



Statements and Speeches

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EDUCATION AND WORLD PROGRESS

An address by Marcel Massé, President, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to the 1981 Convention of the Canadian Education Association, Saskatoon, September 25, 1981

...There are two main themes I would like to discuss with you today. One is the role of education as a factor in whatever progress is being achieved currently in the world — specifically in the developing countries, where most of our fellow humans live, and where most of the world's unmet human needs continue to exist, year after year, generation after generation. The other theme — which is of the utmost importance, in my opinion, at least — is the question of development education within our schools, the matter of just how much our own children will learn about such huge topics as the Third World, international development, global hunger and poverty.

World progress

Lord Melbourne once commented to Queen Victoria: "I don't know, Ma'am, why they make all this fuss about education." Since Melbourne's time, we have made a great deal of progress in the field of education — perhaps because we have continued to make a great deal of fuss about it. No two people seem to have exactly the same idea about what it is, or how it takes place, or what it's good for, but everyone wants it — especially for their children.

Look at it worldwide and you can prove that we are both winning the race and losing it. Immense efforts are being made: in the developing world, enrolment in primary schools doubled between 1960 and 1975, and the number of children aged 6 to 11 not enrolled in schools dropped, according to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, from 212 million in 1970 to 121 million in 1975. For the first time, more Third World children in that age group are in school than are out, and for the first time, too, there are more literate than illiterate people in our world. That is not just progress — that is history, of the best kind, being made in our time, almost unnoticed.

And yet — there is another side of the coin. Even while these percentage gains were being made, there were more illiterate people in the world each year. Between 1960 and 1970, in the underdeveloped world, the absolute number of illiterate men rose by 11 million — and for women the increase was an appalling 44 million! And I have only touched on a few quantitative measures, but we all know that many qualitative factors profoundly colour the picture.

Educational systems in many developing countries are based on absurdly inappropriate colonial models, or are grossly underfunded, or both. We have all heard about the mismatch between education systems and real needs in many countries, which results in unemployment for thousands of graduates who have fought their way to the top of the educational pyramid, while national development is strangled by the lack of skilled technicians and managers and other specialists in crucial areas of the
