> *Annual Report, 1947-1948*, 119; W. C. Miller, “Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 6 (Feb. 1951) p. 2

<sup>49</sup> C. Rhodes Smith, “The Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 11, no. 1 (Sep. 1949) p. 2

significantly more difficult. At first, the department of education was quite confident that the general public would accept their assumptions that male students intending to pursue careers in office work, in trades, or as farmers would flock to a high school program that offered training in these areas and that female students would naturally be interested in learning about homemaking in school. Cheerleaders for the vocational high school program confidently asserted that, since the majority of Manitobans did not engage in jobs that required a university education, "it is almost certain that the enrollment for Vocational courses will exceed that in the Matriculation (academic) course within the next decade."<sup>50</sup> According to an MTS official, whereas the previous high school system alienated "John who wants to be a farmer" and "Mary, who doesn't care about history or analytical geometry (and) would rather put her time at home learning the household arts", in the composite high school, "John would be encouraged to go in by bus...where he would learn about recent developments in Agriculture through which he would become a better and more scientific farmer. Similarly, Mary would enjoy a useful course in home economics and at the same time receive the benefits of two or three years of happy associations with students of her own age."<sup>51</sup>

None of this, however, came to pass. Vocational high school was by and large a failure, with few students choosing to switch from the general course to one of the vocational ones and the expected boom in high school enrollment due to vocational courses failing to materialize. Furthermore, when it came to implementing the program

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<sup>50</sup> L. S. Smith, "Vocational Education in the High Schools", *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 10 (June 1952) p. 10

<sup>51</sup> E. MacDonald, "The Larger School Area", *The Manitoba Teacher* 28, no. 5 (Mar/Apr 1950) p. 42-44

in rural areas, the department faced fierce opposition at the local level from those unwilling to create the larger school areas necessary to pave the way for the construction of composite high schools across the province. Progressives in favor of compulsory high school education and vocational education were not able to impose their version of hegemony as easily as they expected in the late 1940s.

The Garson administration seemed to sense that it would face significant opposition if it tried to unilaterally implement the recommendations of the 1944 legislative committee. Instead of exercising its authority to redraw the map of Manitoba education in order to combine hundreds of small districts into a few dozen larger "divisions", each with a system of bussing children to graded elementary schools and composite high schools, the government chose two regions of Manitoba in which to test the new method of school organization before putting it to a province-wide referendum. Success in these trial divisions would, they hoped, entice people throughout the province to approve school district reorganization in a vote to be conducted at a later date. The plan immediately hit a bump in the road, however, when one of the two districts chosen for the experiment declined to participate, leaving Dauphin as the only school area outside of Winnipeg or Brandon which constructed a composite high school that was capable of offering the entire new high school program that came into effect in 1948.<sup>52</sup>

Despite almost universal support for the larger school area from all three parties in the legislature, "experts" within the department, the Winnipeg newspapers, and the Manitoba Teachers Society, when attempts were made to form additional larger school

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Green, "Larger School Areas", *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 22 1946

areas similar to the Dauphin division these efforts were unsuccessful. In 1951, the school districts in the Swan River Valley region sought to amalgamate around the town of Swan River and form a school area similar to that in Dauphin.<sup>53</sup> The proposed by-law to create the new school area was put to a vote by those within the affected region. The campaign period before this vote was almost entirely one-sided, with school inspectors, the Minister and Deputy Minister of Education and the daily newspapers coming out in favor of the proposal. The *Winnipeg Tribune* failed to even consider the notion that there was a rational argument against amalgamation, stating, "there are so many benefits to be derived from establishment of larger school areas in those parts of Manitoba that lend themselves to this modern method of school administration that it is difficult to understand the reluctance of rural boards to bring about the change."<sup>54</sup>

When voters rejected the amalgamation plan at a rate of two to one, commentators expressed further puzzlement, explaining the defeat as the result of a "whisper campaign" against it, implying that the opponents of the plan were perhaps using fear and underhanded techniques to stand in the way of progress.<sup>55</sup> Alternately, they dismissed those who voted against this proposal as simply backward and irrational. In the minds of supporters of the larger school areas, the composite high school was unquestionably a sign of progress and any opposition to its creation could only come from people who were either misinformed or had disregarded rationality and chosen to vote based upon

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<sup>53</sup> "New School Area Sought", *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 15 1951

<sup>54</sup> "Benefits of Large School Areas", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 24 1952; "Woods Urges School Districts to Amalgamate", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 24 1952

<sup>55</sup> "Larger Unit Plan Defeated", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 21 1952

fear and prejudice. Thus, the *Tribune* chalked up the election loss to farmers' mistaken belief that their taxes would be increased should the proposal succeed and the "unwillingness of local districts to surrender authority over one-room schools" before reiterating that "it has never been disputed that a large school area provides a great deal better opportunity for all children in the area for education up to matriculation."<sup>56</sup>

The second part of the *Tribune's* article unintentionally provided a more realistic answer to their question of why voters had rejected the larger school area proposal. These areas may have indeed better allowed students to obtain a high school diploma. Not all Manitobans, however, accepted an idea that for supporters of the plan was merely common sense: that compulsory high school was desirable and that the composite high school provided the best possible education for all. Local school boards were not simply power hungry nor were farmers necessarily small minded and reactionary. Rather, they did not share the enthusiasm for universal high school education and were concerned with the loss of the easy access to education at the primary level which the old system of administration had provided. Rural voters did not reject the larger school area because amalgamation facilitated universal attendance and required greater expenditures so much as because it replaced the system of ungraded, "one-room" schools no more than a few miles apart that they preferred. This system not only made easy access to schools possible for all children, even on days of poor weather (when bussing would be impossible) but enabled the local community to feel that the school was accountable to them and part of their community in a very real way. Creating larger school divisions

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<sup>56</sup> "Larger School Area Plan Beaten", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 22 1952

made local voters feel that not only would the school building itself move farther away from most of them, but that the decision making process surrounding it would become less democratic and the goings-on at the school less subject to their oversight.

That it was concern with the quality of primary education, not a lack of desire to allow children to have access to high school, that provoked opposition to amalgamation was perhaps confirmed by the partial success of a plan to create larger divisions in rural areas solely for the purpose of secondary education. In 1955, voters in the Portage region approved, by a large majority, a proposal to create what was termed a "secondary school area" which was to be identical in terms of organization to the Dauphin school areas except it would only apply to grades 9 and up.<sup>57</sup> The secondary school area was more acceptable to rural voters because it kept the existing primary system intact, meaning that young children would not have to travel longer distances by bus and local trustees would not lose control over primary school decisions.<sup>58</sup> Although the secondary area was accepted by the Portage region and later the Neepawa area in 1957<sup>59</sup>, there was far from a unanimous consensus among rural Manitobans concerning the desirability of secondary areas. Both the Gladstone and MacGregor regions voted against the secondary school area proposal<sup>60</sup>, and the Liberal government backed off the idea of school area amalgamation, receiving condemnation from the opposition Tories, the CCF as well as

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<sup>57</sup> "Secondary School Area Approved", *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 30 1955.

<sup>58</sup> Portage Votes April 29 on School Area Setup", *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 19 1955

<sup>59</sup> "Neepawa Vote", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 12 1957

<sup>60</sup> "Reject Secondary Proposal", *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 5 1957

the Winnipeg newspapers for doing so. The minister of education stated that, while he remained in favor of the idea of composite high schools and larger school divisions, he would not force people to accept it.<sup>61</sup> Continuing opposition to formation of larger school units as well as the lack of enthusiasm for composite high schools both demonstrate that many Manitobans did not accept the assumption of progressive educators that providing a high school education for all via vocational programs was common sense.

Many Manitobans agreed with traditionalist critics of the composite high school and made their opposition known with both their words and their actions. Hilda Neatby, like many traditionalists, was appalled at the decision to create composite high schools, calling them places in which “one can do anything and everything, or perhaps, nothing” and accusing them of encouraging students to take the easiest possible course of education: “who wants to go to an old classroom and ponder over mathematics, history or even English when she can make cookies in a kitchen with large, bright windows, homey atmosphere, and even a silver tea service?”<sup>62</sup> Other critics argued that the composite high school was simply continuing the progressive mistake of teaching in the schools what should have been taught at home. The *Edmonton Journal* remarked that home economics was a waste of time for high school because while “the sight of a class of twenty or thirty 15 and 16-year-old young ladies twittering happily over cake batters...is a gladsome one...Just the same, there is a lot to be said for young women learning a practical thing or

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<sup>61</sup> “Larger School Units”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 24 1955

<sup>62</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 208

two from one of those experts...who are usually to be found in a home.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, opponents of the commercial, industrial and agricultural courses objected that these skills could be better learned in the workplace or through formal technical training at an institution other than the public school.

Despite the hopes of progressives, it seemed as though young people themselves and their parents were siding with the traditionalists. Many regarded the vocational streams of the new Manitoba high school program as being “watered-down” versions of the academic program and quickly vocational school gained a reputation in many quarters as being designed for the “dumb kids”. In the opinion of many, anyone who had the intellectual ability to achieve a matriculation diploma should have done so rather than obtaining the vocational high school degree.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this attitude of parents and teachers toward vocational education was nothing new in Manitoba nor throughout North America. Agricultural education, for example, was first promoted in Canadian schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, only to fail miserably in no small part due to parents rejecting the notion that learning farming from a textbook in a classroom was any better than learning from one’s parents at home. Furthermore, rural teenagers who did not drop out of school generally desired education to be an escape from the drudgery and hard work of farm life, rather than a path to more of it.<sup>65</sup> Those who planned to continue in their parents’

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<sup>63</sup> “Why Not at Home”, *Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 12 1951

<sup>64</sup> For more on his attitude in relation to Alberta see; Nancy M. Sheehan, “Education, The Society and the Curriculum in Alberta 1905-1980: An overview”, in Nancy M. Sheehan, Wilson, J. Donald, and Jones, David C. eds, *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986)

<sup>65</sup> Stamp, *Schools of Ontario*, 37

agricultural way of life saw little benefit in learning it from a schoolteacher and those who sought to escape from it wanted education that would equip them to do so.

In 1950s Manitoba, the problem of student and parent interest in vocational education existed for much the same reasons as it had in previous decades; those students wishing to enter agriculture or a trade would continue, as their forefathers had done, to obtain only as much academic education as necessary before quitting to begin a process of on-the-job education as soon as possible, whether it was through a formal apprenticeship or simply going to work on the farm, or in a factory or office. As for female students who were encouraged to take the home economics course, those who by choice or by necessity would work outside of the home in their adult lives obviously saw no benefit in a high school program designed to equip them solely to be homemakers. Even those who desired to make homemaking their profession, however, showed no great interest in the home economics course, feeling that, like future farmers or wage laborers, they could best learn the skills of their trade at home as their predecessors had rather than in a high school setting.

The enrollment statistics of Manitoba high schools in the 1950s show a very clear rejection of the vocational programs offered by the composite high school. Despite the department of education touting the formation of the Dauphin school unit as indicative of educational progress in a previously backward region of rural Manitoba, the composite high school program was an almost complete failure. From the start, the department of education had publicly acclaimed the Dauphin school area experiment to be an unqualified success. Glowing news reports in both Winnipeg daily papers noted that

attendance at the Dauphin composite high school was high (313 out of a capacity of 400)<sup>66</sup>, and that this brand new school provided the latest in learning technology including demonstration farm equipment, electric stoves, typewriters, projectors, film strip machines and tape recorders.<sup>67</sup> All of these technological wonders, which were not available at other rural schools that did not have the budgetary resources of the larger Dauphin school area, were meaningless, however, if no one was using them.

Enrollment in the vocational streams at the school was abysmally low in the first years of the program and improved little as time went on. Despite Dauphin's secondary school becoming the only one in the province to offer all 5 high school streams, in the 1950-1951 school year only 97 of the 363 students at the school were enrolled in a vocational stream, including 44 in the commercial course, 33 in Industrial and only 11 and 9 in homemaking and agriculture respectively. Excluding the commercial course which always achieved a measure of popularity due to its teaching some practical office skills such as typing and bookkeeping, enrollment in the vocational streams was only 15% of the student body in 1951, 13% in 1954 and 9% in 1955.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, technical education was not fulfilling its goal of retaining students who would have otherwise dropped out. Just as the majority of students taking the academic stream continued to leave high school before achieving a grade 12 diploma, so

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<sup>66</sup> Fred Johnson, "Dauphin Large School Area a Success", *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 8 1950 and "How Large Area Benefits Pupils", May 11 1950

<sup>67</sup> Fred Johnson, "Large School Area Plan Works Well", *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 3 1948; "Inspector Praises Larger Unit Board", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 20 1953; Margaret Marsh, "Dauphin-Ochre Large School Unit Raises Standards", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Feb. 24 1955

<sup>68</sup> W. G. Booth, "Reports of School Inspectors - Division No. 3", *Annual Report*, 1950-1955

too did the vocational courses replicate the trend. In 1958, for example, the ratio of students enrolled in Grade 10 versus Grade 12 for the academic program was 2 to 1, whereas the ratio for those in one of the four vocational streams was 2.2 to 1.<sup>69</sup> In other words, by a small margin students were *more* likely to drop out of school between grades 10 and 12 in the vocational courses than in the academic. Vocational education was not only failing to keep students in school longer but was perhaps having the opposite effect. By 1959, the school had discontinued the agricultural course entirely due to a "lack of candidates"<sup>70</sup> and officials conceded in their reports that the composite high school was not attracting the expected interest, particularly in the area of agriculture which planners had assumed would be extremely popular due to the dominance of that industry in the economy of the surrounding region.<sup>71</sup> The response from progressive educational authorities was to dismiss the lack of interest in the vocational courses as just another manifestation of rural backwardness that had to be overcome in order to facilitate educational as well as economic and social progress. They failed to consider, however, the possibility that there might be sound and rational reasons for choosing not to participate in the new streams of high school education, reasons that were perceived not just by "backward" rural students and parents, but people throughout Manitoba including the city of Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg, the composite high school was only slightly more successful than in

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<sup>69</sup> C. D. Voigt, "Reports of School Inspectors - Division No. 3", *Annual Report, 1957-1958*

<sup>70</sup> *Royal Commission, 216*

<sup>71</sup> W. G. Booth, "Reports of School Inspectors - Division No. 3", *Annual Report, 1949-1950*

rural areas. Winnipeg schools that offered four of the five different streams (agricultural education was not considered something that city children would be interested in learning about) reported that in 1948, the first year of the new program, 30% of incoming students elected to take the commercial course, 4% the industrial and 66% the academic.<sup>72</sup> These numbers changed little in later years. In September of 1952 66.6% still took the general course, while 20.4% took the commercial and 19% the industrial.<sup>73</sup> The home economics stream was an almost total failure, with no school offering the program at all until 1950 due to lack of interest. The first and only school that ever did offer it, Daniel McIntyre School, failed to attract even 1% of the female students from across the entire city of Winnipeg. The reason for the failure of home economics was once again the lack of enthusiasm of female students for an education that would equip one only for a life spent within the home. The department admitted that admission was low because the Home Economics program did not actually give a graduate any useful qualifications for the working world. Even the Home Economics program at the University of Manitoba required matriculation, which meant that students who were interested in a Home Economics degree in university could not in fact take the Home Economics program in high school!<sup>74</sup> The utter lack of enthusiasm shown by Winnipeg high school students for home economics raises some serious doubts as to how much young women in the 1950s accepted the dominant gender constructions of the time and how much they bought into

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<sup>72</sup> J. C. Pincock, "Report of the School District of Winnipeg No. 1", *Annual Report*, 1947-1948

<sup>73</sup> W. C. Lorimer, "Report of the School District of Winnipeg No. 1", *Annual Report*, 1952-53

<sup>74</sup> H. McIntosh, "Report of the School District of Winnipeg No. 1", *Annual Report*, 1949-1950.

the supposed “consensus” about the suburban nuclear family. Evidence from the Manitoba school system suggests that female students attending high school were quite interested in obtaining a degree that would offer the possibility of a career outside the home.

