



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 43, NO. 2

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, FEBRUARY 1962

Leadership in Education

NO ONE MAY BE ABLE to forecast the developments in Canadian education, but there is evidence at conferences and meetings that we are convinced of the need to adjust ourselves to new ideas. Every community faces practical problems involving shortage of school accommodation, shortage of teachers, and shortage of money. In addition, there are pressures for changes in the subjects we teach and in methods of teaching. We are becoming increasingly aware of the need, if we are to fulfil our boast of equality of education, for special attention to backward and handicapped and brilliant children.

The effectiveness of any school depends upon getting the proper answers to several questions: what is the job to be done? what resources can be made available? what co-operation can be achieved between those who plan, those who support, and those who control the school?

On another level of thought, there is one question: how are we, in a country that is well off materially and has no longer to struggle with the elemental effort to live, to find a focus in education that will lend form, purpose and order to our lives?

We need leaders who will help us to find the answers. This leadership is not a monopoly of ministers of education, chairmen of school boards and presiding officers of this and that organization. It is a function also of superintendents, principals, teachers and rate-payers.

Merely being elected to office or being posted to a job does not make a man a good leader. He is not simply a person who walks in front of people who know where they are going. Success in leadership depends upon vision of what should be, and the ability to get others to follow toward that goal.

There are open questions in education, just as there are open ends in science. Many of these problems are not the result of our failure in years past, but of the scientific, mechanical and social successes which have come upon us recently. We have to abandon the easy thought that we could be satisfied to educate a few

people exceedingly well and all our people somewhat less well. The times in which we live call upon us to give maximum development to every individual at every level.

Education and society

No nation can expect to be ignorant and free, but ignorance means something different from what it did a few years ago. Matters which in years gone by seemed to be the business of only a few persons are now recognized by an increasing number of Canadians as being their business also.

This is so because, after retreating for centuries, despotism is on the march again. Harsh, obscure and powerful forces are at work under the surface. Intelligent citizenship does not consist in having a simple faith in democracy. It calls for a thorough knowledge of political principles and institutions, of history and economics. It requires ability to read, to understand, and to test the logic of arguments far more complicated than any that have hitherto been addressed to the public at large.

Thirteen years ago George Orwell published his terrifying novel *1984*. In it the Party of the Big Brother invented the means of enslaving men's minds. It began by obliterating history, setting all men adrift in a world where past experience became meaningless. Then it attacked language, debasing speech until it could no longer be the vehicle of independent thought. It reached its peak when it assailed logic and mathematics, bringing its victims not only to say, but actually to believe, that two plus two equals five.

It is false to believe that in a world of revolution we must be revolutionary in education. When so much is dissolving around us we need to cling firmly to such higher standards as we can preserve. We may criticize and reform, but without such standards we have nothing against which to judge the merit of our response to new situations.

We are equally in error if we lay the blame for our crisis in education, particularly our science education

at the moment, on propaganda, scientists, the nuclear bomb, or some foreign country. The crisis is caused by mankind's breath-taking breakthrough into a new technological era. Look around in Canada: we are well up in the ranks of those experimenting with nuclear energy; we are participating, in a small way, in the exploration of outer space; our medical scientists are among world leaders in their studies of brain functioning and in work on the living cell. These point to changes in our lives so startling as to test to the utmost our adaptive capacities and our stability.

Education is constructive

We cannot build greatness in education by talking about the need of education for survival. We must appeal to higher motives than fear. We should hold fast this ideal: that in our homes, our schools, our universities and in their social environment, our children shall be educated to live with others, to attain their highest individual success and happiness, and to prepare themselves for citizenship in a world society.

We cannot be content with the trappings of life, for civilization is higher than telephones and electric lights, automobiles and television sets. The inventions of man have revolutionized the conditions of life and have become, even for people in far off lands who do not yet benefit by them, the false symbols of civilization: as du Noüy calls them in *Human Destiny*: the pagan idols of modern times.

Under these circumstances there is the greatest possible need for people who will lead us in the education path we should tread.

Among the organizations working year in and year out in leadership is the Canadian Education Association, organized in 1891. During these seventy-one years the Association has sponsored interprovincial co-operation in education; given leadership in every area of education, practical and ideal; brought together professional people for studies in leadership; and through its publication *Canadian Education* (now *Canadian Education and Research Digest*) informed and stimulated the thought of all Canadians interested in the subject.

Another illustration of forward looking is the Canadian Conference on Education, sponsored by sixty national organizations. The first Conference was conceived in 1956 by the Canadian Teachers' Federation and others in order to give wider public understanding of Canada's educational needs and problems, to assure an exchange of ideas between the public and those responsible for the direction and encouragement of education.

Why go to school?

The test of our system of education is whether it has helped children to become fully developed human beings. We are failing in our purpose if children merely go to school to walk the treadmill of vocational preparation.

