PRIORITIES IN EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURE:
THE ESSENTIAL BASIS

There is a conflict of opinion concerning the priorities in education in Canada today. It is a conflict of opinion that is now hardened by the October, 1966, Federal-Provincial “entente” that adult manpower training and re-training is a Federal Government responsibility while education (defined as the imparting of knowledge through a standard curriculum during the period of childhood, adolescence, and youth) is a Provincial Government responsibility. The Federal Government has re-asserted its concern with national and regional manpower requirements and is giving this concern priority by backing it up with large expenditures. What has happened since 1965 is that the Federal Government has shifted upwards to an entirely new level in its manpower programmes. Such an initiative was essential if Canada was serious about maintaining its place in the world as a highly productive economic system.

The Provincial Governments continue to state that one of the most important goals of their formal education systems is the provision of full opportunities for the development of individual potential. Yet, since 1965 they have not shifted to a new level in their concern and in their financial support of such opportunities.

As a result, a new structure of national priorities in education and training has been established in Canada. It may also set the pattern for the rest of the 1960s and for the 1970s. First of all, adult training and re-training for the world-of-work has been given a much higher value relative to child and youth education for the development of the individual rather than as a factor of production. Secondly, adult training and re-training for the world-of-work has been given a new, higher value relative to adult education for the sake of continuing to learn, that is “as an end in itself and a contribution to how we live as civilized human beings”.

It is simply noted here that this latter shift in national priorities has taken place. The basic concern in this essay is with the first shift in priorities.
Primary and pre-primary school education is the area in which a substantial upward shift in expenditures could have the greatest long-run individual, social, economic and political return.

On the one hand there is the question of preparing individuals for the world-of-work and of maximizing their contribution to economic growth in this era of permanent scientific and technological revolution (popularly called "The Age of Automation"). For this goal an additional one million dollars invested today in pre-primary school education could reduce by at least several million dollars the expenditures that will be necessary to train and re-train many of today's four- and five-year-olds fifteen years from now for the radically changed world-of-work of 1983. If, in other words, the approach to preparing individuals for the world-of-work had a deeper and longer-run perspective in decision-making than it has at present, Canada would have a much more rational and efficient allocation of funds today. On the other hand, there is the belief that it is good for an individual, however gifted, to be able to develop and use the gifts with which he was born. And related to this is the belief that social and economic barriers which stand between a child and the development of his inherited creative, intellectual, and physical gifts ought to be eliminated. For this goal, an additional one million dollars spent today in pre-primary and primary school education could reduce by several million dollars the amount that will be spent on programmes to counteract alienated teenagers ten years from now in 1978.

The conclusion about these two goals is that there is no valid dichotomy between training individuals to be productive factors of production and their education as unique human beings with unique gifts at the pre-primary and primary school level.

In Canada today a great deal of the intelligence, creativity, and other inherited abilities of a vast number of people is being wasted. At least one of every four non-farm Canadian families lives on an annual income of $4,000 or less and more than one of every two farm families lives on $2,500 or less. At the very most 20 of every 100 children of such families in the age group 19 to 24 are attending a regular day-time school or university. Now if only 20 of every 100 of these children were born with the ability to pursue such education, then the argument that there is massive wastage of the talents of Canadians would lose much of its validity. But this is not so. Since it is probable that more than 50 of every 100 young people 19 to 25 whose parents have annual incomes of $7,000 or more are still pursuing full-time school or university
studies, then one-half of the young people whose parents have incomes of $4,000 or less can be judged as having been born with the capabilities of pursuing such education. (There may be more “born bright-but-poor” young people not involved in formal study than there are actually studying.) This “participation gap” is evidence of a massive wastage of manpower resources in Canada.

The Federal Government’s Department of Labour noted in a case study in Ontario in the 1950s that “it is quite clear that children from ‘middle class’ and professional homes enjoy a higher ‘survival rate’ in the educational system than would be predicted from an examination of patterns according to which intelligence is distributed among students. . . . Such findings . . . merely underline the wastage that is occurring among the bright students who drop out of school not because of lack of intelligence or academic potential, but for economic, psychological and social reasons”.