Across the province, enthusiasm for the diverse programs offered by the composite high school was virtually non-existent. In 1950, out of 4803 grade 10 students enrolled in the entire province, only 982 or 20% entered one of the non-academic streams, and of them the vast majority, (83%) chose the commercial course which, as stated previously, was moderately successful due to its teaching of skills that were directly related to white-collar employment in an office environment.<sup>75</sup> The attempt to make universal high school a reality by creating agricultural, industrial and home economics courses for farmers, blue-collar workers and women respectively was a dismal failure. Thus, the department of education soon recognized that the composite high school experiment would have to be abandoned. After extolling the virtues of the larger school unit and composite high school and insisting that the new program had “manifest advantages” for the province’s youth, the deputy minister of education admitted that “any realistic evaluation of the situation in the Province would seem to indicate that there is little possibility of widespread duplicating of this type of school administration.”<sup>76</sup>

By 1960, however, the larger school unit would be adopted by virtually the entire province, thanks in no small part to the determination of the Conservative government

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<sup>75</sup> *Annual Report, 1950-1951*

<sup>76</sup> “Report of the Deputy Minister”, *Annual Report, 1951-52*, 19

elected in 1958 to make this style of administration a reality after the 1959 Royal Commission had again recommended larger units.<sup>77</sup> After the Commission's report, the Conservatives convened a province-wide plebiscite which asked voters whether or not they were in favor of the amalgamation of school areas into larger divisions. The vote in favor of amalgamation in 1959 was interpreted as a sign that more and more Manitobans were accepting the principle that most, if not all, people should obtain some high school education and the existing system of administration would not allow this to happen. They did not necessarily accept this now hegemonic proposition, however, for the reasons the progressives did (ie. that keeping children in school was a way for them to build hegemony by teaching "citizenship and democracy"). Rather, they tended to support for high school education for the reasons that many traditionalists had; that Canada needed its young people to have a higher degree of academic education in an increasingly complex and technical world<sup>78</sup>. The Royal Commission, like the Legislative Committee of 1944, not only recommended the creation of larger divisions in order to facilitate high school attendance, but also recommended a complete overhaul of the high school program itself. This time, however, the recommendations were not toward the creation of a "progressive" program of composite high schools, but the return to a secondary program emphasizing academic achievement and rigid standards.

The Royal Commission recommendations, which were quickly implemented, pleased all political parties and both organized labor and business organizations. The

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<sup>77</sup> "School Area Plan Best, Minister Tells Dauphin", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 28 1959; Stewart McLean, "The Minister's Page", *Manitoba School Journal* 20, no. 7 (Mar. 1959) p. 3

<sup>78</sup> "A 'Yes' Vote is Key to Better Education", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 21 1959.

composite high program was to be scrapped and replaced with a simpler high school program in which there would be only two streams, the “matriculation course” for students intending to proceed to university or some other form of higher education, and another “high school leaving” or “general” course for students intending to obtain a degree that would grant them some status in the eyes of future employers but not be so academically rigorous as to deny them the possibility of finishing high school at all. Both programs would now run over a period of three years instead of four with high school commencing in grade 10.<sup>79</sup> These changes satisfied traditionalists who feared high school would become too “watered-down” if everyone attended. This would be accomplished by preserving the matriculation course for those students who could handle a highly challenging program of studies. In fact, the creation of the matriculation course raised the possibility of secondary education becoming even more geared toward the minority of “gifted” students, because as some noted, during the previous decades the majority of students had taken matriculation because it was the only course that was academic and offered any prestige in the eyes of the general public. With the creation of an academic program with some clout in the eyes of employers, parents and students, the majority could take this general course while leaving matriculation to the 25-30% estimated by the department to be “capable” of handling it.<sup>80</sup>

The new general course, it was emphasized, was not “wishy-washy” or filled with frills but was “complete and satisfying in itself”, consisting of English literature, social

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<sup>79</sup> “Non-University Course Backed”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 4 1960

<sup>80</sup> “Teachers Pleased at News of General School Course”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 4 1960

studies, general science and arithmetic. The only difference between it and matriculation was a decrease in emphasis on hard science, no second language requirement and business math instead of algebra.<sup>81</sup> As if to reassure the public that the new course carried out traditionalist calls for a stricter academic education for all, the department also announced new “tougher attitudes” toward pupils who did not perform well on their exams, warning them that if they failed to perform they would be expelled.<sup>82</sup> All of these changes indicate that, at the high school level at least, traditionalist principles appear to have captured the support of the majority of Manitobans. The progressive idea of grouping secondary students according to their future occupation and providing them with vocational instruction and a common citizenship education was on its way out by the end of the 1950s in favor of an approach to high school that encouraged an academic curriculum for all.

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<sup>81</sup>“Educator Unveils Alternate Course For High Schools”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Aug. 13 1960; “New High School Course Outlined”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Aug. 13 1960

<sup>82</sup> “School Boards Adopting Results or Else Policy”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Dec. 23 1958

## Chapter 7: Rural Schools

Throughout the 1950s, rural Manitobans continued to resist the education reforms that most educational authorities within the department regarded as merely common sense. The mostly urban and mostly Winnipeg-based opposition to rural rejection of education reform seldom if ever questioned the desirability of larger school areas, and therefore the elimination of one and two-room schools. Rather than understanding the reaction of rural Manitobans as a rational response to changes that threatened an education system which they did not regard as broken, the urban reformers simply dismissed opposition to their plans as irrational and the product of either a lack of understanding of their plans, an ignorant disregard for the importance of education, or simply an overall backwardness that pervaded all areas of rural life. For many within the department of education and Winnipeg media, the backwardness of the rural school system was just another symptom of the reactionary nature of the culture of rural Manitoba. In portraying rural life as inherently conservative, these reformers generally ignored the views of those living in rural areas. If they had listened to them, however, they would have heard an opposition based not upon backwardness, conservatism or fear of change, but upon rational arguments for the preservation of the locally controlled school district. Such arguments included the “family” atmosphere in rural, mostly one-room schools, the function of schools in fostering community cohesion and the ability of parents to feel that they held some direct input in the everyday educational experiences of their children. The experiences of one-room schoolhouse teachers confirm that not all educated people felt the older form of school organization was anachronistic and

backward.

Historians have, for the most part, not been kind to rural people who originally rejected the implementation of larger school areas. Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson's survey of the history of Manitoba education concluded that rural opposition to the government's solution to the "problem of the rural schools" stemmed from:

1. Community feeling or tradition
2. Fear of increasing school costs
3. Fear of loss of school control
4. Fear of change
5. Fear of weakening the local community unit
6. Local community pride
7. Belief in the virtue of the small school
8. Fear of pupil transportation dangers
9. Fear of loss of parental control over children
10. Fear of loss of the intimate home-school relationship<sup>1</sup>

Although the authors do indeed correctly identify many of the sources of opposition to the proposal for amalgamation, their inclusion of the word "fear" as a preface to seven of the ten reasons implies that rural people were not acting as rational agents but rather reacting based upon visceral emotion when formulating their opposition. Such generalizations as saying that rural Manitobans were "afraid of change" causes the reader to perceive these people not as rational political actors, but as backward individuals who were unable to draw the "correct" conclusions regarding the education system because they were blinded by their fears and prejudices. In case the reader of Gregor and Wilson's book had missed this point, the authors conclude, "In Manitoba, rural conservatism and devotion to economy effectively combined to inhibit educational advance along the lines generally

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<sup>1</sup> Gregor, Alexander and Keith Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1984) 125

considered to be necessary.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, rural dwellers were too backward and too cheap to know what was good for them.

Some historians, such as Benjamin Levin, have questioned the notion that resistance to changes in the school system in the 1950s should be dismissed as “ignorance on the part of rural Manitobans”, arguing instead that it reflected the rational response of a group who, “saw quite clearly that (school reforms) would change their lives in fundamental ways” and did not want such changes to take place.<sup>3</sup> Although Levin concludes that rural Manitobans who were resistant to change “need not be regarded simply as resistant to change, but as defending real and legitimate interests of those they represented” he agrees that this resistance was fundamentally conservative in nature and a result of a desire on the part of the older generation not to have their children leave the agriculture industry or reject the rural way of life. In his conception, rural people are framed as rationally, and perhaps nobly, defending their way of life in the face of the inevitable modernization and (implied) progress of Canadian society. Rural schools in such a historical narrative are still assumed to have been inferior in quality to urban ones in terms of preparing students for life in an urbanizing and modernizing post-war Canada.

The possibility that rural schools did not necessarily provide an inferior education seems to have been little considered by modern historians. Perhaps, as Mike Corbett argues, the historians who have long claimed that there exists a deep-seated urban bias in Canadian history are correct in their assertion that rural history has generally been

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<sup>2</sup> Gregor and Wilson, 125

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Levin, “The Struggle over Modernization in Manitoba Education 1924-1960”, in Bruno Jofre, (ed.) *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993)

“presented as a backdrop for the “real” history of the development of a modern urban industrial nation”.<sup>4</sup> In such a narrative, the history of rural life is a story of an outmoded form of social organization inevitably being swept away and replaced by a modern, urban one. In terms of public education, then, the story of rural education is the story of the modern industrial-capitalist state connecting backward rural areas to the modern world of the city. This was, ironically, exactly the sort of narrative favored by progressive educationists themselves in the 1950s. In their narrative, the progress represented by the new liberalism, which was being reproduced via the hegemony-creating process of public education, would inevitably replace the backwardness of rural life and bring the areas outside of cities into modern Canadian society.

Department of education officials, journalists and even the Manitoba Teachers Society all concluded in their various publications that the rural school was plagued with problems and could be objectively shown to provide an inferior brand of education. Few traditionalists bothered to take up this particular arena of the battle over schools, possibly because they themselves were overwhelmingly urban and agreed in many ways with the argument that destruction of the one-room schoolhouse was crucial to educational modernization. Duff Roblin’s administration, while abandoning the Garson project of creating the composite high school, did not dispute the notion that rural schools in smaller districts were inferior and that amalgamation was the solution to the problem of the “little

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Corbett, “A Protracted Struggle: Rural Resistance and Normalization in Canadian Educational History”, *Historical Studies in Education* 13, no. 1 (2001) 19-48

red schoolhouse.”<sup>5</sup>

In continuing with their narrative of modernization and progress being brought to a previously backward rural hinterland, promoters of rural education reform argued that, while “remarkable progress has been made toward improving our standard of living in rural Manitoba in the last twenty-five years,” education had continued to lag behind.<sup>6</sup> Electricity and road construction had brought rural Manitoba into closer connection with urban areas and with itself but schools had been reluctant to take advantage of these improvements. An editorialist in *The Manitoba Teacher* noted that although modern communication and transportation meant that the size of the “community” in a rural area had expanded and people in rural Manitoba had become “very mobile and think nothing of traveling 25 or even 50 miles to see a hockey game or show, or to go shopping”, they had yet to feel that travel of this same distance was appropriate for their children when going to school<sup>7</sup>. Thus the rural one-room schoolhouse, which had not benefitted from technological advancement, remained the norm.

The physical conditions of one-room schools were deemed completely unsatisfactory by reformers who sought to replace them with a series of graded schools at a greater distance from each other. In their reports to the department of education, school inspectors spent far less time commenting upon the quality of teachers or their ability to

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<sup>5</sup> Duff Roblin, *Speaking for Myself: Politics and Other Pursuits* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999) 113

<sup>6</sup> Gordon F. Windsor, “Horse and Buggy Education”, *The Manitoba School Trustee* 11, no. 7 (Oct. 1955) p. 3-4/37-38

<sup>7</sup> “The Case for the Larger School Area”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 34, no. 4 (Jan/Feb. 1958) p. 57-63

successfully implement the curriculum than they did pointing out problems with the physical conditions of rural schools. Indeed, the unsatisfactory infrastructure of school houses was unquestionably the most popular subject of their reports. One inspector went as far as to conclude that, "not one of the school plants which I visit outside Greater Winnipeg areas measures up to even the minimum requirements in accommodation and equipment."<sup>8</sup> Department of education officials argued that, in addition to the buildings themselves being in poor physical condition, the sanitary conditions within schools were far from acceptable. Dirty schools with unclean toilet facilities jeopardized the entire purpose of the health curriculum according to school inspectors. As the senior nutritionist for the department of education stated, "we may try to establish health practices in hand washing, proper use of toilet, cleanliness of self and environment, but the daily experiences of the child, due to inadequate school equipment, establish the opposite habits."<sup>9</sup> After running a series of articles detailing horror stories of unsafe and unsanitary conditions at various rural Manitoba schools<sup>10</sup>, including stories of schools with no insulation, no electricity, and rotting walls, the *Winnipeg Tribune* concluded that rural schools were ailing and in need of repair, or perhaps destruction in favor of the creation of new graded schools.

