



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

economy. We have all heard of the brain drain from the Third World, sparked partly by the opportunities discovered while training in donor countries — and if we have come to know one of the individuals involved, we probably have some insight into the powerful personal motivations at work and can understand how individual aspirations can clash with national needs.

And beyond all this lie such troubling questions as whether schooling, in our rather rigid sense, and education in its essence, are necessarily the same things, or whether they are sometimes in conflict. Contemporary critics, such as Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire, may be too sweeping in their attacks, but their scathing analysis has hit many nerves among educators and has revealed a great deal of futility and irrelevance in traditional approaches — particularly when we remember that there will never be enough wealth and resources to deliver our style of education to all the world's children.

Progress has
been made

Nevertheless, it remains a basic truth that some progress has been won painfully over the past 30 years and that the people of the Third World have managed, despite cruel handicaps and countless failures, to raise the average standard of their lives to a higher level than before. The most convincing evidence is the fact that people there are living longer: diseases have been controlled to some extent, sanitation has been improved, infant mortality rates dropped by about 20 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s, and over-all life expectancy in the developing world increased in those two decades by as much as it did in the developed countries in a century. An important milestone on the road of world progress was reached recently when the World Health Organization declared that deadly smallpox had been eliminated from our world — because nations worked together intelligently to overcome one of the age-old enemies of life through a worldwide campaign.

I think it is of great importance for us to recognize the crucial role that education plays in all aspects of development. Whatever the twists of an individual's life, the people of the Third World know that all things considered, education offers their best hope for a decent job, even if it only allows them to compete for the limited amount of employment in their country's modern sector. We have learned, too, that education is essential beyond the modern sector, among the mass of the people as they try to meet their basic human needs — because people who understand writing and numbers are better able to learn new farming techniques, or new methods of sanitation and health care, so they can create a better life out of the resources that are actually available to them. One of the most effective ways to cut dangerous rates of population growth, in fact, is to teach women to read and write; when they learn that there are better ways to live, change becomes possible. Perhaps the real key to development is the transforming effect of education on the individual: illiteracy retards self-development, reduces the individual's contribution to the community, and makes a human being dependent and vulnerable to exploitation — but education *enables* the individual, unlocks hidden talents and capacity, and taps the potential for self-reliance. I want an education, said a Third World child questioned by a Western journalist, so I can stop being only the shadow of other people and become a real person myself.

When the work began

Of course, a lot of effort has already been put into Third World education by government and by voluntary groups, and a lot of progress has in fact been achieved. From a Canadian viewpoint, the story of this educational co-operation begins more than a century ago with the work of pioneering missionaries, but a convenient starting point for the modern period is the early 1950s, the Colombo Plan era, for it was in 1951 that the first trainees came to Canada under government auspices, and in 1955 that the first Canadian teacher went to Asia. Through the 1960s the number rose, the Canadian University Service Overseas emerged as a major channel for educational aid, and the focus shifted to Commonwealth and Francophone Africa, where the shortage of trained educators was most severe.

Overseas service by Canadian educators posted in the Third World has declined — though not necessarily their influence, because while the developing countries have stopped asking CIDA for classroom teachers from Canada, they instead seek Canadian experts in teacher training and curriculum development and specialized technical training.

Our scholarship and training awards for talented citizens of Third World countries have likewise been transformed — partly by linking training in Canada much more closely with the specific needs of CIDA-sponsored development projects, and partly by switching much of our activity into third-country arrangements, which means that we finance a person's training either in the home country or in another developing country, usually within the same region. This plan has the considerable advantages of reducing culture shock and readjustment problems, providing courses more relevant to the students' future working conditions, and strengthening national or regional training centres in the Third World.

Over the years, Canada has sponsored a great diversity of educational projects in the developing countries — from the Accra technical trades training centre in Ghana, co-ordinated by the Saskatchewan Department of Education, to the Thailand comprehensive schools project, assisted by the University of Alberta; from teacher training and university extension centres on small Caribbean islands, to films to help rural people in Africa learn how to protect their basic health. I am confident that all these efforts have been worthwhile and have indeed made things better than they would otherwise have been. We have reached the stage, in fact, where in our dealings with developing countries, we often encounter a generation of officials and leaders, including at least one prime minister, whose careers were shaped by a training in Canada or through Canadian-sponsored education projects.

