

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE SIGNIFICANCE GIVEN TO EDUCATION
ON THE EDITORIAL PAGES OF LEADING WINNIPEG NEWSPAPERS
1936 - 1950

BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE
ON POST-GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL
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EDUCATION

BY

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The Significance Given to Education
on the Editorial Pages of Leading Winnipeg Newspapers

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By W. A. Lorne McFarland
M.Ed. Thesis Abstract

Purpose of the Study.--This study attempted to survey and analyze the editorial comment on educational matters appearing on the editorial pages of the Winnipeg Free Press and the Winnipeg Tribune from 1936 to 1950.

The investigation had a two-fold purpose; first, to show the extent to which educational topics had commanded space on the editorial pages; and, secondly, to determine what trends in editorial thought on education appeared to be dominant both in editorial writings themselves and through the policy practiced in selecting educational items for publication on the editorial page.

Sources of Information.--The material which formed the basis for this study was obtained by a careful examination of the editorial pages of both the Winnipeg Free Press and the Winnipeg Tribune. Since the period surveyed covered fifteen full years from January 1, 1936 to December 31, 1950, the number of items used provided an adequate sample for the purposes of the study. In all, 9,356 editorial pages were examined and a total of 3,248 educational items were summarized and recorded.

Technique of the Investigation.--The major steps in analysis were as follows:

1. Calculation of the percentages of space given to education on the editorial page by each of the two newspapers

concerned.

2. Compilation of the number of items and space allotments by months and years for each newspaper.

3. Classification of the different items into types, that is, editorials, articles, reprints and miscellaneous items.

4. Classification of the items into major educational areas. Thirteen of these were set up, namely, University of Manitoba, other Universities, Manitoba schools in general, Winnipeg schools, other Manitoba schools, schools outside Manitoba, education in general, adult education, educational research, libraries and museums, fine arts, technical-vocational education, and teachers' associations.

5. A detailed analysis of a sample of the items from each of the foregoing major areas. From the many specific topics, certain of them, judged to be of interest and value, were selected for extended discussion.

Findings.--1. The main emphasis of the press in the educational field has been at the university and adult level.

2. Both newspapers have strongly supported the University of Manitoba and have consistently urged greater financial support for it.

3. The press has been strongly in favour of the establishment of larger units of school administration in the rural areas of Manitoba.

4. The impact of World War II on our society revealed some serious defects in our educational system, particularly as regards technical training.

5. The press has given little support to the progressive movement in education. Press comment has rather tended to view progressive education with disfavour as being a movement lacking in discipline both for body and mind.

6. Financial problems were found to be a matter of major concern at all educational levels. The need for adequate financial support for education was stated to be necessary before real educational progress could be made.

7. The period was characterized by a steady decline in interest in the liberal arts subjects and by a correspondingly marked trend towards utilitarian types of educational programmes.

8. There appeared to be a gradual but persistent lowering of educational standards which could, in part at least, be traced to the trend towards progressive education with its philosophy of education made easy.

9. The lack of sufficient well-trained teachers appeared to be a universal complaint in the field of public education. This persistent teacher shortage could largely be traced to low salaries, unsatisfactory working conditions, and insecurity of tenure.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Place of the Public Press in Our Society

The function of daily newspapers.--A clear and concise statement of the function of daily newspapers in our society was set forth by John M. Imrie in 1937, who at that time was managing director of the Edmonton Journal. He states their function to be as follows:

Daily newspapers published in democratic countries have one primary function in relation alike to public and state. That is to furnish news with such related information and comment of others as may be conducive to a clear understanding of it.¹

The foregoing concept of the function of the press is claimed to be an evolution of the past fifty years, and has probably not yet gained complete acceptance. Some people, and some publishers as well, consider newspapers as vehicles for the expression of personal convictions. In that regard Imrie states that the expression of opinion by daily newspapers should be encouraged:

All daily newspapers should have opinions and the courage to present them. But their primary function, in a free state, under present conditions, is to provide news, information and comment of others--this

¹John M. Imrie, The Press in Relation to Public and State, p. 3. Edmonton Journal, Pamphlet, (n.d.).

for the general information of their readers and as a basis for the formation of individual opinion.¹

Louis M. Lyons writing in Saturday Night has this to say about the function of newspapers:

These are the two essential ingredients of newspaper service--to inform the readers and to direct attention to the issues of community concern. By all odds the function of information comes first. That's the news--the facts, people can make up their own minds. The overweening obligation is to report, honestly, conscientiously, as fairly and fully as possible. The community has a right to feel sure that its newspaper will never suppress news because some interest, public or private, is served by withholding the facts.²