The physical conditions of the rural school represented only one of the ways in

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Moore, *Manitoba Annual Report on Education*, 1944-45

<sup>9</sup> Olga H. Anderson, "Health Education in the Elementary Classroom", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 1947) p. 8

<sup>10</sup> "School Fire Death Trap Claims Suburb Principal", June 15 1949; "Teacher Joins in Protest on Rural School Condition", April 25 1949; "Scant Heat, Washing Aids in Typical Rural Schools", April 22 1949.

which proponents of rural education reform argued that the one-room school was unsuitable for modern education. In 1956, the *Winnipeg Free Press* drew attention to provincial high school examination results that showed students outside the city of Winnipeg experiencing vastly higher failure rates than those within the city. For the 1956 grade 11 provincial exams, the rate of failure of rural students in literature, composition, social studies, math, chemistry, physics and french was more than double that of urban students.<sup>11</sup> In grade 12, the disparity was not quite as pronounced, but with the exception of French, in every subject the failure rate was higher in rural schools. The *Free Press*' conclusion was that rural schools were clearly providing an inferior quality of education, since the average innate intelligence of pupils could be considered to be a constant throughout Manitoba. The supposed difference in educational quality between rural and urban schools, according to the *Free Press*, represented "the greatest evil that exists today in the province of Manitoba."<sup>12</sup> In their rush to present the exam results as definitive evidence of the weakness of rural schools, however, the *Free Press* neglected to consider a number of important variables that may have contributed to the discrepancy in exam results such as biases toward urban students in the exams themselves, the smaller percentage of rural students planning on attending university leading to a lack of interest or effort in academics and, most importantly, the explanation given by the Premier of Manitoba for the lower test scores: that only the top students in Winnipeg schools typically took the matriculation course and thus the exams, whereas in rural areas almost

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<sup>11</sup> "Failures in Manitoba Schools", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 30 1956.

<sup>12</sup> "Neglected Children", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 30 1956

all students in high school were enrolled in matriculation.<sup>13</sup> In other words, it was not that rural schools had any more “below average intelligence” students, it was simply that in rural schools these students were permitted to take the provincial exams, whereas it was the policy of Winnipeg high schools to allow exams to be taken only by students with a reasonable chance of success. Such explanations did not wash with many within the department of education who continued to promote the idea that rural schools simply did not measure up to their city counterparts. The system of school inspections in Manitoba, under which all rural classrooms in the province were visited at least twice per year whereas Winnipeg schools were not inspected at all until 1949 and then only once per year confirmed that inspectors expected to find rural schools to be more in need of their guidance.<sup>14</sup>

While poor physical school conditions could be blamed upon a lack of available resources during and immediately following the war and poor results on standardized tests could be dismissed by politicians as stemming from a number of factors rather than just the inferior quality of rural education, increasingly critics such as school inspectors concluded that the cause of these problems was a lack of interest in education on the part of the local population. Rural communities themselves were portrayed as ignorant, penny-pinching and unconcerned with the better education of their children. In other words, it was the backwardness of rural life itself that led to poor conditions in the rural school. One inspector blamed the supposedly poor quality of rural schooling not on the

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<sup>13</sup> “Neglected Children”, This statement further demonstrates that the matriculation course was the only one of the many courses in the composite program that rural Manitobans respected or felt was useful.

<sup>14</sup> C. K. Rogers, Report of the Chief Inspector, *Annual Report, 1949-1950*

teachers themselves, but on the trustees, parents and children in rural areas for simply not valuing education. Inspector B. Warkentin bemoaned: "it appears that one of the essential functions of an inspector is to attempt to stimulate an intelligent interest in education among young and old in the division...to present the importance of education in the personal, the community and the national sphere."<sup>15</sup> Warkentin portrayed the role of the inspector as one of missionary or colonizer, bringing the light and progress of the city to the backward areas of rural Manitoba by preaching the idea, already accepted by forward-thinking individuals, that education was the path to progress and national integration.

Indeed, the rhetoric of progress and civilization through education was quite prominent in the writings of department officials. Various regions of Manitoba were often judged on their degree of "civilization" according to how well their education systems matched the model promoted by the department of education and exemplified in Winnipeg schools as well as those rural areas that had adopted larger school areas and composite high schools. Dauphin, therefore, was often held up by the department as an example of a modern and progressive rural area whereas other regions, particularly those with large Aboriginal, Metis or Mennonite populations were derided as particularly backward and in need of uplift through education. When four divisions in the South-Eastern corner of Manitoba were the only ones to reject the 1959 proposal for school division amalgamation, the cause of the rejection was said to be the larger proportion of Mennonites living in this region and their natural conservatism and desire to maintain

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<sup>15</sup> B. Warkentin, *Annual Report, 1949-1950*

local control of education in order to avoid losing their “racial”, religious and linguistic identity.<sup>16</sup> Duff Roblin, many years later explained his interpretation of the resistance to the process of amalgamation: “New ideas sometimes arouse fears, especially among minority groups-in this case the Mennonites.”<sup>17</sup>

While Mennonite conservatism was portrayed as a barrier to educational progress and nation building, Mennonites were nonetheless regarded as fundamentally interested in the value of education and thus capable of becoming successful members of society. In contrast, Aboriginal and Metis people were portrayed by the department of education as living in communities that lacked either the economic resources or community interest necessary to produce good schools. Although education of status Indians living on reserves was under federal jurisdiction and thus beyond the control of the provincial public education system, the Manitoba government was responsible for the education of persons of Aboriginal and Metis ancestry who did not reside on reserves. The department of education believed these people to be incapable of managing their own educational affairs through the usual system of school boards run by elected trustees and thus set up “Special Schools” in “depressed areas...most of (which) are located on the edge of Indian reservations.” These schools, which served children described officially by the department as “part-Indian,” were necessary because, in the words of the deputy minister,

It is realized that although education progress in these areas will be slow, proper education can raise the level of each successive generation. The social situation and cultural background of the part-Indian is quite different from that of other

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<sup>16</sup> “Reasons Behind the Rejections”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 28 1959

<sup>17</sup> Duff Roblin, *Speaking for Myself: Politics and Other Pursuits* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999) 114

racial or ethnic groups in the Province. They need assistance to make a successful adjustment from their way of life to that required in our society.<sup>18</sup>

One such example of the modern Manitoba education system fulfilling this civilizing mission was cited in a newspaper report that extolled the virtues of the Dauphin larger school area experiment:

Two years ago a little Metis girl was brought by the Area Bus to the school. She was inadequately and poorly dressed, backward scholastically (sic), painfully shy and unable to mix with the rest of the girls. She was a problem child who badly needed help...The girl was soon supplied with clothes that were just as smart as those worn by other pupils. She was given assistance with her studies and all in the district went out of their way to be kind to her. Quick to learn, this little Metis girl has already caught up with her classmates. Today she is happy, joins in all the games and social functions and has a poise seldom seen in one her age.<sup>19</sup>

This article argued that the separation of this girl from her local area enabled her to escape from the backwardness of her town of origin and experience the civilizing effects of the Manitoba public school system. Bussing children great distances to larger graded schools therefore was not simply rational from a logistical point of view, but, in this view, it ensured that children living in the backward regions of Manitoba would receive enlightenment. The focus of this article upon the clothes worn by the girl in question and her lack of social integration reflects the idea that "civilization" consisted of both material prosperity and the ability to achieve "social adjustment", a definition of Canadian "civilization" that postwar psychologists and new liberalism supporters would have enthusiastically accepted.

Although the overtly racist language of colonialism was reserved for areas in

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<sup>18</sup> B. Scott Bateman, Report of the Deputy Minister, *Annual Report, 1957-1958*, 17

<sup>19</sup> Fred Johnson, "No Permit Teachers in Large Areas", *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 12 1950

which a large number of Aboriginal and Metis students resided, the department of education regarded virtually all of rural Manitoba as in a stage of development somewhere between the progressive cities and “uncivilized” Aboriginal communities. Rural life itself was portrayed as problematic and standing in the way of educational progress. This portrayal was apparent in the discussion of and advice to teachers entering the profession for the first time and going to work in rural schools. The *Manitoba School Journal* presented an article entitled, “You’re Teaching This Year?” in order to better prepare new teachers for life in a small town. Teachers were warned that “the goldfish in his glass bowl is a secluded hermit in comparison to the country school teacher in a new position” and told that the community, although welcoming, would immediately “strive to make you conform to their pattern.”<sup>20</sup> Not only could teachers expect enforced conformity and constant surveillance, but they were warned that all rural communities were essentially the same, and always flawed:

In every community, even the smallest, there are always two rival factions. They may not be political in the strict sense of the word. They may centre around rival banks, rival business leaders, rival church groups, rival social cliques or even around no logical point at all. But as sure as death and taxes, they do exist. And so you must be careful not to ally yourself too closely with either group, at least if your own happiness and success are to be considered.<sup>21</sup>

This supposedly natural and irrational desire of small town people to form groups and fight amongst each other was portrayed as one of the chief obstacles that the rational school teacher had to overcome, but by no means the only one. Teachers were repeatedly warned that the rural lifestyle they were to be thrown into was inherently difficult and

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<sup>20</sup> Author Unknown, “You’re Teaching This Year”, *Manitoba School Journal* 10, no. 2 (Oct. 1948) p. 10

<sup>21</sup> “You’re Teaching This Year”, 10

psychologically disruptive unless one was already used to it. Chief Inspector C. K. Rogers, in noting the difficulty of rural schools in “getting and holding trained teachers”, ignored such possible factors as lower salaries or lack of job security and instead blamed the difficulty on rural life itself, specifically, “the living conditions...such as distance from the school, social life in the district, comfort in the boarding place, isolation of the district.”<sup>22</sup> Teachers, according to inspectors, were not welcomed by the community and were not provided with proper living quarters but instead forced to live in “unsanitary conditions” by communities in which teachers were “tolerated and not really welcomed.”<sup>23</sup> Although they could not always agree on whether rural communities paid too much or not enough attention to the personal lives of teachers, inspectors agreed that rural treatment of teachers was certainly inappropriate and another sign of educational backwardness in rural areas.

Oral histories of teachers who experienced life in one-room schools in rural communities, however, sharply contradict the portrayal of rural life which came from school inspectors and department officials. Although some teachers remarked that they did not enjoy their time in a rural school and sought permanent employment in a larger center, many teachers looked back years later on their experiences in rural one-room schools as some of the best professional experiences in their lives. In fact, nearly all of the claims by those who favored educational amalgamation, and thus portrayed the small rural school as innately dysfunctional, are contradicted directly by the oral testimony of

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<sup>22</sup> C. K. Rogers, Report of the Chief Inspector, *Annual Report*, 1950-1951

<sup>23</sup> W. S. Patterson, *Annual Report*, 1946-1947

teachers looking back on their careers in the postwar era.

At a fundamental level, teachers disagreed with the idea that rural schools provided a poorer quality of education by virtue of not possessing graded classrooms, the latest in technological advancements or other resources enjoyed by urban schoolteachers. In fact, teachers praised numerous advantages of the small rural school including the feeling of “family” or community that existed between the students and teacher.<sup>24</sup> One teacher described older pupils constantly helping her to teach younger children in the primary grades and by doing so becoming more proficient in their studies themselves: “they say that in those schools the learning process wasn’t that good, but I don’t believe that. Because they [older students] were teaching those younger ones, and whenever you teach something that’s when *you* really learn it. So I’m sure they learned a lot more teaching those little ones than doing it themselves.”<sup>25</sup> Charlotte Gabrielle, a one-room schoolhouse teacher from the Virden area noted that this technique of using the older children to assist the younger ones when the teacher was too busy with another grade level was not simply an ad hoc strategy for dealing with the impossibility of teaching eight grades at once but had the positive side effect of fostering independence and teaching leadership skills.<sup>26</sup> Another teacher remarked that teachers in rural schools saw schooling less as a top-down practice but as a group effort in which all members of the

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<sup>24</sup> “Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History”, Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

<sup>25</sup> Annette Charriere, interviewed by Rosa Bruno Jofre, “Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History”, Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1991

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Gabrielle, interviewed by Stacie Lockhart, December 4, 2007

classroom, including the teacher, were involved in both learning and teaching.<sup>27</sup>

Ironically, this description matches very closely with the ideas of progressive education in its democratic and participatory tendencies yet was not recognized as such at the time.

In addition to defending the quality of education in one-room schools, teachers also defended the actions of the local community in which they resided. They disputed theories that local control over education meant either disregard for the value of education or the perpetuation of the local community's conservatism and backwardness. One teacher even went as far as to claim that the level of cooperation between teachers and community was better in rural areas because in rural schools teachers lived in the local area and thus felt an attachment to its future whereas urban teachers often lived several neighborhoods away from the school in which they taught and had little direct social contact with the families attending their school.<sup>28</sup> All teachers from rural schools spoke of the communities in which they worked as caring quite deeply about the quality of education and making significant efforts to get to know teachers personally. One teacher recalls, "The teachers got invited out to homes...if there was anything going on in the community you were invited."<sup>29</sup> Rather than feeling like a goldfish in a bowl, this teacher interpreted the desire of the community to know more about her as a sign of good will and an attempt to integrate her into community life rather than keep tabs upon her ideas

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<sup>27</sup> Helen McKay, interviewed by Rosa Bruno Jofre, "Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History", Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1991

<sup>28</sup> Susan Winther, interviewed by Rosa Bruno Jofre, "Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History", Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1991

<sup>29</sup> Susan Winther

and behaviors.

The cooperation between community and school was represented in rural areas in the annual Christmas concert in which children performed plays, oral recitations of poems, songs and dances for their parents. Almost all teachers, when recounting their many years of teaching experience in the postwar era, have mentioned organizing the Christmas concert as one of the most important, and most stressful “duties” they performed due to the fact that “everyone would be there” and “that was the only chance [the parents] had for their children to do something in public.”<sup>30</sup> Teachers themselves seem to have been as excited and happy about the concert as the parents or children as one described the concert as the “event of the year” in an excited voice while another fondly remembered the after-party which included dancing and lasted until three in the morning.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Christmas concert seems to have become such an obsession in rural schools that the Manitoba school inspectors became concerned that too much time was being spent in preparation for it and that teachers should take care to ensure that time devoted to concert preparation was in fact “a natural outgrowth of day-to-day school work” with relevance to the curriculum.<sup>32</sup> The rural school Christmas concert demonstrates that close bonds were in fact formed between communities and schools and between local residents and teachers. Rural people themselves did not endorse the notion that the backwardness rural life stood in the way of providing a quality modern education

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<sup>30</sup> Annette Charriere

<sup>31</sup> “Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History”, Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

<sup>32</sup> “Regional Trustee Convention Reports”, *The Manitoba School Trustee* 12, no. 6 (Sept. 1956) p. 8

to Manitoba's young people.

The rural one-room school remained in existence in Manitoba for far longer than progressive reformers within the department of education had hoped or expected. Throughout the postwar period, little was accomplished in terms of amalgamating school districts into larger divisions and building larger graded schools to serve populations whose children would be bussed many miles to school every day. It was not until the Royal Commission of 1959 and the subsequent approval by all but four regions of a new plan to divide the province into fifty to sixty divisions that the process of closing the one-room schools began in earnest.<sup>33</sup> Even so, it was not until well into the next two decades that proponents of amalgamation could claim to have entirely eliminated the smaller primary schools that were supposedly retarding educational progress in Manitoba. The eventual elimination of the rural schoolhouse, however, was not consented to by rural communities because they shared the criticisms of the progressives, but because they began to regard the financial limitations of smaller school districts as too difficult to overcome.