In 1962 the Central Advisory Committee on Education in the Atlantic Provinces concluded that “there is no doubt that in all four provinces many students who should go to higher education fail to do so, and there is serious loss of student potential . . . about half of the students who could be reasonably classed as of university calibre do not proceed to either university, to teacher training or to nursing”.

Indeed, the Bladen Report (Financing Higher Education in Canada) implies that for every two Canadians in universities today there is about one other young Canadian born with the same ability to do university work who is not attending a university.

The evidence noted above is based primarily on studies done in the 1950s and on the Census of 1961. In 1965-66, the Canadian Union of Students did a sample survey of Canadian undergraduate students which verified the conclusions of earlier studies that Canadian university students are “by and large not representative of the Canadian class structure but rather bear the characteristics of the middle and upper classes of Canadian society.” For example, the study concluded that only 35.0 per cent of Canadian university students were from “blue collar” or working-class families compared to 64.1 per cent of employed Canadians who held jobs that could be so classified.

(Given the extent of this wastage, it is not at all surprising that, proportionately, there are more than twice as many young people in the United States pursuing higher education as there are in Canada.)

Now some people find nothing startling in these comparisons. They assert that children born into the lower social-economic strata in Canada (for
example, low-paid manual workers) are biologically inferior in their inherited abilities, particularly in their thinking powers, to children born to parents who are at the other end of the social-economic spectrum (for example, high-paid corporation directors). Theirs is an hereditary assumption which may have some validity in half-a-dozen isolated rural areas in Canada in which a great deal of family intermarriage has taken place over generations, but it is nonsense when applied to a province, or to Canada as a whole. There is little evidence to support the assertion that the range and distribution of intelligence of a group of children born to parents who have not gone beyond Grade 8 and who bring home annual incomes of $4,000 or less is any different from the range and distribution of inherited capacity of a group of children born to parents with university education who bring home annual incomes of $7,000 or more. The number of children born with the capability for higher education is the same regardless of the social, educational, and economic background of their parents. This is the only possible premise to adopt in the formulation of public policy. It is unequivocally the operating principle of the United States War on Poverty as proposed by President Johnson in his message preceding the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964:

The young man or woman who grows up without a decent education . . . in a hostile and squalid environment . . . that young man or woman is often trapped in a life of poverty. He does not have the skills demanded by a complex society. He does not know how to acquire those skills. He faces a mounting sense of despair which drains initiative and ambition and energy. . . . The war on poverty . . . is a struggle to give people a chance.

There are many reasons for the present wastage of human potential in Canada. The concern here is with the "poverty" environment only. It is now a platitude to say that it is the home environment which stimulates a child to develop the gifts with which he is born and stimulates his desire for learning and knowledge. There are tremendous differences between the home environment and attitudes of a poverty-handicapped home and a well-to-do home besides the definitional difference of annual incomes.

Thelma McCormack, a York University sociologist, comments:

The poverty syndrome is produced not by economic deprivation but by a pattern of social relations symbolized and maintained by income differences. Being poor means being powerless, being treated in a variety of contexts throughout one's life. . . . The Old Left called these people the 'lumpenproletariat' to suggest
that they were not just poorer than most but outcasts too. The probability is high that their children will be outcasts too. Everything conspires against them. With few exceptions their fate is sealed before they ever walk across the threshold of schools which would have failed them in any event.\textsuperscript{14}

One essential aspect of the “poverty syndrome” is that “poverty homes” produce too many children without adequate words at the age of 4 and 5. Such children have not had the opportunity or the encouragement to pick up the basic skills of communication and understanding of language that are largely a prerequisite for success in senior kindergarten and Grade 1.

All later learning will be influenced by this lack of basic learning—having names for things is essential in the learning process. The average child from such a background will have difficulty and constant frustration from the demand of a typical primary school programme. He cannot cope with the change and with expectations about what he should achieve, and he is baffled and feels inadequate. No wonder the desire grows to escape from the virtual imprisonment which school comes to represent as he experiences failure year after year. Instead of eight or ten years of primary school curing the basic handicap of such a child, he has either left school for good or if he lasts through secondary school is probably reading at a level approximately three and one half years below the expected grade average.\textsuperscript{15} Since he literally cannot read the secondary school arts and sciences text books of Grade 9 it is probable that he will shift into the stream, labelled in some provinces as “science, technology and trades”, “business and commerce”, and “occupational”. In too many cases, the choice is simply to get out of the tough reading courses of the university-geared arts and science programmes. A great many gifted children from poverty homes end up in courses below the level of their actual intelligence because they appear to lack the ability.\textsuperscript{16} Most do not get into the academic stream leading to university and many other kinds of post-secondary-school education.