Freedom of the press.--The importance of a free press in a democratic system has long been recognized. Many articles have been written pointing this out in no uncertain terms. Kingsley Martin states what freedom of the press implies:

The freedom of the press is an essential principle of democratic government which was won in a long and hard fight. It means the right to publish news without censorship, and within the statutory limits of libel, to comment and criticize without interference from the government or anyone else. It is properly a right claimed by the editor, who should be known to the public as responsible for the truth of the news he presents, and for the fairness of his criticism and comment. This freedom is based on the argument that truth can only be discovered by open enquiry; that governments abuse power unless they are subject to control by public opinion, and that intelligent public opinion can only be formed on the basis of honest information.³

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Louis M. Lyons, "What Makes a Newspaper", Saturday Night, June 14, p. 14. Montreal, 1952.

³Kingsley Martin, The Press the Public Wants, p. 140. London, The Hogarth Press, 1947.

factor in that vast operation.¹

Some of the good reasons suggested for discounting the influence of daily papers may be briefly indicated by merely listing some of the other news agencies which exist:

1. Various weekly papers
2. Radio stations
3. Picture weeklies--such as Life, Look and others
4. Monthly Magazines--Readers Digest, Coronet, etc.
5. Public libraries
6. The moving picture theatres
7. News magazines--Literary Digest, Time, Newsweek, etc.
8. Various service clubs
9. Numerous other societies
10. Weekly magazines--Saturday Evening Post, Colliers,
etc.
11. The many trade publications
12. Daily papers from other areas
13. Television stations.

However, since this paper is concerned with educational matters it seems fair to point out that since educational matters are primarily close at hand, the local press is likely to exert considerable influence in educational affairs. In fact, the influence of the local daily papers in this particular field is likely to be greater than in that of any other single news medium or perhaps in all of them combined.

The chief points made in the foregoing somewhat ex-

¹Frank Luther Mott, The News in America, p. 9.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952.

tensive quotations regarding the place of the public press in our modern society may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The primary function of a daily newspaper is to furnish news;
2. sufficient comment should be made on the news to make it understandable;
3. a daily newspaper should have opinions and should express these opinions on topics of the day which are of public interest and importance;
4. a daily newspaper should have opinions and should express these opinions on issues of community concern;
5. a newspaper should not suppress nor color the news to serve private interests;
6. the freedom of the press implies responsibility for accurate reporting of the facts and the honest interpretation of these facts;
7. abuse of the power given by freedom of the press by any newspaper leads to the loss of confidence in that paper by the reading public;
8. the daily newspapers are only one of a number of agencies for the dissemination of news and for the formation of opinion.

The Place of Education in the Press

The art of printing.--In order to assess in a broad way the place of education in the press, it is necessary to consider some brief history of the art of printing, the growth of newspapers, the rise of democracy, and the extension of public education.

Printing and printed material have become commonplace in the twentieth century. Today no one can really conceive of a world without such a medium for the preservation and the transmission of ideas and knowledge. However,

papers began to reach the masses. It is both interesting and significant to note the starting dates of famous newspapers of London, England. Some of these were: The Morning Post, 1772, The Times, 1785, The Daily News, 1846, The Daily Chronicle, 1877, and the Daily Mail, 1896. Newspaper publication did not reach large proportions until after 1855 when improvements in printing presses made possible the production of newspapers at a price which would arouse widespread interest in them.

Newspapers and public education.--It is significant that interest in public education closely parallels the development of newspapers. It is also significant that it was in Germany, the home of printing, that the demand for the education of all children at public expense made its appearance. The idea of universal education for all children in state supported schools was urged by Martin Luther in 1524. A start in this direction was actually made in 1528 in Saxony but not much was achieved. In 1763 Frederick the Great laid down the principle of compulsory school attendance at schools supported by the state.

The first public support for education in England came in the form of grants to church-school societies in 1833. The first state or "Board Schools" in England were set up by the Education Act in 1870. These were elementary schools organized, supported and supervised by the state. The first state supported schools in the United States of America appeared about 1805, and had become fairly common

by 1853. Previous to the latter part of the eighteenth century the schools of both England and the United States were largely under the control of church-school societies and as a result it was the religious motive that controlled education.

Democratic government.--A third factor enters into the picture also, namely, the rise of the democratic form of government. The advanced statesmen of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw clearly the relation of education to political and national welfare. Many of them recognized that the perpetuity of the new form of democratic government depended upon education of the masses. The idea became firmly established that the new education unlike the old, must not be confined to the so-called "upper" or "privileged" classes if democracy was to work.