Teachers in rural schools who insisted that they delivered a high quality education to pupils and who defended the one-room school as having many advantages admitted that the resources of such schools were simply not enough to provide large libraries or science labs or indeed to offer teacher salaries comparable to those in larger areas. Thus the problem of teacher turnover and attracting high quality candidates for teaching jobs remained in rural districts and even those teachers who speak highly of their school

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<sup>33</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education 1959* (1959), 22-29

districts acknowledged the inadequacy of their own wages. School trustees in poorer districts eventually came to support amalgamation because it promised them a greater degree of equalization of financial resources that would allow them to improve teacher salaries and upgrade infrastructure.<sup>34</sup> It was precisely because rural Manitobans *did* value education greatly that they accepted amalgamation. Finally, another factor was at work in lessening resistance to the elimination of rural schools. Manitoba itself was experiencing a massive population shift from the country to the city which was reflected in school attendance. Simply put, rural schools closed due to lack of pupils as the rural areas of Manitoba declined in population and the remaining population grew increasingly older.<sup>35</sup> The Royal Commission's recommendation to close all Manitoba schools with populations of fewer than 10 students was a death knell for many schools in rural areas that struggled to maintain this number on a yearly basis. Perhaps the reformers were correct that the decline of the rural one-room school was inevitable, but not for the reasons they themselves envisioned.

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<sup>34</sup> "Blueprint for Education: Complete Overhaul of Manitoba's System Proposed", *Manitoba School Journal* 7, no. 8 (Apr. 1945) p. 12-13

<sup>35</sup> "Reports of School Inspectors", *Manitoba Annual Report on Education*, 1955-56

## Chapter 8: The Battle Over Teachers

In the contest over schooling that raged between Progressives and Traditionalists, various battlegrounds had emerged. None was more contentious, however, than teachers themselves. Teachers, particularly female teachers who made up the vast majority of individuals within the profession (72% in 1955)<sup>1</sup> in postwar Manitoba, especially at the primary level, were regarded by both progressives and traditionalists as fundamentally important to the creation of educational hegemony and badly in need of significant reform. The *Legislative Committee Report* of 1944 concluded that all of its recommendations to improve schooling in Manitoba would be of little use if good quality teachers could not be found to implement them:

it is the seriousness of purpose with the power of inspiration of the teacher that infuses vigor, provokes activity, and evokes the stirring of new life in the hearts of our young people. Material conditions may be improved...but in the end, it is the spiritual force behind our educational effort that will determine, not only the quality of our citizenship, but also the course of our civilization. And that spiritual force must find its outward expression through the teacher.<sup>2</sup>

More often than not, however, commentators upon education, whether progressive or traditionalist, found such a spiritual force lacking among Manitoba's teachers. Perhaps no other occupation in Canada was subject to as much outright scorn and derision from so many different factions as was teaching in the 1950s. An article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* discussing the "Big Row" over teachers quoted the Vice President of Great-West Life calling teachers "uneducated and incompetent as a group" and asserting that those

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<sup>1</sup> Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofre and Colleen Ross, "Decoding the Subjective Image of Women Teachers in Rural Towns and Surrounding Areas in Southern Manitoba: 1947-1960", in Bruno Jofre, ed., *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993)

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba, *Report of the Special Select Committee of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly*, (1944)

teachers that “lack either training or ability or both for teaching at any school level” represented the majority in Manitoba.<sup>3</sup> This view was widely expressed in the popular media. Teachers were said to be under qualified and underperforming. No entry into the ever expanding literature on the “battle over the schools” could be complete without at least one attack upon the individuals who had the most direct control over the educational system as it existed in practice. Yet, as with other battlegrounds in the battle over the schools, progressives and traditionalists had vastly different ideas regarding the way in which the teaching profession was to be reformed.

Progressives, seeing the teacher, particularly at the primary level, as primarily a manager of the psychological health of her pupils, argued for more teacher training in the area of psychology, the elimination of the “emotionally immature” permit teacher and the inclusion of more men in the profession. Traditionalists, on the other hand, regarded the teacher’s role as strictly academic and argued that, if schools were to return to the goal of providing the most academically challenging experience possible, then teachers themselves would have to gain greater academic credentials. They also argued for the elimination of permit teachers, on the grounds that they lacked the knowledge necessary to challenge pupils academically. Teachers organizations incorporated parts of each side’s critiques in their own calls for an overhaul of the teacher qualification process in order to advance their primary goal which was the achievement of professional status for teachers. They accepted the argument made by both progressives and traditionalists that

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<sup>3</sup> Stefan Hansen, in “Big Row Erupts Over Teachers”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Jan. 14 1960; Ted Weatherhead; “Teacher Delivers Blast”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan 14, 1960

teachers required far more training than was currently mandated and roundly condemned the permit-teaching system. However, the argument made by some traditionalists that teaching was an innate rather than learned skill threatened their claims to professionalism and thus put them marginally on the side of progressives. The department of education, especially under the Campbell administration, was reluctant to raise minimum teachers' salaries enough to attract a flood of candidates to the profession and relied upon the permit system to fill the gap. Thus, not surprisingly, the department tended to ignore the recommendations of both progressives and traditionalists and insisted that the current teacher training system was adequate until the Royal Commission of 1959.

Certainly no individual was the subject of as much criticism as the permit teacher, a special category set up by the department in order to deal with the massive teacher shortage experienced in Manitoba, and across all of Canada during and after the war. Under the permit system, individuals who had completed grade 12, and in some cases only grade 11, would be given special permission to teach the primary grades for one full year, after which time they would be expected to enter the one year normal school training program in order to obtain the permanent teaching certificate that was standard at that time.<sup>4</sup> It was also hoped that these "permittees" would take a six week summer course offered by the Manitoba Normal School before entering the schools in September. This special course was intended to provide permit teachers with a crash course in the basic skills required to effectively manage a classroom and implement the curriculum.

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander D. Gregor, "Teacher Education in Manitoba: 1945-1982" in Bruno Jofre, ed., *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993)

As of the 1945-1946 school year, however, only 509 of the 826 people who received a special permit to teach had taken the course.<sup>5</sup> At the 1947 peak of the teacher shortage, the permit system provided 871 teachers, almost all of them women<sup>6</sup>. Although the use of permit teachers steadily declined thereafter, in 1951-1952 permit teachers still made up 568 of Manitoba's 5118 teachers or 11%.<sup>7</sup> However, since no permit teachers were employed in the high schools, where teachers almost always had university training, the percentage of permit teachers was much higher in the primary schools, particularly rural schools which for financial reasons had difficulty holding experienced teachers and were thus forced to recruit from the pool of permittees.

The presence of so many "unqualified" teachers in Manitoba's classrooms was a cause of great concern for many educational commentators. Ironically, it was those individuals who were farthest removed from the realities of everyday classroom practice who criticized the permit teachers in the harshest terms whereas school inspectors, who were the only ones other than students who had actually seen permit teachers at work, were much more likely to soften their criticisms. Opinions of permit teachers varied greatly among the inspectors but can roughly be grouped into three categories; those who wholeheartedly approved of the job being performed by permittees, those who felt their teaching was adequate under the circumstances but not up to par with fully trained teachers, and those who condemned permit teachers outright as unable to satisfactorily

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<sup>5</sup> *Manitoba Annual Report on Education, 1945-46*, 10

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Report, 1951-1952*, 11

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Report, 1950-1951*, 13

perform their task. While there were several inspectors in each of the extremes, it was the middle category into which most inspectors' reports fell.

Some inspectors, such as B. Warkentin, fully supported the permit teaching system in arguing that the quality of teaching provided by the permit teachers was generally no better or worse than that of fully qualified ones. Warkentin stated, "the general level of their work was satisfactory, and in a number of cases the work was considered excellent."<sup>8</sup> The chief inspector pointed out that only two permittees failed to complete the school year and that as many were classified as above the level of the average teacher as below. His report also noted that the grade 9 exam results of those students who came from schools relying heavily upon permit teaching in the primary grades were no lower than those who came from schools staffed entirely with teachers holding permanent certificates.<sup>9</sup> Minister of Education John Dryden agreed that "the permit teachers, with a relatively small number of exceptions, have given good service."<sup>10</sup> Both the Garson and Campbell administrations publicly defended the permit teaching system, the former because it was deemed necessary due to the wartime labor shortage and the latter because of a fiscally conservative ideology which opposed the extension of public spending on all areas of education if at all possible.

Most school inspectors did not have as positive a view of the permittees as the officials at the top of the public school system hierarchy. Inspector R. J. MacKenzie

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<sup>8</sup> B. Warkentin, *School Inspector Reports, Annual Report, 1946-1947*, 26

<sup>9</sup> C. K. Rogers, *Report of the Chief Inspector, Annual Report, 1946-1947*

<sup>10</sup> John Dryden, *Annual Report, 1946-1947*, 11

declared, "permit-teachers did as well as should be expected from them", but noted that the conditions with which they were faced made it impossible for them to perform up to the standard of the regular teacher: "generally they had "left-over" schools in which teaching and other conditions are not up to standard. Some were not mature enough for the responsibilities placed upon them, but in the great majority of cases, once they accepted the responsibilities they responded handsomely and gave of their best."<sup>11</sup> This ambiguous attitude toward permit teaching was held by the majority of inspectors, who commended the permit teachers individually and praised both their efforts and intentions, but maintained that permit teachers were not equal to their fully qualified counterparts, and were in need of "more help than the inspectors can give them."<sup>12</sup> School inspectors credited themselves with giving the guidance that allowed permit teachers to succeed, but maintained that the continuation of the permit system was not a long term solution to the problem of the teacher shortage. As inspector A. A. Herriot concluded, "the sooner they can be replaced by qualified teachers the better it will be for all concerned."<sup>13</sup>

Several inspectors, however, argued that their own experience in the classroom with permit teachers had demonstrated "without any shadow of doubt, the advantages gained by the employment of fully qualified and experienced teachers."<sup>14</sup> This minority position on the part of the inspectors was the viewpoint most often found outside of the

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<sup>11</sup> R. J. MacKenzie, "School Inspector Reports", *Annual Report*, 1946-1947

<sup>12</sup> A. A. Herriot, "School Inspector Reports", *Annual Report*, 1946-1947

<sup>13</sup> Herriot, "School Inspector Reports"

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Connolly, "School Inspector Reports", *Annual Report*, 1946-1947

department of education itself. With the exception of the inspectors, permit teachers found very little sympathy with the Canadian public. Instead they were denounced from all sides of the education debate, and regularly held up by progressives and traditionalists alike as examples of everything that was wrong with public education. Even their fellow teachers, at least those with full qualifications, denounced them, as the Manitoba Teachers Society repeatedly published attacks upon the permit system in *The Manitoba Teacher*. In one such article, the principal of Kelvin high school in Winnipeg claimed that students who had been “subjected to permit teaching” were academically weak and could “profit much more from correspondence courses” rather than from teaching by permittees.<sup>15</sup> He called for the abolition of the permit teacher system entirely and blamed the provincial government for failing to address the teacher shortage in a more constructive manner. The *Winnipeg Tribune* echoed the idea that permit teaching was something to which students were being “subjected”, publishing an editorial entitled “Lowered Educational Standards in Manitoba” that argued for the elimination of the permit teacher by the provincial government based upon two premises: that the standards in schools had been lowered and that permit teachers were unable to properly carry out the task of teaching.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most scathing attack upon permit teachers came from *Macleans* which published a three part report on education in Canada. One part entitled, “The Teachers” placed the blame for most educational problems in Canada squarely on the

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<sup>15</sup> R. J. Cochrane, “Like a Grain of Mustard Seed”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 38, no. 1(May/June 1959) p. 18

<sup>16</sup> “Lowered Educational Standards in Manitoba”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Mar. 5 1947

shoulders of permit teachers, and governments that allowed the permit system to continue. Using anecdotal evidence, *Macleans* presented the classroom of the permit teacher as every parent's nightmare. Permit teachers, it was said, were immature teenagers who were "not teachers but baby sitters" who had been let into the classroom because, in the words of an unnamed deputy minister, "we take everybody. If you haven't got a criminal record and if you haven't been certified by a psychiatrist - you're in."<sup>17</sup> One sixteen year old in Quebec, according to the article, "spent most of her classroom time reading love pulp magazines while children amused themselves by playing games or drawing. When her dates interfered with her job she closed the school."<sup>18</sup> Such a shocking story demonstrates the degree to which permit teachers were demonized in the popular Canadian press and hints at the highly gendered nature of this criticism.

Even teachers who took the one year normal school course, however, were under qualified according to many progressives. For them, the solution to the problem of unqualified teachers lay in allowing future teachers proper access to the knowledge of experts, particularly those in the field of psychology. Since, for the progressives, education was primarily the changing of behavior or the promotion of psychological adjustment, those within the public school system should themselves be well-adjusted individuals with an adequate understanding of psychology. The Canadian Teachers' Federation reconstruction committee, for example, explicitly called for normal schools across the country to redirect their educational programs to provide courses in

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<sup>17</sup> "The Teachers", *Macleans*.

<sup>18</sup> "The Teachers", *Macleans*

“community leadership” as well as “child guidance and practical child psychology.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, progressives suggested both an increase in formal training in human management techniques that were grounded in psychological knowledge and a change in the composition of the teaching workforce itself to include only those individuals who had the necessary psychological makeup to become successful teachers. Since the psychological characteristics deemed desirable in teachers were generally labeled as “male” and the undesirable traits almost exclusively labeled “female”, the solution to the problem of training more effective teachers was to recruit more men, as well as the “correct” type of women, ie. married mothers rather than single women.

According to progressives, it was not as important for the normal school to produce a scholar with vast amounts of knowledge as it was to produce a well-adjusted individual who was capable of teaching proper behavior to others. Particularly in the area of primary teaching, the academic knowledge required of a teacher was limited. That a teacher had acquired enough academic knowledge to teach the primary grades after completing high school did not mean, however, that no further teacher education was necessary or that permit system was sufficient preparation for a teaching career. Another inspector noted that the reason for requiring permit teachers to go to normal school after their one year certificate expired was not academic per se but so that they could learn to overcome their “lack of maturity and training academic and professional.”<sup>20</sup> As Dr. J. L.