Most provincial departments of education in Canada have recently reorganized the secondary school curriculum. In Ontario the revision instituted a few years ago is resulting, and will probably continue to result, in an extraordinary perversion of intent. Although it was clearly not planned as such, it is turning out to be “class” legislation in the sense that it encourages children from lower-income homes to stay out of the five-year stream leading to a university and reserves places in that stream for the sons and daughters of the well-to-do. This is happening because the reorganization of the secondary
school curriculum was not backed up by a barrage of other educational measures designed for the very young, disadvantaged, and poor children and their parents. The reorganization is accentuating rather than diminishing the enormous gap between those who can and do read and communicate intelligently—between those who can and do communicate in the language of the school—and those to whom the printed word and the standard techniques of communication in the school setting mean very, very little.

Several provincial departments of education have also expanded non-university institutions of higher education, particularly the junior college. Excellent examples of these are the community colleges established in British Columbia and Alberta. A somewhat different trend is taking place in Ontario. Ontario recently established what are called Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) which are merely a logical extension of the secondary school organization plan. The CAATs in Ontario will, unless substantial policy changes are made by the 1970s, in effect seal the fate of the average culturally disadvantaged pupil who survives four years of secondary school in watered-down streams, particularly in the stream labelled “4 years arts and science”. The principle of “separate but equal education” is now institutionalized in post-secondary-school education in Ontario. Instead of the colour of one’s skin being the distinguishing characteristic, poor or well-to-do family background become, in general, the de facto entrance labels. The two plans together, in Ontario, progressively close the door to re-entry to the top level of academic education after Grade 8 to those many teenagers who are placed at an absolute and at a competitive disadvantage because of the accident of birth.

The priority in education today must be at the primary and pre-primary school level. Many educators and experts on learning accept the validity of the following statement: “Our present knowledge of the development of learning abilities indicates that the pre-school years are the most important years of learning in the child’s life. A tremendous amount of learning takes place during these years: and this learning is the foundation for all further learning”.  

A further statement by Jerome Bruner supports this concept. It is not surprising in the light of this that early opportunities for development have loomed so large in our recent understanding of human mental growth. The importance of early experience is only dimly sensed today. The evidence from animal studies indicates that virtually irreversible deficits can be produced in
mammals by depriving them of opportunities that challenge their nascent capacities.\textsuperscript{18}

It is on the basis of this premise that the advocates of pre-primary school education for children born into the “poverty syndrome” largely rest their case. For example, the “Head Start” programme in the United States rests “on the assumption that an organized programme of enrichment preceding kindergarten or first grade schooling will have an important positive effect on the educational and social development of children living in conditions of poverty”.\textsuperscript{19}

In Canada the number of “5 year olds” increased by 50 per cent between 1951 and 1964 (from 301,000 to 454,000). The number of 5 year olds in school is estimated to have increased over the period by almost 200 per cent (from 92,000 to 271,000). This means that the percentage of 5 year olds in school almost doubled (from 31 per cent in 1951 to 60 per cent in 1964).\textsuperscript{20} These results are praiseworthy.