The late Canon Cody once defined education in this way: "The process by which persons grow and are enabled to live significantly." And Prince Philip put it in these words: ". . . training the intellect, actively developing character, and providing a practical preparation for life."

Education is not a process of filling up pupils' heads with facts and formulae. Upon graduating from any educational institution a youth should know three vital truths: where he is; where he is going; and what he had best do under these circumstances. The most precious gift education has given him is the ability to solve new problems by using the accumulated intellectual power of the race.

If, then, we are not to become a nation of docile minds giving carbon copy opinions we need to provide a broad, liberal education. Spurning the thought of the eternal verities as essentials of education, the last Kaiser declared: "Our business is to educate young Germans, not young Greeks and Romans." He spoke the language of nationalistic despotism, not that of liberal democracy.

Some people believe, even today after world-wide examples of the scourge of such thinking, that a liberal education is unrealistic in what has become a technological race for survival. But there is evident a reaction against preoccupation with techniques divorced from humanizing influences. As Léon Lortie, Director of Extension of the University of Montreal, said to the National Conference of Canadian Universities in 1956: "Along with other Canadian institutions of higher learning, the French speaking universities are expressing the opinion that we do not only need scientists, engineers and economists but well educated people who, whatever may be their language or their religion, will be excellent Canadian citizens."

The liberal subjects are not chunks of frozen fact; they are the powerful tools and engines by which a man discovers and handles facts. They sharpen his perceptions, cultivate his powers of analysis, and teach him to foster the habit of holding a valuable point of view. We need to make liberal education not merely something we have a right to and are ready to defend against despots, but something we give freely to our young people.

This is not to say that science should be ignored. It would be absurd to argue that a man could be considered liberally educated today without some comprehension of the role of science in our lives.

We have to live at the level of our times, but we need to know the steps by which we arrived at this level. We need to know about the whole of life, including something of where we are going.

Education of the liberal sort is opposed to dogmatism, to assurance, to closed-mindedness, to smugness, to intolerance of others' opinions. It attempts to develop the ability to use the scientific method of

enquiry so that students may learn to weigh issues and arrive at logical conclusions on the basis of sound and reliable evidence.

Need for leadership

Everyone in Canada has a practical stake in the leadership given to our education. We need to create in groups of people a sense of mutual endeavour, carefully directed toward the aim we have. The function of leadership is to bring out the best efforts in these groups, and to unite their efforts in a common purpose.

Certain principles of leadership apply to all sorts of leaders — individuals and groups, professional and lay, official and voluntary. These include, but are not made up exclusively of, intelligence, initiative, courage, and knowledge about human nature. The personality of the leader does not consist in the possession of a number of independent qualities, but in the fusion of desirable traits in face of a social situation.

The leader is called upon to work earnestly. His preparation must be suitable to the greatness of the enterprise and the hopes of his followers. Much of the bumbling waste of time that blots the history of our co-operative efforts can be laid to people who thought they could negotiate complex problems without doing their homework first.

Leaders are careful to involve key people in their work. When people share in analyzing a problem they are more likely to initiate or support action than if they have been merely told about it. They like to be heard and recognized. They become suspicious of the proposals of anyone who seems to claim a monopoly of inspiration and wisdom.

The leader must be adaptable, willing to discard some of his ideas in favour of commendable new suggestions. He will be aware of the value of compromise. Only after he has failed to win by persuasion should he resort to enticing or coercing, and only then in the case of vital issues.

Who are leaders?

The heart of the educational system is the teacher. Our ideals for our children can be realized only if we have well-informed, well-taught, enthusiastic and dedicated teachers.

Members of the profession, conscious of their social responsibility, can be leaders of the highest importance toward a better educated Canada. If a pupil's mind catches fire it is almost invariably a teacher who sets the spark.

Society has a grave responsibility to teachers. It owes them prestige, suitable payment as non-competitors in a competitive economy, good working conditions as to environment and equipment, protected integrity, and the opportunity to reach higher satisfaction by constantly broadening their horizons.

The teaching profession needs dedicated men and women to whom pay is not an overriding consideration, but, said the Rockefeller Report on Education three years ago: "until we pay teachers at least as well as the middle echelon of executives we cannot expect the profession to attract its full share of the available range of talents."

It goes without saying that the principal is a leader of paramount importance within a school system. He can exercise powerful influence among pupils, teachers and parents, based on their common interest. If he has a vision of greatness, a glimpse of the ideal, he is in strategic position to communicate it in such a way as to inspire teachers to do their best.

The community, through its appointed representatives, should see to it that the school principal is not so loaded with management work and teaching duties that his contribution in leading teachers and pupils becomes dwarfed.

Skill in leadership is looked upon as one of the most important ingredients of administrative success, and the office of school superintendent is a keystone in the local leadership arch.