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<sup>19</sup> Canadian Teachers Federation Reconstruction Committee, *Education: The Keystone of Democracy*, “Subcommittee for Education”, Advisory Committee on Coordination of Postwar Planning Files, GR1650 A0064, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

<sup>20</sup> W. C. Rind, “Reports of School Inspectors”, *Annual Report*, 1950-1951, 43

Asselstine, the Director of the Child Guidance Clinic of Winnipeg remarked, "the Grade I classroom is no place for an emotionally unstable child to be in charge."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the future grade I teacher did not need to go to normal school in order to learn the academic content of grade I, they needed to go in order to learn to manage the psychological well-being of a classroom full of "problem" children who, Asselstine warned, "In a few years, unless something is done, will steal, run, and play truant."<sup>22</sup> The normal school, for progressives, was not to be so much an academic institution as a place for the creation of well-adjusted teachers knowledgeable in the field of human relations. As one proponent of increased teacher training observed, "A teacher is like a bacterium: it is a delicate living organism which will only grow to maturity under carefully controlled circumstances; it must be carefully nurtured; the atmosphere must be regulated to produce congenial conditions."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the primary function of the normal school was to promote mental health and emotional maturity in its pupils.

Normal schools in Manitoba did indeed create a highly regulated atmosphere for would-be teachers. The students at the Winnipeg residential normal school, mostly women between the ages of 18 and 21, were subjected to regimentation in every aspect of their lives and for virtually every minute of their day. Although they had graduated from the public school system and would soon be teaching others, normal school students were

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<sup>21</sup> J. L. Asselstine, "Child Development and Behaviour in the Primary Grades", *Manitoba School Journal* 20, no. 6 (Feb. 1959) p. 19-21

<sup>22</sup> Asselstine, "Child Development"

<sup>23</sup> Jack Stevenson, "He Who Can, Does. He Who Cannot, Teaches", *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 8 (Apr. 1952) p. 18

not considered to be adults. They were referred to in official documents as “boys and girls” regardless of their actual ages which in many cases were beyond the official age of legal majority.<sup>24</sup> The paternalistic, *in loco parentis* approach of the normal school was designed to create an atmosphere in which students could be molded, like clay, into exactly the type of teachers desired by the department. The regimented normal school began at 7 am every day when the “house captains” awakened their fellow students for a 7:30 breakfast at which “no one sits down or touches anything placed on the table, before grace has been said.” Before heading to classes for the day, future teachers were led in religious and patriotic exercises. Both noon and evening meals were again held at precise times and the after-class portion of the day was regulated as well. Students were given “quiet time” from 6:45 to 8:00 during which the canteen and gymnasium were locked and they were expected to study. Although students had the freedom to leave the school grounds in the evening, they were expected to be in bed by 10:30 and, if they wanted to be late, had to inform the administration of their “whereabouts and intentions.”<sup>25</sup>

The strict regimentation of daily life in the normal school was perhaps designed to produce graduates who would become so accustomed to it that they would enforce regimentation upon public school pupils as strictly as it had been upon them. The purpose of the public education system in an industrialized society has always been in part to inculcate a modern, industrialized way of life in young people so that the division of time and space that is so unique to modern society might appear to be common sense.

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<sup>24</sup> *Annual Report*, 1945-1946, 46

<sup>25</sup> Author Unknown, “A Day in the life of a Normal School Student”, *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 4 (Dec. 1955) p. 11-14

The regimentation of the normal school suggests more than simply a desire to produce teachers accustomed to time/labor discipline, however. The normal school sought to mold the entire psychological make-up of the future teacher. The progressives sought, to borrow one of their own terms, to create the "whole teacher."<sup>26</sup> In other words, the teacher herself was to be trained to achieve perfect mental health. A teacher who lacked the appropriate psychological attributes would fail to accomplish the goal of creating psychological adjustment among her pupils that was so central to the progressives' conception of schooling. Thus, the normal school represented an effort to change future teachers' behavioral patterns and psychological make-up.

Child psychologists were convinced that the teacher's own mental health was vital to the success of the educational process. Samuel Laycock, Canada's foremost child psychology expert, was perhaps the most prominent in insisting that successful teaching was a product of the teacher's own personal psychological adjustment. Laycock conducted an investigation of 158 classrooms in 5 provinces in 1944 in order to evaluate the effect of the mental health of teachers on their classrooms. His conclusions, which were repeated in numerous articles for educational publications across Canada for the next decade, made it clear that the difference in good or bad education, "lay in the personalities, not the academic competence, of the teachers."<sup>27</sup>

In a remark that was published in journals by the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, the Manitoba Teachers Society and the Department of Education itself, Laycock

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<sup>26</sup> Author Unknown, "Teachers - Let's take Stock", *Manitoba School Journal* 13, no. 1 (Sept. 1951) p. 11

<sup>27</sup> S. R. Laycock, "Invest in Good Teachers", *The Manitoba School Trustee* 12, no. 8 (Nov 1956) p. 5-6/21-22

claimed of his experience observing the classroom in action, "it was amazing. The dithery teacher had a dithery classroom; the tense teacher a tense one; and the bossy teacher either a meek or resentful one."<sup>28</sup> This placing of responsibility for the behavior of the students within the classroom directly upon the teacher's personality and disregarding the factor of the pupils themselves exemplified the tendency of 1950s child psychology to subscribe to a crude behaviorism that regarded all children as essentially blank slates upon which adults could write. When applied to the classroom, this belief meant that there were no bad children or bad students, just bad teachers. The key to effective classroom practice was therefore to be found in shaping the personality of the teacher herself. As Laycock stated, "only the emotionally mature, mentally healthy teacher can teach most effectively the three R's or promote other learning."<sup>29</sup> By shifting the focus of child adjustment away from the student and on to the teacher, psychologists created a larger role for themselves as guardians of that system by virtue of their belief that they alone possessed the expert knowledge necessary to train good teachers.

Laycock argued: "the school should be a laboratory for living where a child's relationship with his teacher and his fellow pupils give him practice in being socially, emotionally, intellectually and morally mature...only a well-trained and highly competent teacher can do that."<sup>30</sup> Specifically, the teacher was to be trained not only in understanding the "characteristics and problems of each stage of child development" but

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<sup>28</sup> Laycock, "Invest in Good Teachers"

<sup>29</sup> Laycock, "Invest in Good Teachers"

<sup>30</sup> S. R. Laycock, "The Teacher's place in the Community", *Manitoba School Journal* 9, no. 1 (Sep. 1947) p. 18

also needed to receive instruction that would further her *own* personality development. If the behavior of children in the classroom was more or less a product of the teacher's own mental health, then the teacher needed to learn to develop a well-adjusted personality. In other words, teacher training at the normal school, according to psychologists such as Laycock, was to be very much like the curriculum of the public school, with the focus placed upon "meeting basic personality needs", such as "emotional security", "independence", "achievement", "recognition of approval" and "sense of personal worth."<sup>31</sup> If teachers did not learn how to live balanced lives that provided them with emotional satisfaction, they would become maladjusted and disgruntled complainers who let their resentment spill over into the classroom.

Although psychologists promoted teaching mental hygiene to those who had chosen to become teachers, they also promoted the notion that not all of the mental attributes required for effective teaching could be learned. They turned their attention, therefore, from instruction of those who were interested in teaching to the selection of proper candidates for the profession, recruiting individuals who possessed the necessary attributes for effective teaching and turning away those who did not. Increasingly, this process of selection assumed gendered overtones. An article in *Chatelaine* told prospective teachers that the predominance of women in their profession was a product of their "normal interest in children, their aptitude for drawing them out" and advised them that if women did not enjoy the messier jobs associated with looking after children, "you shouldn't teach young children...But then, you shouldn't be a mother either. Or maybe

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<sup>31</sup> Laycock, "Teacher's Place"

even a woman!"<sup>32</sup> In other words, the challenges of teaching were not challenges at all if one was a woman rather than a man, since nature had given women the innate ability to handle the hardships of child rearing. Laycock, however, felt that a woman's "natural" love of children was not enough to make her an effective teacher. Affection for children was necessary, indeed assumed, for female teachers but was not enough to make one a responsible guardian of children's mental hygiene. In fact, the rest of the positive personality traits which Laycock deemed essential for teachers were ones that typically were gendered as "male" in postwar Canadian society while most, if not all, of the negative traits which he identified as standing in the way of effective teaching were associated almost exclusively with female teachers, particularly those who were unmarried and either very old or very young. Laycock made this clear in presenting the results of his visits to classrooms, citing examples of teachers who lacked the psychological adjustment necessary to succeed. In almost all of his examples, gender subtly played a role in the characteristics of the teacher which made her unsuitable for her profession and damaging to the welfare of the children.

In the case of young, unmarried female teachers, Laycock characterized them as unable to "thrill pupils or 'lift' them enough", and condemned them for not being "warm" and "outgoing" or for having an "unimaginative, repressed, and "heavy" type of personality" that resulted in a "deadly calm" in the classroom rather than an active and stimulating atmosphere of intellectual curiosity. The young female teacher, according to Laycock, tended to lack the maternal warmth which, it could be assumed, he associated

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<sup>32</sup> Lotta Dempsey, "But School Teaching is Going to be Different", *Chatelaine*, Sept. 1947

with women who had already become mothers. It was older, unmarried, teachers, however, who received the worst condemnation from Laycock. In one classroom Laycock discussed a teacher of the "over-sensitive, recessive, 'old-maid' type" who was having an "unwholesome" effect upon her pupils. The reasons for the deficiencies of this teacher were clear to Laycock after "the Principal told me that this teacher has withdrawn from life, lives and chums only with her mother, does not mingle with the other teachers of the school." In another example, a middle-aged and unmarried teacher was condemned as "dithery", and said to be "flitting from one thing to another...the teacher talks too much and gives the impression of being a neurotic old-maid. The pupils do not like her and are tense, rude and intolerant."<sup>33</sup> In both of these situations, the problems of the teacher stemmed from her poor personality development as a result of her inability, or lack of desire, to carry out her "proper" role of marriage and motherhood. The belief of Canadian psychologists that a "normal" woman wanted to marry and have a family and that failure to do so was therefore a sign of deep-seated neurosis led Laycock to universally condemn the unmarried teacher, particularly the "old maid" who had *chosen* a life without marriage or children, as completely unsuited to become a guardian of children's mental hygiene. He stated that without the "natural" experiences of marriage and motherhood, the unmarried teacher was prone to "develop characteristics which are commonly called "old maidish". Sometimes these express themselves in prudishness and oversensitiveness. At other times they express themselves in cattiness or gushy

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<sup>33</sup> S. R. Laycock, "Effect of the Teacher's Personality on the Behavior of Pupils", *Manitoba School Journal* 12, no. 5 (Jan. 1951) p. 21-22

behaviour...Unmarried teachers must be helped to face the problem as to how they are going to handle the problem of emotional security outside of family life.”<sup>34</sup>

The Manitoba department of education argued, however, that proper normal school training was not enough to produce a superior teacher. The health curriculum stated that, “the teacher with a well-modulated voice, a business-like manner, and an encouraging smile achieves best results from children...If the teacher is nervous, imperious, uncertain or moody, this attitude is reflected in the behavior of pupils and affects their mental development.”<sup>35</sup> Although not explicitly stated in the curriculum, psychologists and educational authorities were believers in the dominant gender discourse that characterized women as more prone to emotionality and instability in contrast to men who “naturally” exhibited a greater degree of outward emotional control and possessed natural “business-like” rationality. Laycock’s findings and the writings of the Manitoba department of education both expressed a fear which was common among male psychologists in the postwar era: that female teachers were particularly prone to either “over-mothering” or “under-mothering”. As Kristina Llewellyn argues, in the 1950s the female teacher was considered either “too much of a woman” or “too little of a mother” to be suitable.<sup>36</sup>

Such concerns were nothing new. In turn of the century Ontario at the time of the “cult of true manhood,” educational experts complained that female teachers were having

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<sup>34</sup> S. R. Laycock, “Mental Hygiene in Education”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 8 (Apr. 1946) p. 16-17

<sup>35</sup> *Health Education and Nature Study I-VI*, Department of Education, Province of Manitoba, 1946, 21

<sup>36</sup> Kristina Llewellyn, “Gendered Democracy: Women Teachers in Post-War Toronto”, *Historical Studies in Education* 18 no. 1 (Spring 2006)

an overly feminizing effect upon male students, making them unable to perform their male roles as breadwinners and political agents later in life.<sup>37</sup> Psychologists in the 1950s, while no longer talking of “true manhood” shared the same core beliefs that the development of appropriate gender characteristics in boys was hampered by their being overly surrounded with female influences at an early age. Presumably they were already subject to a “woman dominated home” for the first few years of life. Now they were going from houses in which “over-mothering” was a serious problem to schools in which female teachers exerted too much of a feminine influence upon them. All of this time spent in female-dominated situations would create a generation of women who learned to be too domineering and men who turned out to be overly effeminate.<sup>38</sup>

These concerns about the effects of female teachers, particularly upon boys, were expressed at the first annual Canadian Education Convention in 1958 and received a high profile in the print media across Canada. One presenter at the conference told attendees that “co-education is bunk and boys ought to be taught by men” because “women teachers cannot teach the manliness necessary to equip a boy for this tough world.”<sup>39</sup> A proposed solution to this problem consisted of creating separate boys and girls schools across the country in which boys would only be taught by men and girls, interestingly, would be taught by both male and female teachers. Apparently, even girls could use the additional

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<sup>37</sup> John Abbott, “Accomplishing a “Man’s Task”: Rural Women Teachers, Male Culture, and the School Inspectorate In Turn-of-the-Century Ontario”, *Ontario History* 78, no. 4 (1986)

<sup>38</sup> Mona Lee Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999)

<sup>39</sup> “Women Teachers Turn Out Sissies, Educationists Told”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Feb. 20 1958

influence of male authority figures, perhaps to prevent their becoming accustomed to women holding positions of authority. Both boys and girls would benefit from patriarchal schools because in the present system, "from birth until the age of six they're dominated by Mom; between six and 14 they're dominated by women teachers at the elementary level, and between ages 13 and 18 it's the same again in high school."<sup>40</sup> Although the last statement was false, (the majority of high school teachers in Canada were in fact male), the presenter's concern with female authority in a postwar social order that was supposed to be patriarchal and based upon the male breadwinner-led nuclear family as the basic unit of society was shared by many Canadians. The teaching profession, therefore, was innately problematic as it represented a break from the "natural" order of patriarchal society and yet was supposed to prepare the next generation to replicate such as society. Simply put, young people who grew accustomed to a women being in charge would be ill-suited to a world in which this was seldom to be the case.