Specialized training limited

One troubling cloud on the scene should perhaps be given some thought. The Third World still needs access to many forms of training only available in the industrialized countries. This legitimate need is one of the factors that should be weighed carefully as Canadian educators cope with the problems of international student mobility — or in other words, as we make decisions about the differential fees that could deny Canadian education to many Third World students, except for the income elite, thus limiting access to specialized training vitally needed for development.

An important part of Canada's effort in educational assistance to the developing

countries has been initiated and run successfully outside the bounds of our official aid program, though often with CIDA's support and admiration. The 200-plus Canadian voluntary agencies and non-governmental institutions committed to international development are doing a remarkable job, carrying out several grassroots education projects each year, many of them highly innovative. One that has attracted attention recently is the Developing Countries' Farm Radio Network, sponsored by Massey Ferguson and the University of Guelph with financial help from CIDA. Through it George Atkins, a former CBC farm commentator, gathers practical farming tips and sends tapes to hundreds of radio stations in most of the developing countries to add to extension programs and enrich farmers' knowledge.

Project overseas

Among the hundreds of other examples that could be given, I would like to single out the work sponsored by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF). Since the beginning in 1962 in Nigeria, Project Overseas has given several hundred Canadian teachers first-hand knowledge of the developing countries. Through Project Overseas and a variety of other initiatives, the CTF has contributed significantly to improving both the professionalism of teaching in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, and to Canadian understanding of the wider world. CIDA is proud to have played a supporting role, and I certainly hope that this creative co-operation will continue and will yield still more new ideas and fresh approaches in the years ahead.

Universities' role

I would also like to note with pleasure that Canada's universities and colleges have a long record of support for and active participation in Canada's international development efforts, both as contractors carrying out many projects for CIDA, and as independent actors initiating their own projects. So major in fact is the role being played by a growing number of universities and colleges that it was a factor in our recent restructuring of CIDA's Non-Governmental Organizations program, so that more attention could be paid to this sector.

Canadians, then, have made and are making important contributions to educational progress in the world, through many channels. But it is an uphill path, and experience is always changing our perceptions of the goal and how to reach it. One of the many lessons we have learned about international development is that there are better ways of helping than trying to reproduce our systems in 100 Third World countries. The developing countries are now asking for specialized types of assistance, and in the educational field Canada has responded by changing to a more effective, concentrated kind of help. This means, of course, less chance for the average Canadian classroom teacher to make a personal contribution through overseas service on a CIDA assignment. But it is a change we should welcome, because it reflects a growing ability of the developing countries to meet their own needs, to educate their own people.

The future

Where do we go from here? What lies ahead? Clearly, we still need intelligent experimentation and innovation about what people learn, and how, and why. The result should be better education in the developing countries, and maybe in our own country as well. To meet the problems we have identified in this field, CIDA has done two main things in the past few years. As already mentioned, we have modified the kind of educational aid Canada provides, shifting the emphasis to teacher training, relating our help to manpower needs, supporting third-country training, encouraging

regional co-operation, and offering support for non-formal education. Meanwhile, we have also rethought the whole field, to take into account the massiveness of need, the relative scarcity of resources, and the prior claim of the world's poorest countries and peoples.

I believe that the future of our involvement in Third World education lies in non-traditional directions. We must guard against the subtle temptation to impose our own values and systems on their emerging concepts of education, because by doing that we could cause a great deal of harm, in terms of both cost and culture. We could lead them into ruinously expensive attempts to replicate Western structures, in which each school built would consume so much of the meagre educational budget that it would in reality deny education to thousands of people. And we could substitute the powerful values of our Western culture for the indigenous values of the people who must live their own kind of development, thus undermining their cultural integrity. We must not underestimate our own capacity for causing havoc. "Soap and education," said Mark Twain, "are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run."

We should not seek to give education to anyone, but with sensitivity we can enter into helpful association with them as they work out the kinds of education that will meet their true needs as they see them. We can make available our full range of learning resources to help the developing countries carry out several essential efforts — planning that emphasizes the full range of learning opportunities, not only schooling; curriculum development based on the reality of life in the country concerned and on the idea of learning as a life-long process; and creation of a basic education system that can realistically be made available to most of the people and that will give them at least the minimum base needed for participation in their society and for further learning opportunities.

