

Problems of High School Education in Nova Scotia

By ALEX S. MOWAT

THE present condition of High School education in Nova Scotia (as in many other parts of the world) presents something of a paradox. On the one hand it is widely recognised in the Province, especially by those who know the schools best, that high school education, particularly in rural areas, is far from what it might be. On the other hand the public shows its tremendous faith in the value of high school education by steadily and consistently sending its children to high school in numbers really remarkable in a province not usually regarded as economically wealthy. No less than 9 out of every 10 Nova Scotian children enter Junior High School, and no less than 5 out of every 10 enter Senior High School. Unfortunately our high school education has not yet caught up with these facts nor made proper use of the opportunities they afford. So rapid has been the increase in numbers that it would have been a miracle if it had caught up. But the important thing to realize is that the present high school system is quite inadequate to present day conditions. In the old days it was easy to decide what should be taught in high school, for only a few pupils stayed on after the elementary grades. They were generally the ablest and cleverest, and they were, quite rightly, given an academic training and sent on to University or College.

Today the high schools are invaded annually not by hundreds, but by thousands, of students, most of whom will never attend University, and for many of whom the present high school studies are both unsuitable and uninteresting. To put things right nothing less than a reorganisation of high school education is required.

Such a reorganisation will, in my opinion, certainly be a failure unless it does two things. First it must provide some variety of courses for different types of pupils; and, second, it must, as justly as possible, regroup and reclassify children at the beginning of the high school stage.

There are many ways in which scholars can be classified into types, two of which are of first importance in the present connection. In the first instance, high school students (like people of all ages) will be found to differ enormously among themselves in natural ability, and (with a very limited group of possible exceptions) no treatment or teaching will remove or alter these differences. Such differences increase with age during the years of schooling, and it is their existence which makes imperative some differentiation of courses or studies at the high school stage. For if the attempt is made to put all the children through the same course of study, one or other, or probably both of two results will surely follow. Either the clever children will be kept back in their work by having to wait for those who are less intelligent, or the clever children go ahead according to their ability, leaving the rest to flounder along in confusion. This difficulty can be met only by providing different courses for groups of different mentality.

In the second place, high school students may be classified according to the length of time they spend in high school. In Nova Scotia important differences result from this method of classification. For of every 10 children who enter Junior High School in grade VII, only 8 are left in grade VIII; by Grade X only 5 are left, and only 3 complete grade XI. It seems reasonable, therefore, that in addition to the differentiation of courses

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made necessary by differences in ability, differentiation is necessary because of differences in the length of time pupils remain in high school. For it is obviously bad educational policy to start out on the same high school course a student who is going to remain 2 years in high school and another who intends to remain 5 years. In places where this problem has been investigated it has been found that, generally speaking, the less intelligent pupils leave early and the more intelligent stay on.

Provision of two types of courses goes a long way to solve both the difficulties which arise from differences in ability among the students and those arising from the varying lengths of time they stay in school. A course planned for five or six years meets the requirements of the more intelligent students, who are usually those who stay longest at school, and a shorter and simpler course provides for the less intelligent, who are usually those who leave school early. More than two types of courses I think it impossible for Nova Scotian high schools to offer on account of their necessarily small size. For a similar reason I consider the present system of electives ill-adapted to Nova Scotia, since a small high school is either unable to offer much choice in electives or can do so only at the price of too much dependence on the text book by both pupil and teacher. But in any case, the present elective system does not meet at all adequately the difficulties of the junior high school, though it does make possible some real differentiation in the senior high school.

In the light of all the facts the simplest and most reasonable solution in Nova Scotia of the problems under consideration would appear to be the institution, on the one hand of a General or Modern course and on the other hand, of a course similar to the present academic course. The general course would be non-academic in character, would be planned for 3 years and would absorb about 80 per cent of the pupils in the junior high school. It would have an extension planned for 2 or 3 years into the senior high school, where it might be expected

to absorb about one-half of the students. The academic course would be planned from the beginning to extend over the full 5 or 6 years of junior and senior high combined and would definitely prepare for University or College work.

If some such differentiation by courses were adopted it would undoubtedly prove of the greatest benefit to pupils in both courses. It would raise the standard of attainment of those in the academic course and it would provide congenial and useful instruction for the bulk of those students who are at present floundering uneasily in academic depths.

So much for the first requirement of a successful reorganization of high school studies, namely, the provision of duplicate courses. The second requirement, that students be regrouped and reclassified at the beginning of the high school course, now claims our attention. Such regrouping is desirable in itself and rendered necessary by the provision of duplicate courses. The present Course of Study clearly contemplates that some reorganization should take place at the end of Grade VI. I do not think it should be postponed until later. For increasing differences in ability should be no longer ignored. One might add that at this stage pupils are strong enough and mature enough to travel some distance to school without risk.

The obvious and sensible thing to do is to empty the children out of the elementary schools at the end of grade VI, gather them together in a high school, reclassify them according to ability or length of time they expect to continue at school and to start them off on one or other of the two courses offered. To be efficient, teaching should be by specialist teachers and high schools should be large enough to ensure a sufficient number of specialists. It seems to me that any high school (junior and senior high combined) of less than 8 teachers will be handicapped in this as well as in other respects.

At this point the problems of town and country become so different that they had better be treated separately.