The psychologists' solution to the problem of reforming the teaching profession was to induce more men to enter the profession so as to limit the influence of women, and particularly emotionally unstable single women, on Canada's next generation. Just as psychologists saw the solution to the problem of "over-mothering" in the home as the presence of a properly masculine father, the solution to the problem of children being subjected to neurotic, unmarried females was the introduction of men into the lives of school children. Educational authorities in Manitoba made no secret of their desire to recruit more male teachers. The Minister of Education declared in 1945 that the return of

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<sup>40</sup> "Too Many Women in a Boy's Life", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 21 195;

men who had been serving in the armed forces during the war was “a good sign” because, “we are particularly desirous of increasing the proportion of men in the teaching profession and hope that as demobilization proceeds we shall find amongst the ex-service men a willingness to devote their lives to this most important task.”<sup>41</sup> Newspapers openly called for the replacement of women teachers with men after the war and argued that teacher recruitment efforts should be focused primarily upon men. One editorialist remarked, “Women teachers should be the variable and men teachers the constant factor in a program to recruit candidates for the teaching profession.”<sup>42</sup> This call for male recruitment was echoed by the Department of Education’s annual report of 1945 which concluded that a “dearth of male teachers” existed within Manitoba at that time.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, the words of educational authorities made little difference in the actual gender ratio of teachers or those training to become teachers in Manitoba in the postwar era. From 1918 to 1961, the percentage of teachers who were women remained between 70 and 80 percent, although women still made up only 33% of principals by 1956.<sup>44</sup> In normal schools, the situation was no better from the perspective of those who desired more male teachers. In the 1944-1945 school year, of the class of 235 at the Manitoba Normal School (222 of whom graduated) only 11 were men<sup>45</sup>. After the war,

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<sup>41</sup> J. C. Dryden, “Minister’s Page”, *Manitoba School Journal* 8, no. 2 (Oct. 1945) p. 3

<sup>42</sup> Victor Peters, “The Crisis in Our Schools”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 25 1953

<sup>43</sup> *Annual Report*, 1944-1945, 32

<sup>44</sup> Mary Kinnear, “Mostly for the Male Members. Teaching in Winnipeg 1933-1966”, *Historical Studies in Education* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994)

<sup>45</sup> D. Bruce Moorhead, “Report of the Normal School”, *Annual Report*, 1944-1945, 55

the situation began to change slightly, and the enrollment of 36 men in the normal school, the largest number since the beginning of the war, was described as having a “beneficial influence upon the school”.<sup>46</sup> However, the hoped-for flood of male recruits to the teaching profession failed to materialize and the Winnipeg Normal School remained very much a female-dominated institution. By 1950-1951 men made up only 26% of the student body and remained at roughly that level throughout the decade.<sup>47</sup> When the demographic make up of prospective teachers was broken down further, one could see that the typical person going into teacher training in Winnipeg was a female, rural WASP between the ages of 18 and 20, hardly the professional urban career man pictured by psychologists as the solution to the problem of mentally unsuitable teachers.

In addition to encouraging men to take up teaching as a profession, educational authorities also tried to discourage women from continuing as teachers as much as possible, particularly when they married or became pregnant. Despite the massive teacher shortage facing Manitoba, normal school Principal Bruce Moorhead was not worried about the teachers who were leaving the profession each year since “this loss is occasioned mainly through marriage and *should not be considered a loss* (my italics). If qualified teachers marry, the transfer of their ability from school to a home is in no sense a loss.”<sup>48</sup> Although in the 1940s, married women received the right to continue as teachers for the first time in Manitoba, they were still in many cases discouraged and their

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<sup>46</sup> *Annual report, 1945-1946*, 53

<sup>47</sup> “Report of the Normal School”, *Annual Report, 1951-1952*

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Moorhead, “Normal School Report”, *Annual Report, 1946-1947*, 63

motives for continuing to work were considered suspect. As in all areas of women's work, married women were assumed to be "doing this work to supplement the family income, perhaps to pay mortgages on homes or try to afford the luxury of the family car."<sup>49</sup> In other words, it was assumed in a society founded upon the notion of the male breadwinner that a woman's income was not necessary for the family and thus a working woman, especially one with children, was seen as at best materialistic and looking to simply purchase more consumer goods, and at worst a selfish and greedy individual who was taking a job from a man while at the same time neglecting her domestic duties which should have been her primary focus. Ironically, discouraging married women from continuing to teach only exacerbated the teacher shortage and contributed to the influx of more young, female permit teachers into classrooms.

Oral testimony from female teachers confirms that they faced discouragement if not outright dismissal after marriage and childbirth. One remembers that while she was at normal school, "it was taken for granted that most girls would only teach until they got married." Another notes that after her own marriage, "I was permitted to continue teaching but denied placement on the permanent staff and any salary increases."<sup>50</sup> Teachers who chose to have children faced an extremely uncertain future as in most cases it was assumed they would never return to the profession and their position was lost as soon as they resigned due to pregnancy, which in most cases was well before the final

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<sup>49</sup> H. Connolly, "Reports of School Inspectors", *Annual Report*, 1951-1952, 63

<sup>50</sup> Helen McKay and Ernestine Fenny, "Recollections, Reminiscences and Reflections", in Bruno Jofre, ed., *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), 623, 605

months of pregnancy.<sup>51</sup> However, despite the best efforts of some to make a return to teaching difficult after marriage or childbirth, the problem of Manitoba needing more teachers than there were trained candidates, particularly male ones, meant that any efforts to exclude married woman teachers simply backfired by increasing the teacher shortage.

Although educational reformers could agree on the desirability of more male teachers, the process of actually making this goal a reality was quite complicated. Low wages and lack of professional status remained major barriers to the entry of men into teaching and conversely the reality of teaching as a “female” occupation worked against its recognition in society as truly a “professional” occupation or one in which workers were paid a wage capable of supporting an entire family.<sup>52</sup> When evaluating the failure of the education system to attract more men to the teaching profession, some commentators relied upon cultural factors to provide an explanation. The headmaster at St. John’s Ravenscourt, a Winnipeg private school, commented that, although lip service was paid to the importance of teaching by middle class men, “the number of businessmen who would willingly see their sons as school teachers is minute.”<sup>53</sup> Other commentators also believed that men, or at least respectable, hardworking and competent men, failed to enter teaching because the profession was populated with underachievers and unqualified women. Many, including school inspectors, blamed the permit teachers specifically,

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<sup>51</sup> McKay and Fenny, *Recollections, Reminiscences and Reflections*”

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, historically one of the most basic criteria for determining which occupations are recognized as professions has been whether or not they are carried out by men or women. See Mary Kinnear, *In subordination: professional women, 1870-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995)

<sup>53</sup> Robert Gordon, “The Mission of the Teacher”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 12 1954

remarking that no self-respecting man wanted to choose as his vocation something which a teenage girl could enter with no schooling after high school.<sup>54</sup>

*Macleans*, in a feature article entitled, "Why Teachers Quit", placed the blame on the lack of prestige given to teaching and the negative stereotypes of teachers in the popular imagination: "Another factor that keeps young people out of the profession and makes many teachers self-conscious and almost ashamed to admit that they are teachers is the old "Ichabod Crane" concept of the schoolmarm, which still persists in many minds. Did you ever hear a characterization of a schoolteacher on the radio that didn't make him out to be a blundering fool or worse? Cartoonists show teachers as spindly, long-nosed, bespectacled individuals...always good for a laugh."<sup>55</sup> As the concern expressed by *Macleans* demonstrates, the perceived lack of masculinity of the teacher was regarded as a barrier to encouraging the right sort of people, (ie, middle class men) from entering the profession. However, the article also told two stories of male teachers who quit the profession who, perhaps not surprisingly, did not name the public perception of teaching as reasons for quitting. Instead, they told *Macleans* financial considerations were paramount. They could, according to the magazine, make more money as a salesman and a farm hand respectively than they could as teachers.<sup>56</sup>

Increasingly, promoters of men in the teaching profession acknowledged that it was not the image of the teacher in the public mind so much as the reality of their pay that

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<sup>54</sup> R. E. Beecher, "Inspectors Reports", *Annual Report*, 1947-1948, 41

<sup>55</sup> Max Braithwaite, "Why Teachers Quit", *Macleans*, Jan. 1 1947

<sup>56</sup> Braithwaite, "Why Teachers Quit"

ultimately dissuaded middle-class men from taking up the occupation. As with virtually any job designated as “women’s work”, teachers were underpaid. The *Winnipeg Tribune* called the salary given to Manitoba teachers “a disgrace” and “completely out of line with the responsibilities which the teacher is expected to shoulder and the training demanded.”<sup>57</sup> In comparison to other occupations, teachers’ salaries simply did not measure up. In 1950, the average salary paid to a teacher in Manitoba was \$2,095 while the “average industrial wage worker” received \$2013 and the “average industrial worker” receiving a salary made \$2818.<sup>58</sup> Although the wages of qualified teachers rose significantly in the 1950s to a 1957 average of \$3,331 per year, permit teachers’ wages remained far below the average at \$2639 and the wage of an industrial worker remained comparable to if not more than that of a teacher.<sup>59</sup>

No group was more enthusiastic in promoting the notion that low salaries presented the greatest barrier to the recruitment of more qualified candidates (and more men) to the teaching profession than the Manitoba Teachers Society. MTS had historically been instrumental in fighting for the small raises in real wages enjoyed by teachers. Since its creation in 1919, however, it had been struggling with the issue of its own identity and purpose, specifically the question of whether it should be a labor union or a professional organization. By the end of the Second World War, the question of

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<sup>57</sup> “This Year of Disgrace”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, April 13 1944

<sup>58</sup> “Report of the Deputy Minister”, *Annual Report*, 1957-1958, 11; Rosa del C. Bruno Jofre, “The Manitoba Teachers Federation 1919-1933: The Quest for Professional Status”, in Bruno Jofre, *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993)

<sup>59</sup> Bruno Jofre, “The Manitoba Teachers Federation 1919-1933: The Quest for Professional Status”

whether MTS should act as an industrial union and form alliances with workers in both white and blue collar industries as part of the broader labor movement or whether it should turn its back on organized labor and instead consider itself akin to professional organizations that governed occupations such as medicine and law had been answered. MTS saw itself first and foremost as a professional organization whose primary goal was to receive recognition for teaching as a profession, characterized by self-regulation of the job itself, control over training and entry into the profession as well as salaries commensurate with those in other professions.

In deciding to become an organization aimed at achieving professional status for teaching, MTS turned its back on the labor movement and those who wanted MTS to become more like other unions in the postwar era. Although regarding collective bargaining as one of its greatest achievements, MTS eschewed the right to strike, opting instead for a system of binding arbitration in cases in which the union and a school division could not agree on the next collective agreement. The renunciation of the right to strike took place in 1956 when MTS essentially “traded” it for greater job security for teachers. Under the new agreement with the provincial department of education, teachers with more than two years experience teaching in a district could not be dismissed from their positions without the right to appeal the dismissal to a joint committee made up of both MTS and management representatives. If this appeal was unsuccessful, the teacher could take their final appeal to the provincial level via an arbitration board appointed by the minister of education.<sup>60</sup> Although MTS regarded such an arrangement as a step

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<sup>60</sup> “How Good is Our Tenure”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 34, no. 4 (Jan/Feb 1958) p. 4-5

towards professionalism in that it both secured tenure for teachers, which was vital to their being regarded as professionals rather than individuals temporarily involved in an occupation, and disassociated the teaching profession from unions which used the strike as a weapon, some teachers were less than enthusiastic about the decision. An editorialist in *The Manitoba Teacher* noted, "there is evidence that many teachers feel we sold our birthright for a mess of potage".<sup>61</sup>

A vital step for any occupation to receive public recognition as having "professional" status is for the profession itself to take control over training and to institute a long and arduous process of education for those who would seek to enter the profession. For teaching in Manitoba in the post-war era, however, this was perhaps the biggest obstacle faced in the quest for professionalism. Not only did teachers themselves have absolutely no control over teacher training, but the amount of education required to teach in a Manitoba classroom was far below what would be considered appropriate for a profession. Thus, MTS were harshly critical of permit teachers, not on the basis that the individuals themselves were necessarily unsuited for teaching but that, because teaching *was* in fact a professional job, even if not recognized as such, it was just as impossible for an untrained teacher to perform her job adequately as it was for a medical student to perform surgery as well as a trained doctor. Indeed the analogy with the medical profession was used quite frequently by teachers in order to promote their desire for professional status.

The president of MTS in his outgoing 1947 address to teachers attacked the

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<sup>61</sup> "How Good is Our Tenure"

presence of 800 permit teachers in Manitoba schools as a “deplorable condition”, stating, “Imagine...the possibility of hundreds of young aspirants to the medical profession who crowd the pre-medical course, being permitted to...establish a paying practice in the villages and hamlets of Manitoba where no doctors are available. Can you imagine the outcry of the doctors and the community?”<sup>62</sup> J. W. Chafe, who would later write the official history of the Manitoba Teachers Society, wrote an editorial in 1956 that appeared in the *Winnipeg Tribune* expressing exactly the same concern: “Can you imagine a mother allowing a permit-doctor (say a first-year medical student) to treat her child’s body? Too many parents are willing to leave the delicate task of guiding the development of their children’s minds and characters for 10 to 12 years in the hands of immature, uneducated and untrained teachers.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, MTS joined the chorus of voices calling not only for the elimination of the permit system but for the raising of the educational bar for all teachers. As early as 1944, the Canadian Teachers Federation called for a minimum of one year of university education before normal school for teachers, with the ultimate goal of all teachers earning a university degree before entering the profession.<sup>64</sup> The Royal Commission of 1959 agreed with MTS, calling for the abolition of the normal school in favor of transferring control over teacher education to the University of Manitoba faculty of Education, a process which was completed in 1965<sup>65</sup>. This was still not, however,

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<sup>62</sup> F. D. Baragar, “The Past President’s Address”, *The Manitoba Teacher* 26, no. 1(May/Jun 1947) p. 12-16

<sup>63</sup> J. W. Chafe, “Your Child at School”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, April 2 1956

<sup>64</sup> “Teachers Want Equality in Education”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 15 1944

<sup>65</sup> Gregor and Wilson. *The Development of Education in Manitoba*

teacher self-regulation but rather passing the control over teacher training to the university rather than the department directly. It did, however, promise to bring teaching closer to being a true profession by requiring teachers to hold significant academic credentials and enabling educational experts who held PhDs to preside over training.

The 1959 Royal Commission recommendation that teachers be subjected to a “merit rating” system that would be used to determine their pay and tenure was a setback to progressive teachers within MTS who desired professional status. Under such a system, teachers would be given much higher wages and expected to attain higher academic credentials, both key planks in the program for professionalism. Instead of gaining more control over their occupation in return for higher wages, however, teachers would be subject to a rating system that would force them to prove that they had “earned” their higher salaries. In the words of Robert Bend, one time minister of education and former teacher, “If teachers are going to receive this kind of money, they should be ready to prove they’re worth it.”<sup>66</sup>

The merit rating system would replace the possibility of teacher control over the curriculum and classroom practice with a paternalistic system of almost constant oversight in which each school principal rated each teacher annually before giving his report to the inspector who commented upon the teacher’s ability himself. These two reports would then be given to the local school board without the teacher having had the chance to make her own case as to her abilities as a teacher. It would be the local board that would then decide on the basis of the reports of the principal and the inspector

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Bend in “Bend Goes All-Out for Merit Rating”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 10 1959

whether or not to approve a “merit increase” in pay for each individual teacher. The only level of appeal available to the teacher would be to file a complaint, along with “supporting evidence” to MTS, which would then make their appeal on the teacher’s behalf directly to the Minister of Education, whose decision in the matter would be final.<sup>67</sup>

Not surprisingly, those who had attacked teachers as standing in the way of educational progress were very much in favor of the new potential scheme for teacher salaries. The *Winnipeg Tribune* called teacher merit ratings, “something that should have been recognized in teachers’ salary schedules long ago - not only in justice to hard-working teachers but as a means of improving education standards in the province.”<sup>68</sup> Presumably, standards would be improved by such a scheme because any teacher repeatedly denied a raise on the basis of merit would quit either in search of more lucrative work or because of the pressure which would be applied by parents who were unhappy with their children being taught by a poorly rated teacher.