A closer look, however, reveals some interesting facts:

1. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics states that in 1964, 19 per cent of all the 5 year olds in British Columbia attended public and private elementary schools compared to 96 per cent in Nova Scotia.\textsuperscript{21}

2. In the Ontario Public School system in 1964 only 3 of every 100 pupils in rural townships were in kindergarten compared to over 12 of every 100 pupils in cities.\textsuperscript{22}

3. In the City of Toronto which has one of the most extensive systems of Junior Kindergarten classes in Canada, the following statement was a major conclusion of a study (1965) by the Research Division of the Board of Education:

   Junior kindergarten is most available in areas characterized by low socio-economic and educational levels of the parents . . . children from the lower socio-economic strata might benefit by the extra year. . . . But these are not the children who are sent to junior kindergarten.\textsuperscript{23}

4. In Ontario the number of 5 year olds in kindergarten in the Public School system increased by 40 per cent between 1956 and 1961; the increase in the Roman Catholic Separate Schools was 107 per cent. Looked at from a different index, an index of “kindergarten enrolment to total elementary school enrolment”, the increase was 10 per cent in the Public Schools between 1956 and 1964 and 98 per cent in the Roman Catholic Separate Schools. (It should be noted that in 1964, 9.5 per cent of the pupils in Public School were in kinder-
garten and 8.6 per cent of the pupils in Roman Catholic Schools were in kindergarten.)

5. In Ontario there are about 157,000 5 year olds. Ten years from now there may well be 183,000; an increase of 26,000 (17 per cent).

Various interpretations can be given to these facts. One set of tentative conclusions could be the following. There are vast provincial opportunity-gaps for 5 year olds to attend school. Within each province (Nova Scotia excepted) there are vast regional opportunity-gaps for 5 year olds to attend school. Within areas in which junior Public School kindergartens for 4 and 5 year olds (Toronto for example) are widely available, the children of the lower socioeconomic strata are vastly under-represented. In one province (Ontario) the Roman Catholic Separate Schools made a much greater relative thrust at the pre-Grade 1 level over the last decade than did the Public School system. Over the next decade there could well be a 17 per cent increase in the number of 5 year olds in Canada. (There could, of course, be a dramatic downward shift in the Canadian birth-rate).

The children who will be in their early twenties in 1985 are already born. The vast majority of the 40 per cent of the 5 year olds who are not attending school are from poverty and low-income families—children who were born behind the eight ball of disadvantage; children who need preferential pre-primary school education if they are to have a meaningful chance to develop the abilities with which they were born and have an equal chance in competition in school against the children from more affluent and advantaged homes. In the world of 1985 it is doubtful that very many of these children will feel like worthwhile citizens and independent members of society; their process of alienation started the day they were born and little is being done before they are 6 years old to help them lift themselves up. Virtually nothing is being done for them when they are 4 years old, an age which some learning experts state is much, much more potentially productive than 5 years old.

It is difficult to predict what the effects of the new technology will be on Canadian society, particularly in education and the world-of-work. Nevertheless, the following speculative view represents a state of affairs that might possibly come about.

The evidence of an extremely wide gap between the level of formal education reached by the children of the relatively well-to-do and the level reached by the children of the poor has been noted above, as has been other evidence indicating the sheer magnitude of the under-representation of children
from low-income homes in Canada's educational institutions, particularly in post-secondary-school institutions. Regardless of the reasons why children born into low-income homes do not occupy anything near their share of places now available in the final years of high school and beyond, the clear fact is that they do not. It can be argued that what the new technology is beginning to do is to freeze those conditions in our society which tend to perpetuate the sons and daughters of the poor in the cycle of poverty and to perpetuate the sons and daughters of the middle-class and wealthy in the cycle of middle-class and wealth. The basic reason for this ossification could be that, for the first time in the history of man, education is placed squarely between man and the work which is his acceptable means of livelihood. Thus, the children of the poor tend to be drop-outs from elementary and secondary school education. These under-educated members of the labour force are increasingly becoming the unemployed. The unemployed are the poor. The children of the poor are the school drop-outs and so on. Even if the average child from a low-income home survives to secondary school, he ends up in an academically watered-down technical, commercial, or arts stream for two to four years to prepare for a low-grade and low-income job, which—particularly if he happens to be born quite bright—is usually personally unrewarding.

In the industrial economy in the pre-1960s he probably managed to get a steady job and considered himself fortunate to have achieved the same low-income category as his parents. Today, and in the future world of automation, however, the likelihood of the average person with such an educational background securing a steady job will be much less. Instead he will join the ranks of the occasional labourer and eventually take his place as a welfare recipient, possibly before he is twenty-five. If his children have only the opportunities he had to make his way in life, then the saying "If they're poor now, they will never be anything else" will tell the story from one generation to the next.

