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Education and Development in Atlantic Canada

The term 'development' we commonly associate with underdeveloped countries, with the Third World, with areas and regions that are backward, non-industrialized, that are subsistent economies, where the people are poor and illiterate. And yet *Education and Development in Atlantic Canada* focuses on an old, well established region of Canada, a part of the country that includes two of the original partners in Confederation, and an area that has had public education for all since the days of Charles Tupper, It focuses on education's role in the perpetual underdevelopment of the region. It focuses on the rural regions, and on women, as the main examples of the failure of education to bring the Eastern provinces into the mainstream of industrialized America. And yet one gets the nagging feeling that the authors, the seminar leaders, the organizers don't quite believe their own rhetoric. Certainly, if Tony Burton's assessment is correct, the Maritime audience didn't. (p.359) And why should they listen to educators who have yet another 'solution' for the problem of the region. They've been listening for years and the results appear to have made no difference.

Education and Development in Atlantic Canada is the result of a conference held at Dalhousie University in April 1976. Sponsored by the Dalhousie Department of Education and the Atlantic Education Association, the Conference set out to examine "many of the assumptions of modern schooling as they relate to the economic transformation of the region." (p.xxii) Professor Ricker in the Preface suggests that while the basic aim of government policy is one of seeking economic growth by whatever means, more and more people are questioning the attainability of this goal and even its desirability. Why alter the agreeable lifestyle and an unspoiled environment they ask? Why indeed? Poorly heated homes, outdoor privies, leaking fishing boats, hard manual labor in the cold and the wind, depressed prices for fish and farm products and lumber, a cost of living continually on the climb are reasons that come to mind. But perhaps the citizens and interest groups who now want to keep the 'agreeable lifestyle and unspoiled environment' are speaking from the position of an urban or suburban experience - far removed from the natives and their worries about huge fishing trawlers or rocky soil or the upcoming winter.

The conference and therefore this text approached the problem of the relationship between education and economic development via major addresses, symposia, seminars and workshop papers. Because of this diverse approach the book is difficult to assess, and one wonders about the kind of audience it might attract. Eric Ricker's *Introduction* puts the changes in schooling in an historical context: from the beginnings until the late 1950's, when the primary objective was to enhance the individual's chance in life; the 1960's during which time the human capital theory (that expenditures on education increase the GNP), and regional growth strategies were in ascendance; and the 1970's, which have been a time of

retrenchment and despair for some, of questioning and delineation of goals for others, and of continued faith in the education/economic bandwagon for others. He concludes that there is little doubt that the main effect of reform in the past two decades has been to alter the school's role to conform more closely to models practised elsewhere. In other words the change in education in Atlantic Canada in recent years has brought it more in line with changes that took place elsewhere. The results of these changes have been many: better educated teachers; a variety of course offerings; the possibility of equal opportunity for all. In one respect, however, no change has taken place. The educational system is still, as it always has been, "robbing the rural and industrial population of their natural leaders." (p.36) The brain drain from the Atlantic area to the rest of North America, from rural areas to urban areas has not lessened. Therefore to indicate that reforms have failed and education should revert to a local, cultural, indigenous effort is begging the question. Will that necessarily halt migration? More to the point: will it produce citizens who can live in harmony with themselves, their neighbours and their environment?

A closer examination of the individual addresses and papers included in the volume underscores the uneasy role that education plays in the process of development. It also leaves the reader with the impression that Atlantic Canada is being treated as a monolith. The vast differences existing between Halifax and other metropolitan areas, and Newfoundland outports, Acadian New Brunswick, the Annapolis Valley, industrial Cape Breton or the Prince Edward Island countryside are a major reason the topic is so hard to deal with and education's role is so difficult to define. Which Atlantic Canada should we perpetuate, or improve, or expand?

John Saul looks at the global nature of development problems, education's role in finding solutions, and the importance of worldwide trends for local realities. He indicates that the problem in Atlantic Canada is one of economic exploitation by the central region of the country, something which "the readaptation of activities in line with local resources and needs will not resolve" (p.62). Saul suggests that perhaps Mozambique and Tanzania are closer to Atlantic Canada in stages of development than New York, Boston, Toronto and Montreal. I would suggest there are examples of educational developments closer to home that might be worthy of note. The Northwest Territories, for example, has in the 1970's adapted education to the lifestyle and environment of the north without sacrificing the current standards of industrialized North America.

Denis Smith in "Regional Development, Education and Canadian Nationalism" approaches the subject from a national perspective. He argues that nationalism can be reconciled with a vibrant regionalism, and tries to indicate what is required in the way of better public understanding and education to make that vision a reality. He concentrates on the elimination of American cultural output via suppressing *Time* and supporting *Maclean's*. Presumably Professor Smith doesn't see that *Maclean's* effect on the East (or the West) of the country is perhaps equivalent to *Time's* and *Newsweek's* effect on Ontario. Some in Atlantic Canada might even prefer American culture, via *Time* to *Maclean's* version of Canadian culture. A positive nationalism that strives for a democratic form of self-determination is fine. But who pays for it? Professor Saul might argue that Atlantic Canada has been ripped off to sustain Ontario and *Maclean's*.