Trustees were also heavily in favor of the merit rating system, voting virtually unanimously in favor of its adoption<sup>69</sup> and expressing their great disappointment when, under heavy pressure from MTS, the provincial government failed to implement this particular Royal Commission Recommendation.<sup>70</sup> Of course, the support of trustees for

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<sup>67</sup> Manitoba, *Royal Commission on Education in Manitoba 1959*, (1959), 123

<sup>68</sup> “No Reward for the Good”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 4 1958

<sup>69</sup> “The Urban Association Annual Meeting”, *The Manitoba School Trustee* 13, no. 3 (April 1957) p. 16

<sup>70</sup> “Education Bill Scored by MSTA”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Nov. 2 1958

merit ratings only confirmed in the minds of teachers what they had suspected all along: that the merit rating scheme was an excuse for thrifty school boards to avoid raising teachers' salaries at all. The main objection to merit rating put forward by MTS, however, was not so much that the system could be used to deny raises to teachers or grant them on personal rather than professional grounds on the whim of the individual school board, but that the idea of merit rating called into question their central premise that teaching was a professional job. Those opposed to the merit system did not oppose it upon the general principle that ranking of teachers was demeaning and contrary to the principle of equality in the workplace, but rather that the objective quality of the teacher was simply impossible to measure accurately.

Rather than adopting an argument that perhaps an industrial union would have employed, insisting upon the fundamental principle of equal pay for an equal amount of work and equal education and experience, MTS argued from a professional point of view that since teachers' jobs were more complicated than those of industrial workers, their proficiency was difficult, if not impossible to measure. While a factory worker's proficiency could be measured with a stopwatch and rewarded accordingly, (a possible state of affairs about which MTS showed no opposition), a teacher's skills and abilities were so complex that any individual teacher's effectiveness was impossible to gauge effectively. As one expert commissioned by MTS to present the case against merit ratings argued, "a teacher is a craftsman, but the value of his craftsmanship may not be apparent for a score of years. A teacher's work with one pupil may function in the mastery of subject matter, with another it may help to build strength of character or it may

help to mold personality so that the pupil in later life works well and co-operatively with neighbors and associates. Only God knows the teacher's real score."<sup>71</sup> Implicit in this statement, however, was the notion that such a score did indeed exist; it was simply beyond the capacity of mere mortals to discover it. Judging the teacher by the achievement of his or her pupils was impossible, furthermore, because while the individual craftsman or industrial worker created an object from essentially unworked raw material or at least a uniform product from further down the assembly line, the teacher inherited a diverse and imperfect product in the form of a child who might already have been well or poorly crafted by teachers and parents. Another expert brought forth by MTS argued, "the schooling of a child is a group project, not an individual one, and the excellence of his education will depend in large measure on how whole-heartedly and unselfishly all his teachers co-operate in the effort."<sup>72</sup> Rating teachers individually promised instead to divide the staff and breed jealousy and resentment, making group cooperation even more difficult.

While the progressive program for reform of the teaching profession included additional training in psychology, the inclusion of more men in the profession and professional recognition for teachers, traditionalists generally did not regard teaching as a profession and, although they too felt that the academic training required to work in a Manitoba classroom was completely inadequate, had little or no desire to see an

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<sup>71</sup> W. L. Shuman, "We Vote "No" on Merit Rating", *The Manitoba Teacher* 35, no. 4 (Jan/Feb 1957) p. 36-39

<sup>72</sup> John Long, "A Trustee Looks at Merit Rating", *The Manitoba Teacher* 35, no. 4 (Jan/Feb. 1957) p. 14-15

expansion of training in the area of child psychology. For traditionalists, the problem with unqualified teachers was not that they were lacking education in the area of management of children's psyches or knowledge in how to run a classroom but rather were insufficiently trained in the subject matters which they were charged to teach.

Traditionalists held a quite different vision of what made one qualified to teach and allowed one to become an effective teacher in the public school system. Hilda Neatby saw the ideal teacher not as manager of behavior and expert in psychology but as a scholar.<sup>73</sup> In *So Little For the Mind*, Neatby wrote that teacher training was essentially a waste of time in its current form because, "ordinarily, any intelligent person can teach any other intelligent person what he knows; his success will depend very largely on his knowledge of the subject matter and his sympathy with the pupil."<sup>74</sup> Thus, she dismissed the goings on of the normal school as little more than wasting a valuable year instructing young people on "the operations of the local school act, the meaning of a teacher contract, how to draw up a time-table, and how to get along with the janitor" and reporting upon "the latest research findings about the optimum width of school corridors or the latest thing in paper towels."<sup>75</sup> Neatby claimed that no more than two hours total were required to instruct teachers on what they needed to know to physically manage the running of a typical school. The rest of the normal school program was simply filler and the memorization of meaningless jargon. What was required for teachers, then, was not more

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<sup>73</sup> Hilda Neatby, "Education is NOT Everybody's Business", *Chatelaine*, April 1958

<sup>74</sup> Hilda Neatby, *So Little For the Mind* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1953), 74

<sup>75</sup> Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, 78

normal school controlled by the department of education but increased liberal education at a university.

Neatby's views on the solution to the problem of teaching in postwar Canada were born out of her own life experiences. Neatby herself had struggled to obtain a University education facing barriers as both a woman in a male-dominated world and a product of a modest economic background who required scholarships in order to proceed. Between degrees, Neatby had attended normal school herself, intending to teach high school while pursuing her masters degree. Neatby would never teach within the public school system, however, and was able to obtain work teaching at the university level instead. Neatby found that her own continuing education not only made her a more effective university-level teacher but also a more mature, studious and generally more capable person. Her own personal journey of higher education as a path to greater fulfilment in life, as well as her brother's frustrations and struggles in his career as a teacher and principal, convinced her that the path to the creation of better Canadian teachers lay in further education for future teachers along academic lines. Normal school was, for Neatby, an inferior product for the creation of individuals well-suited for teaching. Higher education for those capable of excelling within it was a path to progress, not just for the teaching profession but for all of society.<sup>76</sup>

Traditionalists echoed Neatby in their dissatisfaction with the academic knowledge of Canada's teachers. University professors who were unhappy with what

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<sup>76</sup> Michael Hayden, "A Short Biography of Hilda Neatby", *So Much to Do, So Little Time: The Writings of Hilda Neatby*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983) 7-42

they regarded as a recent decrease in the abilities of incoming university students were quick to point the blame not just on a “frill” laden curriculum but on teachers who supposedly did not impart the knowledge necessary for competent performance in university in their students because they did not possess it themselves. Public criticism of the academic credentials of teachers, from primary to high school grades was particularly strident in the area of science after the launch of Sputnik in 1957. In the wake of the public panic surrounding the Russians’ “winning the space race” many turned their blame to teachers who, it was said, could not teach science properly to young people correctly because they themselves did not understand it<sup>77</sup>. Traditionalists, following Neatby’s lead, accused teacher training of filling teachers’ heads with psychological nonsense while neglecting to further their knowledge of the content they would eventually be teaching. A chemistry professor at University of British Columbia remarked that “Incompetent people are allowed to teach science in Canadian high schools...This is one reason why the country fails to produce enough scientists. Russia is turning out twice as many scientists as the rest of the world.”<sup>78</sup>

Neatby and the traditionalists argued that a thorough knowledge of the subject matter one was teaching was sufficient for one to become an effective teacher and thus implied that the teaching methods which progressives claimed to have been scientifically developed and tested were more or less a waste of time. Some traditionalists advocated the notion that teaching was an occupation that simply could not be taught. Great

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<sup>77</sup> “Teachers Criticize School System”, *Toronto Telegram*, Nov. 26 1957

<sup>78</sup> Cyril Reid in “Better Teaching Gives Russia Lead”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Oct. 12 1957

teachers were “born” with the gift of imparting their knowledge to others and therefore the best course of action for the department of education was to weed out those unsuited for the profession, give a financial incentive to those who were to take up teaching and provide these individuals with the maximum amount of academic knowledge possible in order to allow them to succeed in the classroom. Not surprisingly, such a prescription did not sit well with progressive reformers who argued that the idea of the “born teacher” was a dangerous one which would lead to chaos in Manitoba’s classrooms. Dean Neville Scarfe invoked professionalism as a defense against critics of the teacher training system, remarking, “neither musicians nor artists, neither doctors nor lawyers ever become great without training. No one wished to be operated on by the untrained, “born surgeon”. It is folly to suggest that teaching alone of all professions needs no training.”<sup>79</sup> Of course, acceptance of Scarfe’s argument was predicated upon one accepting the premise that teaching was, in fact, a profession, something which the traditionalists disputed. Thus, in this debate as with many similar ones of the time, the “battle of the schools” was not so much a debate between the two sides as it was an argument between two groups who spoke a very different language and held a fundamentally different set of beliefs regarding not just the intellectual foundations of public education but the intellectual underpinnings of post-war Canadian society itself.

Teachers, however, were not simply passive objects to be manipulated by those who wanted to reform the teaching profession, whether progressives or traditionalists,

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<sup>79</sup> N. V. Scarfe, “Is Teacher Training Really Necessary?” *Manitoba School Journal* 16, no. 1 (Sep. 1954) p. 8-10

psychologists or newspaper editors. Although bound to follow the dictates of those who controlled both entry into their profession and tenure once hired, teachers did not simply accept the comments of the various groups who blamed them for Canada's supposed educational dysfunction. Instead, they developed their own vision of what constituted a "good teacher" and articulated their own agenda to the best of their abilities. While many teachers took sides in the "battle over the schools", evidence suggests that for many these debates were deemed less important than other issues facing teachers in their classrooms on a daily basis.

When the *Manitoba School Journal* temporarily offered teachers the ability to turn the journal into more of a two way conversation between themselves and the department via a "question and answer page", the questions received and answered by the department dealt with much different issues than those taken up in the feature articles presented for teachers by the department. Most of the inquiries by teachers dealt not with theoretical issues of education or the latest findings by child psychologists but instead consisted of specific questions of how to manage the many tasks assigned to the teacher in the limited time frame of the school day. Such questions from a typical question and answer page included, "I am having trouble with my timetable. I have pupils in Grades I-VIII and a girl in grade IX taking her work by correspondence. Could you please give me some ideas on how to timetable my work?" or "How can I keep my Grades I and II pupils profitably occupied while I teach other classes."<sup>80</sup> The enormous task of managing a one-room school meant that the teacher was in effect preparing lessons and grading papers for

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<sup>80</sup> "Question and Answer Page", *Manitoba School Journal* 17, no. 3 (Nov. 1955) p. 6

every subject in every grade while trying to find ways in which to give children the individual attention they often required. Several former one-room school teachers remarked that the independence of “being my own boss” was one of the great advantages of the one-room school, but also left teachers in a situation in which, “you were on your own and you had to figure out things for yourself.”<sup>81</sup> Some found this situation almost impossible to manage, as one teacher recalled: “I was never able to arrange or prepare enough assignments to keep them (the pupils) busy.”<sup>82</sup> Most teachers relied upon trial and error in determining their own theoretical framework for teaching. If a certain technique worked, it was continued. If not it was discarded. Urban teachers in graded schools did not necessarily feel any less put upon in their day to day lives. The *Directed Self Survey* found that among the top four complaints of Winnipeg teachers was a vague outline from the department of what they were expected to do, a lack of proper materials and books and a lack of time.<sup>83</sup> It seems that they too were using almost all of their time and resources in a struggle to make the classroom work on a day to day basis and, like their rural cousins, were put in a position in which they were forced to figure out on their own what worked and what did not.

In the postwar era it seemed as though everyone could agree that the teaching profession was in a state of transition. Whether teaching would emerge as a profession or

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<sup>81</sup> Bruno-Jofre and Ross

<sup>82</sup> Agnas Remais, interviewed by Rosa Bruno Jofre, “Education in Southern Manitoba - Oral History”, 1991, Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

<sup>83</sup> *Report of the Directed Self Survey - Winnipeg Public Schools* (Chicago: Committee on Field Services, Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1948) Education Library Archives, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 146-147

not and whether teachers would be trained in psychology, in academic subjects at the university level or through a program of apprenticeship had yet to be decided. In the end, teaching would take on elements of all three visions. As both progressives and traditionalists had wished, permit teachers were eliminated in the 1960s and by 1965 the era of the normal school too had ended, with teacher training being permanently transferred to the University of Manitoba faculty of education.<sup>84</sup> Progressives could take pride in the fact that psychologically-oriented courses in classroom management and guidance were part of the new university teacher training program. Traditionalists were happy about the creation of teaching as an occupation requiring university education, particularly when that education was not just in the area of techniques for understanding and management of child psyches but consisted of higher academic training in the subject areas which students would one day teach. On the other hand, the goal of professionalism sought by MTS was never fully realized, although teachers continued, and do continue to this day, to perceive of themselves as professionals. Whether or not the public at large holds this same perception is a matter of debate in a way it is not for the legal or medical professions. Furthermore, many of the markers of professional status such as control over entry into the profession and control over curriculum were not entirely in teachers' hands. Education it seemed, still was everybody's business as long as the provincial government wished it to remain so. Nor, however, did teaching, as traditionalists such as Neatby hoped, become regarded as a "natural" skill that could not be learned but simply existed

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<sup>84</sup> Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1984)

as a product of one's own mastery of a subject. Particularly in the area of primary education, academic content remained secondary to theory and technique in the courses at the university level. If not a profession, then public school teaching in the post-war era was at least regarded as fundamentally different than teaching at a university or other institution of higher learning and as an occupation that required not only inborn skills or attributes but skills in handling the physical and mental well-being of pupils that could only be learned from those with expert knowledge.