These are the directions that I think Canada's educational assistance to the developing countries will likely take in the 1980s. The opportunity to help create new types of education that will enhance the lives of millions of underprivileged people is obviously an exciting one to those who are interested in education.

I will offer just a few more thoughts on my first main theme, the role of education in world progress.

**Education key
to development**

I believe that we are at the beginning of a renewed emphasis on education as a key factor in development. Analysis by the World Bank has given fresh evidence that social investments, such as in education, often yield higher rates of return than those in sectors thought to be more directly related to economic growth. Canada's own choice of priorities in world development, by emphasizing social development and help for the poorest, have prepared the ground for new initiatives in educational co-operation. And my personal reading of the over-all trend in development co-operation is that, on the basis of what we have learned over 30 years, we have left behind the early, simplistic economic model of development; have progressed through a decade of growing insight into a social model of development; and are moving further in this direction towards a deeper and more complete understanding that I

would describe as a cultural model of development. In this phase of our understanding of the development process, I believe the emphasis will be on the effect that development has on people's lifestyle and attitudes, on their levels of health and education, on their ability to shape their lives and their relationship with their environment. We will need to break new ground in understanding people, their behaviour and their ideas, and the planners and experts involved in our co-operation efforts will need to be much better prepared. As we work toward forms of co-operation that answer more profoundly the cultural needs of developing societies, education will certainly be, in many senses, the key factor. Our aid program will need, urgently, the help and the expertise of Canada's educational sector.

**Development
education**

I could go on indefinitely on the themes of Third World culture and education as a vital part of world progress, because my mind and my heart both tell me they are at the core of human experience, past, present and future. But instead I shall take just a few more minutes of your time to look at the other side of the educational coin, the place that world development has, or should have, in our own education system.

Development is a new theme, or issue, or subject in world affairs. It is most of what is happening to people in the second half of our century. If our education is to have the global dimension that gives coherence to all its other elements, it surely cannot ignore the Third World. Educational progress will be an illusion if our young grow up ignorant of how three-quarters of their species live.

There are powerful reasons for putting more emphasis on this new and difficult field of knowledge. Our young people are growing up in a world in which only one person in 200 is a Canadian. Their lives will be shaped increasingly by the growing interdependence that links what happens here ever more closely to what happens in parts of the world that we used to think of as remote and obscure — in Vietnam, for example, or Iran. They will need to understand the whole picture if they are to make sense of the flow of events, and to make wise decisions.

We in CIDA have some access to the biggest, most dramatic story happening in our generation — world development, the struggle of most people to gain a better life. We appreciate that education, in Canada, is a provincial responsibility. That is why we have been scrupulous about respecting provincial jurisdiction and have suppressed the strong desire to plunge into what we consider to be urgently needed work — for we know that another important aspect of development education is that, in the long run, it alone can ensure that there is enough public understanding and support to sustain a continued, substantial and enlightened Canadian program of development assistance.

The systematic introduction of world development into the curriculum of Canada's schools is, I believe, at least a decade overdue, and we are lagging behind what has been done in several European nations. Fine efforts have been made, it is true, by individual educators, by community groups and by non-governmental agencies. Progress has been achieved in the curriculum area in some provinces, aided by general interest among educators, by the leadership shown by some senior officials and certain universities, and by the visible presence of the Third World in Canadian class-

rooms, especially in our cities. A Futures Secretariat has even been created recently, to link up and complement efforts to inform Canadians, especially those not yet adequately reached, about North-South affairs and their impact on our future — and CIDA, of course, is anxious to be helpful. Moreover, the subject is by its very nature rich in human drama and endlessly fascinating in the way that it confirms or calls into question our own values and understanding of life.

The ground, then, is fertile indeed, and ready to yield a rich educational harvest. The question is: how can this substantial theme best be integrated into what our young people learn, and how can we best support the process so that a major step forward will be taken over the next few years? Together we face a high challenge: to give our young a whole and true picture of their world.