Interdependence of these factors.--These three, the spread of newspapers, the rise of democracy, and the extension of public education grew along together. There is, of course, no clear evidence to suggest which of these exerted the greatest influence on the others. Certainly newspapers could not achieve wide circulation without a reading public. On the other hand democracy could not survive without an electorate able to read and with access to inexpensive, reliable and up-to-date information such as newspapers could provide.

Finally, public education could not advance without the interest and support of both government and press. It

is, of course, the responsibility of governments to direct, control and finance public education, but the press can and should do much for education. The responsibility of the press is to bring to public notice what is being done in the field of education. The press can assess education in all its branches, advise and criticize governments in their educational policies and safeguard the freedom of universities. In addition, the press can keep a watchful eye on administration, teaching methods, aims of education, standards, and the like, bringing to public attention both the good and bad features of them. The very fact that newspapers enter so many homes, at all levels of society, makes them powerful mediums for awakening public interest in education. The present study, although confined to the editorial pages of the two daily papers in one particular city, should reveal something of the variety and extent of educational topics which have commanded the interest of the press and, it is to be hoped, of the public at large.

The Nature and Scope of the Study

The present study is an attempt to survey and analyze the editorial comment on educational matters which has appeared on the editorial pages of the Winnipeg Free Press and Winnipeg Tribune during the years 1936 to 1950 inclusive. The study has a two-fold purpose, first to show the extent to which educational topics have commanded space on the editorial pages, and secondly, to determine what

trends in editorial thought on education appeared to be dominant both in editorial writings themselves and through the policy practiced in the selection of items for publication on the editorial page.

These two newspapers, the only large daily papers printed in Winnipeg, Manitoba's largest city, constitute two important mediums for the formation and expression of public opinion in this Province. Evidence to show the extent to which they are read is shown by the circulation figures for these newspapers. In 1950 they had a combined circulation of 168,387 copies daily, 105,177 for the Winnipeg Free Press and 63,210 for the Winnipeg Tribune. Complete circulation figures for the period surveyed are given in Tables 23 and 24 of the appendix.

A third daily newspaper, the Winnipeg Citizen was published for some thirteen months during 1948-49 but was not in publication long enough to establish itself as a moulder of public opinion; consequently, it has not been included in the study.

The period surveyed.--The period from 1936 to 1950 inclusive was selected for study with the intention of getting the picture of education as viewed by the press before, during and after the second World War. The period falls into three rather sharply defined divisions.

From 1936 to the outbreak of war in September, 1939, may be considered as the post-depression period. By 1936 the devastating effects of the great depression of the early

thirties were at their height. However, early in 1936 the first signs of recovery from the depression began to appear and a more hopeful outlook for business recovery became evident. Educational programmes certainly had not escaped unmarked by the depression, hence it seems worthwhile to consider the state of education at its close and the effects of gradual economic revival upon education.

With the outbreak of the second World War new and pressing problems arose for education. The evidence shows, however, that for a time at least education and its problems tended to recede into the background as the grim struggle for survival claimed first place in the attention of public and press alike. But the effects of war upon education could not be ignored for long and it should prove valuable to discover what these effects were and how they were dealt with. Thus the war period from September, 1939, to August, 1945 forms a second distinct division.

The third period from the end of the war until 1950 may be termed the post-war period. The close of war brought new and difficult problems for education. The return of thousands of students to the classrooms, particularly at the university level, and the inflationary result of the easing of wartime restrictions are but two of these problems. Here again it should prove fruitful to assess public opinion on education as revealed by the press. The study was terminated at the end of 1950 partly because the effects of this post-war period had largely emerged by that time, and

partly to avoid reference to present day issues which may still be of a controversial nature. The contention here is that events which occurred prior to the closing date of the survey may be considered to be in the realm of history and hence may be treated accordingly.

Specific terms of the study.--While the foregoing serves to explain the selection of terminal dates for the study and to outline the broad approach to it, some further definite direction is required to indicate the lines along which it is proposed to develop the study. With that in mind six suggested hypotheses have been set up with the intention of determining to what extent they are supported by the evidence. These may be listed as follows:

1. That the main emphasis of the press in the educational field has been at the university and adult level.
2. That these two newspapers have strongly supported the University of Manitoba, and its affiliated colleges, consistently advocating the value of such institutions and the need of greater financial assistance for them.
3. That the attitude of the press has been consistently in favour of the establishment of larger units of school administration in the rural areas of Manitoba.
4. That the press has consistently pointed out the great need of improvement in the status of public school teachers, particularly as regards salaries.
5. That the attitude of the press has been favorable to the progressive movement in educational philosophy.