## Conclusion

The drama that was the battle over public education in postwar Canada reached its climax in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In Manitoba, this climax can be seen in two important events; the Canadian Conferences on Education of 1958 and 1962 and the McFarlane Report issued by the Royal Commission on Education in 1959. The first demonstrated the inability of the two sides in the debate over the future of public education to reach even the most limited degree of consensus or, indeed, to even agree upon the terms of the debate itself. The second represented an attempt at formulating public policy which expressed a practical compromise between the two camps that neither entirely pleased nor entirely antagonized either. Together they revealed the limits of possibility for the program of public education in Manitoba in this era.

The first Canadian Conference on Education held in Ottawa in February of 1958 was a media extravaganza touted as the *deus ex machina* which would solve the problem of the "crisis of education" once and for all. The *Winnipeg Tribune* noted that the conference was launched, "with all the fanfare usually associated with the unveiling of a new automobile"<sup>1</sup> while the *Manitoba School Trustee* claimed that the conference had "caught the imagination and enthusiasm of the general public" and would no doubt be "a brilliant gathering."<sup>2</sup> The conference organizers themselves did little to dispel notions that this meeting would settle the "battle over the schools" in a constructive fashion once and for all. The creators of the conference included nineteen different national

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<sup>1</sup> "Exit Education Conference", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Aug. 6 1962

<sup>2</sup> "Canadian Conference on Education", *The Manitoba School Trustee* 13, no. 11 (Feb. 1958) p. 31

organizations representing industry, labor and parents' groups and claiming over two million Canadians in their memberships according to their own estimations.<sup>3</sup> The chairman of the conference, neurologist Wilder Penfield, noted that this was not simply a gathering of laymen outside of the corridors of educational power. Included in the conference were some of the most prominent and outspoken commentators on education of the past decade including Samuel Laycock, Sidney Smith, and Hilda Neatby but also those individuals whom Neatby described as "the captains of education - deputy ministers and deans, superintendents and presidents" in addition to "lesser folk - principals and teachers and trustees, home schoolers and professors".

Neatby summarized the gathering by stating, "for the first time in a generation representatives of all levels of education...met in Ottawa in free and general talk with representatives of their clients: parents, businessmen and labor unions. No interested group was excluded nor was any matter remotely pertaining to education slighted."<sup>4</sup> With such an assemblage of individuals convened in one place and observed by a rabid media who put them on the front pages of newspapers across the country, how could the conference fail to solve the problems plaguing the education system? The answer to this question was to be found among the bickering and disagreement into which the conference descended.

Fundamentally, the battle over education was not so much a rational debate about education policy as a war of attrition between two sides who shared completely different

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<sup>3</sup> Wilder G. Penfield, "The Crisis in Education", *Winnipeg Tribune*, Dec. 6 1957

<sup>4</sup> Hilda Neatby, "Education is NOT Everybody's Business", *Chatelaine*. April 1958

visions of the school system and postwar Canada itself. Thus, traditionalists and progressives could not even reach agreement regarding the all-important question of why a public education system existed in the first place, much less reach consensus on the various issues of its operation. A Canadian Press article summing up the meager results of the 1958 conference said it best when commenting that while the conference had aroused public opinion and perpetuated the already prominent notion that public education in Canada was deeply flawed, it “missed the boat on recommending what’s to be done about it.”<sup>5</sup> The *Winnipeg Tribune* concluded that the conference had “thrown plenty of light on what is wrong with education in Canada, but without any concise program for improving matters in the future.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the only resolutions which the conference managed to pass included demands for more spending on education by the federal and provincial levels of government and encouragement of higher pay for teachers, both of which had never been causes of disagreement between progressives and traditionalists in the first place.<sup>7</sup> Fundamentally, the conference failed to produce tangible results because the battle over the schools was not merely a debate over how best to achieve the goals of schooling, but about what those goals should be in the first place. Progressives remained committed to the idea of schooling as a tool for the production of citizens who were psychologically capable of succeeding within and reproducing the postwar new liberalism. Traditionalists were equally adamant that schooling needed to

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<sup>5</sup> “They Lit the Fuse But No Explosion”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 21 1958

<sup>6</sup> Charles Lynch, “Meet Sees Ills But Offers No Cure for Education”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 21 1958

<sup>7</sup> “6 Demands for Education Aid”, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Feb. 21 1958

return to its supposed original purpose of preparing young people to succeed in a *laissez-faire* society based upon individual competition that was strong enough morally and intellectually to repel the threat of the Soviet Union. So long as these two different visions of postwar Canada remained, there would be no uniformity regarding the issue of education.

Despite the failure of the 1958 conference, its organizers tried again to assemble an even larger collection of organizations at a second conference four years later in Montreal. The 1962 conference, however, was even less successful than the first and by some accounts represented a complete and abject failure. Despite the original intent of the organizers to create a permanent organization devoted to the study of education<sup>8</sup>, the National Committee on the Canadian Conference on Education voted itself out of existence in June of 1962, just three months after the second conference.<sup>9</sup> Their reason for doing so was once again the failure to reach consensus simply by bringing all players in the education game to the table. The 1962 conference degenerated into yet more polemics being launched back and forth by traditionalists and progressives, with the *Tribune* noting that the delegates went home arguing among themselves and concluding, "The Canadian Conference on Education - extravaganza, dismal failure, milestone, waste of time - is over."<sup>10</sup> Little enthusiasm could be found from any constituency to revive it.

While the failure of the Canadian Conference on Education demonstrated the

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<sup>8</sup> R. W. Queens-Hughes, "Major Pulse-Taking on Canada's Schools", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 2 1962

<sup>9</sup> "Education Group Kills Conference", *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 1 1962

<sup>10</sup> Pat Campbell, "Delegates Go Home Arguing", *Winnipeg Tribune*, March 9 1962

inability of Canadians to reach agreement regarding the purpose or practice of public schooling and marked the end of public enthusiasm for broad attempts at widespread educational reform, the Royal Commission of 1959 in Manitoba demonstrated how the influence of two powerful historical blocs led to the adoption of a new educational synthesis in Manitoba's public schools that resembled the ideals of neither school of thought yet included elements of each. Despite the conclusion drawn by some that compromise was impossible in the battle over the schools, there were some within the department of education who demonstrated that this was not entirely true. J. K. MacKay, Chief Inspector of Schools for the province, wrote in 1958 of a possible compromise that would foreshadow the recommendations of the MacFarlane report a year later. He stated that the principle of educating the "whole child," as progressives advocated, was indeed a sound one, and the inclusion of subjects such as music, art, health and physical education was justified, but cautioned that the three R's should still form the core of the curriculum. Furthermore, making learning "fun" was important: "Business and Industry recognize [fun's] importance and we have things such as coffee breaks, pleasant physical working conditions, and extra-curricular activities of a cultural and recreational nature." At the same time, such recreation was to remain a diversion from the serious and sometimes difficult work of the school rather than its central purpose.<sup>11</sup> MacKay concluded by stating, "some may call me a Progressivist, others a Traditionalist. I am neither."<sup>12</sup> Such a compromise position may not have won MacKay any friends among the die hard

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<sup>11</sup> J. K. MacKay, "The Teacher, the Pupil, and the Public", *Manitoba Schools Journal* 14, no. 9 (May 1958)

<sup>12</sup> MacKay, "The Teacher, the Pupil, and the Public"

supporters of either side, yet it did demonstrate a desire on the part of the Manitoba department of education to move forward with a new program of education that placated both sides to some degree.

Manitoba's Royal Commission was similar to other such commissions that took place in 1959 and 1960 in Alberta, BC, PEI and Saskatchewan, all of which recommended a "return to the fundamentals", marked an official end to the "experimentation" with progressive education and yet retained the vast majority of the results from such experiments.<sup>13</sup> For example, on numerous occasions the MacFarlane Report stressed that it advocated a return to fundamentals as demanded by traditionalists, stating, "It is better for the pupil that he learn a few subjects well than that he emerge with an undigested mass of impressions of many subjects. To this end, the peripheral subjects permitted in any grade must be rigidly restricted to ensure that they can be given in the time available after satisfying the demands of the core subjects."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the devotion of additional time to the core subjects, however, subjects such as health and physical education, art, guidance and home economics or industrial arts remained part of the school program rather than being eliminated as traditionalists had hoped. Furthermore, the Royal Commission agreed with the progressive notion that the purpose of the public school was to do more than simply identify the intellectual abilities of each student and train the more capable to be scholars: "It seems to the

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Titley and Kas Mazurek, "Back to Basics? Forward to the Fundamentals?", in E. Brian Titley ed., *Canadian Education: Historical Themes and Contemporary Issues* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1990)

<sup>14</sup> Manitoba, *Royal Commission on Education in Manitoba 1959*, (1959), 127

Commission that there can be but one basic aim in compulsory public education...no aim seems legitimate except that of developing in each child the desire and the capacity to become an acceptable and worthy member of a society of free men.”<sup>15</sup> Such a statement had the advantage of both eloquence and ambiguity so that progressives could interpret it as a sign that the goal of “education for democratic citizenship” was being retained under a different name while traditionalists could choose to interpret it as a repudiation of social engineering via psychology and a return of “moral” instruction in the schools. Such an interpretation was supported by the most controversial recommendation of the Commission: that “Judaeo-Christian concepts” be formally introduced to public schooling in order to foster “moral training and character formation.”<sup>16</sup> Although formal religious instruction was not to be compulsory (students being given the option to opt out) it was recommended that at least ten minutes per day be set aside for religious exercises in addition to a daily half-hour religious studies program in which children would be instructed as to the principles of either Protestantism, Roman Catholicism or Judaism.<sup>17</sup> For many traditionalists, such a call for a return to religion-based moral instruction in the school was long overdue. Although the trend of the Royal Commission report was very much toward a return of traditional education, progressives could still take solace in the fact that, especially in the primary grades, the enterprise or hands-on methods of learning were retained and the return of a school system based upon rote memorization and

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<sup>15</sup> *Royal Commission*, 126

<sup>16</sup> *Royal Commission*, 150-152

<sup>17</sup> *Royal Commission*, 150-152

frequent formal examination was not recommended.<sup>18</sup> The Royal Commission demonstrated that, while the pendulum had temporarily swung in favor of traditionalism, progressive education had a lasting impact upon the theory and practice of education within Manitoba.

The failure of the Canadian Conference on Education and the report of the Royal Commission marked the formation of a new paradigm in public education. While both progressives and traditionalists could rightly complain that the public school system that emerged in Manitoba in the 1960s and beyond would not entirely inculcate the sort of hegemonic beliefs they desired to see in young people and thus would not lead directly to the realization of their visions of the postwar social, political and economic order, neither side could deny that the education system of the sixties was greatly changed from that which existed prior to the Second World War. The “battle over the schools” itself, at least in its most public forms, died a quiet death, as the postwar moment of reconstruction and the initial hysteria of the cold war era both passed and fewer and fewer Canadians wondered aloud how their country could avoid a return to the dark days of the “Age of Catastrophe” or speculated as to the chances of Canada’s survival in the face of the Soviet threat. While the issue of reconstruction which had sparked so much interest in public education slowly disappeared as Canada found itself living within the new postwar consensus rather than debating its proper form, the debate between progressives and traditionalists did not truly end. Rather it simply continued in other forms with different actors contesting different specific issues. Neither side claimed victory nor conceded

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<sup>18</sup> *Royal Commission*, 163

defeat. Instead both simply continued the process of attempting to win enough adherents to their philosophy of education as to one day establish something resembling unanimity.

The debate between “progressives” and “traditionalists” has continued, to the present day, to demonstrate fundamental disagreement over the purpose and practice of schooling among those responsible for its planning and implementation. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a school of educational thought resembling the principles of “progressive” education gained great support across Canada as part of a generalized radicalization of Canadian politics and liberalization of Canadian society. Thomas Fleming, education historian of BC, refers to this youth-based movement for broad social change as not so much a social revolution as a “cultural prison break....in which long-neglected constituencies, as well as new coalitions, clamoured for recognition of their rights.”<sup>19</sup> The Hall-Dennis report in Ontario echoed the ethos of the time in calling for a more libertarian school system in which children’s independence and interest were to be of primary concern and the conformity, competitiveness and authoritarianism supposedly present in the old system were to be eliminated. These changes which at the time were promoted as part of a broader vision of the “modernization” of Canadian society ranged from the purely superficial such as loosening up dress codes and conducting experiments in school architecture such as the “open school” to the fundamental such as the elimination of religious instruction and corporal punishment, the replacement of quantitative with qualitative report cards in the primary grades and the

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Fleming, “From Educational Government to the Government of Education: The Decline and Fall of the British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1972-1996”, *Historical Studies in Education* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003)

implementation of a language arts curriculum intended to nurture the “whole child” and focus upon creative expression rather than technical correctness.

The traditionalists, however, were never fully eliminated from the debate, and, just as a backlash to the radicalism of the 1960s and the perceived excesses of that era led to the birth of the New Right or neo-liberalism as a major political movement throughout the Western world from the late 1970s to the end of the century, so too a backlash against the changes to the public school system of the 1960s and 70s emerged stronger than ever. Once again critics of public education, as they had done in the fifties, mobilized against the supposed “softness” of the public school system and its attempts at “social engineering” which were said to have weakened the individual moral fibre and intellectual ability of young people and created a generation incapable of succeeding within the laissez-faire society which neo-liberals regarded as the solution to the problems of the previous decades. This new move toward traditionalism in education resulted in governments across Canada reimplementing or attempting to introduce several of the major tenets of the traditionalist program of the 1950s including an increased emphasis on the “core” subjects of English, Math and Science, standardized testing at all ages, special enriched streams for students identified as gifted as well as the evaluation and testing of teachers.

In Manitoba, the Conservative Filmon government of 1988 to 1999 backtracked from the more “progressive” bent of Manitoba’s first NDP government of 1969 to 1977 led by Ed Schreyer. The Conservatives implemented province wide English Language Arts and Mathematics exams for grades three, six, nine and twelve in addition to other

measures aimed at bringing renewed emphasis to academic achievement in the core subject areas. However, many of the reforms of the NDP era, such as the “whole language” approach to reading, remained. Similarly, when Filmon’s government gave way to an NDP administration led by Gary Doer, provincial exams remained in place, albeit only at the high school level. Although all of these changes in Manitoba’s education system occurred because of issues and debates specific to their time period, it has remained accurate to say that the “traditionalist” versus “progressive” debate has survived and informed virtually every discussion regarding public education for the simple reason that the confusion of the Canadian Conference on Education has not disappeared. The answer to the question of why exactly we send our children to public schools remains a contested one. Whether one believes that the mandate of the school is to teach solely academic skills or to teach psychological adjustment, whether the vague goal of “citizenship education for democracy” is taken to mean preparation for a society governed by the principles of laissez-faire or by a Keynesian new liberalism, or whether one rejects these goals entirely and envisions another purpose altogether for the educational state, one can look back upon the postwar era and conclude that then, as now, these are not trivial or unimportant questions. Rather, the answers to such questions reveal how, fundamentally, we see ourselves and our society.

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