The other cycle is just the reverse. The children of the relatively well-to-do stay in school, and some of the less able enter and scrape through a university. The highly educated are the employed who receive good middle-class salaries. The children of the middle-class stay in school. The average child from the middle-income home will get into the academic stream in secondary school which has an "open door" to universities. He will end up with a good job and a good salary to enable him to hand on a middle-class life to his children. The shift from the industrial age to the age of automation will certainly affect his life but it will not cut his job and income out from under his feet.
Unless, therefore, the link between drop-outs from education and young people from low-income homes is broken before the full impact of the new technology makes itself felt in the world-of-work, automation could virtually eliminate social mobility from one generation to the next. The poor and their children will not only be alienated from education but will, as a direct consequence, be alienated from participation in the productive process, and fail to receive any income from such participation. This could mean increasing alienation of such individuals from society.

This speculative view of the “new technology and opportunity” should be considered. It could happen. However, if the right policies are taken today it need not happen and the possibility need not exist.

In some of the better financed and socially concerned school board districts in Canada, the need, and hard-headed economic returns, have been identified and action taken. The City of Toronto has been mentioned already as having an outstanding example of a school board which is trying to fight its war on poverty without a moral or financial commitment from other levels of government. Another example is the ENOC programme in Hamilton, Ontario. ENOC stands for the “Educational Needs of the Older City”. The ENOC programme is designed to uplift many of the children in the older and poorer areas of the city who are greatly handicapped by circumstances: unemployed fathers, broken homes, inferior housing conditions, large families, lack of parental concern and interest. (Only half of the parents from such areas attended the school “open house” compared to an almost complete attendance of parents at a school in a middle-income area in the city). The ENOC programme includes a kindergarten for 4 year olds with emphasis on remedial reading, teacher visits to the home of each child, medical examinations for each child, and in some cases dental examinations (“children whose teeth hurt can’t study”), and trips and excursions in order to broaden the experience of the children and to increase their vocabulary. Surely, if such opportunities are given to disadvantaged children in Hamilton, they should also be offered to similarly disadvantaged children throughout Canada. They would have opportunities not only to develop individual potentials but to become trained and educated to make their way in life in the world-of-work of the age of automation; it is manpower training at the beginning.

If, for reasons of national unity, Canada cannot have a federal ministry of education, the least that can be done is to recognize that adult manpower training for jobs in 1985 has a basic relationship with, and is highly dependent
PRIORITIES IN EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURE

on, what happens in the way of training and education at the pre-primary school level today. What is then needed is a federal ministry of manpower and anti-poverty which would have as one of its cornerstones a massive programme of pre-primary school training for disadvantaged children. A real combined "war on poverty" and "manpower training programme" in Canada would have many other objectives, but the pre-primary school front would be the major one and would have the greatest long-run economic, personal, and social benefits.

In summary: the first public-policy principle that must be accepted in Canada is that of universal accessibility to education. The first programme to achieve genuine accessibility to education is one that makes it possible for children born into low-income homes to have as good a set of initial communication skills as children of equal inherited ability from homes of the well-to-do. Canada's kindergartens are certainly not even attempting to do this. Many children from low-income homes have been born into a poverty syndrome and they need preferential treatment in education, not simply equal treatment. This is not happening, particularly in the rural areas of Canada. Furthermore, Canada's nursery schools have children who are mainly from well-to-do homes where the exact opposite ought to be true. Quite simply, without universal opportunity before kindergarten and Grade I, it is impossible to have universal accessibility to education that will enable a child to develop the gifts with which he was born. The hard fact which has been recognized in the United States but not in Canada is that five years old is too late for the underprivileged child to begin schooling.