The question of reorganisation in the

towns is a comparatively simple one. For in each town or city are large numbers of children congregated in a small area, and transport from one part of that area to another is not difficult at any time of the year. Thus, for example, in Halifax the city could be divided into a number of areas, say 6, each containing a high school and 3 or 4 elementary schools. Children would leave the elementary schools in their area at the end of grade VI and proceed to the high school where they would enter the course most suited to them and have the benefit of expert instruction from a specialist staff. I have often in the past had to point out the dangers of specialist teaching, but I have no doubt that the junior high schools of Nova Scotia would benefit enormously by a greater degree of specialist teaching than is now possible.

Unfortunately, in Halifax at least, reform is hindered by a legacy from the past, for administrative changes have not yet been made to bring the organisation of the city schools into line with the new course of study adopted by the Province in 1935. This new course (a great advance on previous courses) makes the main break in school life at the end of grade VI after which high school studies begin. The earlier course of study made the break at the end of grade VIII, where it still remains in the city schools for administrative purposes. You therefore have the anomaly of students beginning a new *course* in grade VII, but not *changing school* till grade X (in some cases IX). Several unhappy results follow. One is that the high school child suffers two breaks in his school life when only one is necessary. This tends to prevent a desirable continuity of instruction and indeed leads to a blameworthy habit of thinking of school work in horizontal rather than vertical terms. By this I mean the tendency to think of each year's work as a unit in itself instead of something growing out of past instruction and preparing the way for future instruction.

The present organization of the schools also prevents specialist teaching in the junior high school and most

effectively prevents differentiation of courses in all but one or two of the largest schools. There are no less than 19 schools in Halifax giving instruction in grades VII and VIII (and sometimes IX), each one duplicating the work of the rest. Fifteen of those units are very small having only three teachers or less. There is not the slightest doubt that the education of those children would benefit by the reduction of those units to 5 or 6 and their amalgamation with the senior high schools. This need not mean the construction of 6 new schools, but it does mean better use of the existing school space. If such a reorganisation took place, the adoption of a double course for high schools would be easy.

Children in the rural areas suffer under the same disadvantages as children in the towns, only more acutely, and the removal of those disadvantages is a more difficult task. That they do suffer more acutely is shown by their poor showing in the Provincial Examinations relative to the town children. There is no reason to suppose the country children less intelligent. It is simply that they are less well taught. This is not surprising when we consider that many of those children are in the one-room miscellaneous schools, where the solitary teacher has to teach not only all the subjects of the high school curriculum but the elementary grades I to VI in addition.

The only really satisfactory solution is to remove from the small rural school all children in grades above VI and to bring them together into high schools. I am well aware of the difficulties raised against such consolidation, sometimes insurmountable but frequently illusory. Such objections are usually raised on grounds of expense or of difficulties of travel in winter and spring. The first of those objections is beautifully answered by H. M. Macdonald in his pamphlet on School Consolidation in Nova Scotia, where he shows that consolidation may be expected to save money instead of increasing expenditure. Difficulties of travel are more serious, but not serious enough to prevent the adoption of rural high schools where at present

proper high school instruction is denied to students. After all a great proportion of Nova Scotia's population lives along or near the paved highways of the Province which are now open to traffic all the year round, and even if proper high school instruction were possible only if pupils were boarded at or near the high school for the difficult months at the public expense, that expense would probably justify itself in the long run.

A fuller realisation of the handicap under which high school students suffer in rural schools would I think help greatly to bring about the establishment of rural high schools, as would the adoption of the larger unit of administration in education. For reasons already given I should like to see those schools take their students not later than the end of grade VI, and I should like wherever possible, to see them large enough to give satisfactory duplicate courses. There are two possible aims for higher education in rural areas. One is to prepare the students for rural life, the other is to give an academic training leading to the University. At present in Nova Scotia

the second is the aim attempted, and the first, except for a handful of students, is neglected. It seems to me certain that when the new rural high schools come (as come they will) they will have to attempt *both* aims, the main body of students being given a training with a definitely rural and practical bias, and the few with academic leanings being educated along familiar academic lines. In short, the rural high schools will have to be high schools of a kind hitherto unknown in Nova Scotia and not very highly developed in any part of the world.

Such are the improvements that seem to me, a newcomer to the province and perhaps a somewhat hasty judge, to be desirable in the high schools of Nova Scotia. Whether we obtain these reforms or others which will solve the high school problem in a better way, depends in the main on whether Nova Scotians as a whole sufficiently desire for each of their children the chance to do the best that is in each one of them. It is the strength of that desire which distinguishes progressive from other societies.

Municipal Retirement Plans

By I. RAFKIND*

A RETIREMENT plan is concerned with the problem of employees who no longer can work with reasonable efficiency or are unable to work because of old age, invalidity (premature old age), or disability. The condition of inefficiency because of age or invalidity commonly is referred to as "superannuation." Various tools can be used to meet this problem. Of course, superannuated or disabled employees can be retained on the payroll, unless their condition is such that even an occasional appearance at their

jobs is impossible. But retention in service has proved to be unsatisfactory because the efficiency of the whole service is adversely affected. Moreover, such practice is expensive since the payroll actually includes a hidden pension roll.

The most satisfactory practice is the provision of a plan whereby employees may be separated from the service and receive a benefit. A scheme for accomplishing this objective generally is referred to as a retirement or pension plan. The benefit usually is an amount less than the employee's compensation while working, and except for rare exceptions, is paid during the lifetime of the retired employee. Death benefits to

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