The superintendent or inspector who has the ideal of improving instruction will not be content merely to audit or review the functioning of the schools. He will help principals and teachers to uncover weaknesses and assist them to build strengths.

While showing strong initiative in guiding the activities of the school groups, he will establish such relationships among his subordinates and between himself and his subordinates as to make them sharers in responsibility and accomplishment.

Every community should, by displaying constructive interest in education, persuade its best available citizens to take office as trustees. To serve as school trustee is to make a substantial social contribution, because on the school board rests the obligation to provide what is necessary in the way of education.

The community will be especially proud of leadership by trustees whose current policies reflect unusual foresight and vigilance. It is a compliment indeed when ratepayers say: "Our school trustees saw this situation coming, and when it arrived we were ready for it."

Moving out from the school, past professional teachers and official boards, we reach the parents, and find that they, too, are leaders in education. They teach language, manners, food habits, self-control, religion, work habits, cleanliness, and a host of other things basic to living. They can block or impede the school, but if they give constructive leadership they can facilitate and support the school.

Parents must not abdicate their own responsibilities so as to rely upon outside agencies to discover qualities which can best be developed at home. They need to motivate their children to use all their potential

capacity to learn, and to guide them toward making the best use of their talent. A child will not strive for excellence unless his parents believe that excellence is desirable.

Group leadership

We have in Canada many associations devoted to the improvement of our educational processes. Parents are acting wisely when they ally themselves with a group of likeable people all passionately concerned in this joint enterprise.

The Home and School movement has made a significant contribution to education by constantly striving to develop parental interest in improving educational opportunities for their children. In many cases it has been instrumental in achieving noteworthy advances in school curriculum and facilities.

A Home and School Association is not designed to take the running of the school out of the hands of the trustees and the principal. On the other hand, warns Dr. S. R. Laycock in *The Parents' Responsibility*, it should not degenerate into a ladies aid to provide luxuries or needed supplies through the running of whist drives and dances. Its purpose is to co-operate with the school authorities so as to assist in the raising of pupils to be mentally healthy and well-rounded citizens.

The Association must be continually studying if it is to be of service to the school. Group discussion is a useful tool in planning a course of action, but let it be discussion of how to do things now and not heady talk about a distant Utopia. As Dr. Samuel Johnson said: "While you are considering which of two things you should teach your child first, another boy has learned them both."

The Home and School Association is not a platform from which educators acquaint parents with policies, but an assembly for the exchange of ideas having as their purpose the provision of the best education that parents and teachers can imagine.

Other groups with major interest in education include the I. O. D. E., which has offered scholarships in post-graduate studies since 1919; the National Council of Women, which has as one educational aim to support the better training of teachers and provision of remuneration commensurate with the importance of their services; and the Federated Women's Institutes, speaking for the rural women in Canada, which has since its inception in 1897 been concerned with all levels of education.

It is evident, then, that we are conscious of the need for widespread leadership in education. The progress of civilization is made up of details in which every person is involved. Leadership stems from the people, and expresses itself through a lively, pressing, urgent public demand for excellence.

Public interest like this needs something to sustain it. Information must be broadcast fully and freely so that the people can discuss facts and determine policies in an enlightened way.

In 1959, a survey was undertaken in a major Canadian city to determine the extent of knowledge about the school system possessed by citizens. The scores ranged from zero to 71 per cent, with an average of 38 per cent. Said the thesis written by E. R. Coffin: "The survey showed conclusively that the public is ill-informed with respect to school matters."

The schools have everything to gain by being frank and helpful in catering to the desire of the community for information.

This does not mean publicity, which is merely telling people about things — perhaps how good you are, or how good your plans and actions are. Nothing could be more dangerous in leadership, whether in education or business, than to think of this sort of thing as public relations.

What is to be sought is understanding, which gives and receives. It provides the information on which proposals and acts may be judged, and it invites the judgment.

On looking forward

There is no philosophy of education with a lifetime guarantee. Education cannot be standardized this year, no matter how hard we try, and left to run itself like an automatic machine. In the course of the next half century — the lifetime of children now in our schools — there can be little question that the spread of technology and the waves of political change will alter the aspect of the world. There could be nothing more disastrous than that we should educate our children for a way of life that does not exist.

As Thornton Wilder put it, our young people are being prepared for a world in which "every good and excellent thing... stands moment by moment on the razor-edge of danger and must be fought for."

This puts us all in positions of leadership. There is not an hour in the education of our young people that is not trembling with destinies, and we are the leaders in preparing for those destinies.

We must define our purpose clearly, and it should not be a paltry compromise with expediency. It should not give in to the panic of immediacy.

How are we to judge the effectiveness of our leadership? Only by seeing clearly the gap between what is and what might be. There is a philosophy which gives us the standard of value by which to judge. It is a very simple one, to which Sir Richard Livingstone has given the name: "The Philosophy of the First-rate."