NOTES


2. "Family Incomes by Age, Sex, Occupation, etc., of Family Head", Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada 1961, Vol. IV, Part I, No. 4 (Catalogue No. 98-504). For the year ended May 31, 1961, there were approximately 1,405,000 non-farm families, each with a total family income under $4,000 a year. This represented 38.5 per cent of all such families (Table D2). The statement in the text that, today (1968), "at least 1 of every 4 non-farm Canadian families lives on an annual income of $4,000 or less" would seem to be a reasonable estimate. In 1961 there were also approximately 688,000 non-farm "persons not in families" living on $1,500 a year or less (Table D1). These statistics were collected from a 20 per cent sample of private non-farm
households. The sample data were collected from every fifth household in each of approximately 31,000 enumeration areas in Canada, and the sample was then weighted to the total number of families and non-family members in each enumeration area to obtain total estimates.

For a good discussion of what it means to urban families to live on such incomes, see "FSA Looks at the Low Income Earner", in On Record, (Toronto: Family Service Association, March-April, 1965).

3. Poverty in Ontario 1964, Ontario Federation of Labour, p. 12, using D.B.S. statistics, and on the basis of reasonable assumptions, Mr. John Elen (the author of the study) concludes that in 1961 “71 per cent of Canadian farm families, or over one and a quarter million farm persons, can be said to be living in deprivation, poverty or destitution” by which he means living on “net incomes of $2,500 or less”. The statement in the text that, today (1968), “more than 1 of every 2 farm families lives on $2,500 or less” may be an underestimate.

4. “Educational Levels and School Attendance”, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada 1961, Vol. VII, Part I, No. 10 (Catalogue No. 99-520). The educational data are classified by the earnings of the head of the family whereas the income data referred to in footnote No. 2 relate to total family income. While the two series are not strictly comparable, the basic conclusion is unlikely to be invalidated. For the year ended May 31, 1961, 12 per cent of the 19-24 year old children (whose family heads earned $3,000 a year or less) were in regular day-time attendance at a formal school or a university. In the $3,000 to $4,999 family head income bracket, 18.4 per cent of such children were thus occupied. (Table X, p. 18). (There is no sub-category $3,000 to $3,999).

The statement in the text that today (1968), “at the very most 20 of every 100 children of such families (non-farm families with incomes of $4,000 or less and farm families with incomes of $2,500 or less) in the age group 19 to 24 are attending a regular day-time school or university” may well be an overestimate. Note: Certain types of strictly vocational schools were excluded from consideration, “such as teachers colleges, schools of nursing, private business colleges, trade and vocation schools other than technical high schools, and schools of technology”. This is unfortunate. However, for relative comparisons (see note 5 immediately below) this omission should not invalidate the comparison although it is probable that the sons and daughters from low-income homes would have a higher propensity than children from higher income homes to become enrolled in “vocational schools” outside of the secondary school system. Counterbalancing this, however, could be a lower propensity of the former, between the ages of 19 to 24, to remain a member of the family unit.

5. Ibid. For the year ended May 31, 1961, 50.0 per cent of the 19-24 year old
children whose family heads earned $7,000 a year or more were in regular daytime attendance at a formal school or a university.


7. Loss of Student Potential and Prediction of University Success, A. S. Mowat and J. Ross, Report No. 2, Central Advisory Committee on Education in the Atlantic Provinces, 1962, pp. 7 and 13 (emphasis supplied). In the study the comment was made that "it is clear that the wastage is at least as serious and probably more serious in Ontario than it is in the Atlantic Region" (p. 37). The Comparison is based on the Committee's study of the Atlantic Region and Dr. R. W. B. Jackson's Ontario study (The Atkinson Study of Utilization of Student Resources in Ontario, a report submitted to the National Conference of Canadian Universities, June 5, 1958, Department of Educational Research, Ontario College of Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1958).

8. Financing Higher Education in Canada, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, University of Toronto Press, 1965. The argument in the text is that since this Commission accepts E. F. Sheffield's projection for 1975-76 of 15.7 per cent of full-time enrolment in Canadian Universities and Colleges to people 18 to 24 years of age, this implies acceptance of the 15.7 per cent figure today as the index of the number of young people born with the potential for university education. The Sheffield figure for 1966-67 used in the report was 10.7 per cent, based on 229,100 students. A 15.7 per cent figure for 1966-67 results in 336,734. The difference is 107,634 people (Table 4, p. 95). It should be noted that the Commission does not accept this kind of "pool of ability" argument (p. 19).


10. Ibid. p. 45.


21. Ibid.