From global and national perspectives on development Ronald Manzer looks at public school policies in Canada over the years. He places the development of

educational policies for all the provinces within the framework of a general theory of policy-making, and zeroes in on the significant principles that guide the policy formation process in all jurisdictions. Historically the design of public policies rests on five principles: denominational instruction; ethnocentric education; civic schooling; occupational selection and child-centred education. Manzer suggests that because of social composition, economic interests and historical development, each province has its own pattern of development. He concludes that the process has been the same pattern of development. He concludes that the process has been the same across the nation, but that the sequence and the length of the various stages has been tailored by local traditions and circumstances. Although one principle for policy for public schools may be dominant at any one time, the others are not totally obscured. Professor Manzer believes that these successive principles of policy signify decisive shifts in communities about the goals and instruments appropriate for governmental intervention. What Manzer doesn't tell us is what stage the various Atlantic provinces are in at the moment and how this relates to government involvement.

David MacDonald approaches education and development from a regional perspective and concludes that education has not fulfilled its promise, has not moved the society closer to meeting the aspirations of its people. The expansion of schooling has been irrelevant and negative. He believes that Atlantic Canada has a need for autonomous development, for expressing and pursuing goals of its own making. He decries the notion that education supports the status quo and indicates that "in the Atlantic Canada of today, the higher your class, the more the educational system works to your benefit" (p.139). Since public schools are agencies of the society, run by and for the dominant group in the society, can it be otherwise? Does this make Atlantic Canada different from elsewhere? I think not! MacDonald suggests that emphasis be placed upon verbal skills, life skills and on a continuing adult education which is not economic and job skill oriented, but which helps build and retain a personal sense of worth. One might ask what kind of a sense of worth can be developed in a person who has no employment, is unskilled, and who lives below the poverty line.

"Education and Development: A Journalist's Perspective on the Underdevelopment of the Maritimes" puts the blame for the Maritimes' underdeveloped status clearly on education. *It* is the scapegoat (certainly not for the first time), not world economic development, nor multi-national corporations, nor the arrival of the global village. Even if we partially agree with the statement, to say that development will naturally follow the right kind of education is treating education as the panacea. Surely, it is neither scapegoat nor panacea.

Turning from the major addresses the next section of the text is devoted to three symposia, on "The Antigonish Movement", on "The Role of the Schools in the Underdevelopment of Atlantic Canada", and on "Research Ethics and the Study of Development Processes". The material included consists of short presentations by panel members, followed by comments, questions and answers both among the panel members and the audience. Although the symposia contain interesting tidbits it is difficult to relate them to the whole question of education and development. For example, the section on the Antigonish movement there is no analysis of the movement, and no summary of the discussion is offered. The reader is left to draw his/her own conclusions about what the experience of the movement has to say about education and development. I question the value of including panel discussions in a text.

The last section is devoted to seminar and workshop papers under three headings: "The Concept of Development and Development Strategies"; "Control of the Schools, Equal Opportunity and Underdevelopment"; and "Women, Education and Development." In the first instance these are case studies of particular development strategies in one area, or county or region. The paper by Harry O'Connell suggests that a rural development council in P.E.I. did such a good job of helping citizens influence public policy that it lost its contract with the provincial government. And, in losing the contract, it also lost the provincial funding that supported many of its activities. Is the message here that local input and innovation are only acceptable to the extent that they fit in with government strategies? The equal opportunity case studies look at various ways schools create unequal opportunities and at the dangers of such processes. Hal Chalmers suggests that one way inequalities can be reduced is to pay teachers on the basis of the job done, instead of by qualifications and length of service. (All teachers of Grade V would make $14,000). He is advocating equal pay for equal responsibility. What happens to this idea when one grade V teacher has a class of 40, another one of 25?

The third set of case studies is about women, women in the social sciences, in education, and in the society generally. It is a section that looks not at general underdevelopment in the Atlantic region, but at the specific self development of women. Women, treated as a minority group, discriminated against, and sexually exploited, are urged to fight for a better deal. The relationship between economics, education, development and women is not clear. One might well ask how the modernization of the educational system has affected women; or if industrialization has not followed government policies is it because women were discriminated against; or what is the result to society of an undeveloped component. These kinds of questions are not even voiced, let alone answered. The inclusion of a section on women highlights the absence of any mention of either the Acadian population or the Blacks.

Education and Development in Atlantic Canada is an attempt to come to grips with what is generally considered to be the 'have not' status of the Maritimes, to present the relationship between this economic condition and education, and to look more closely at some attempts at modernization. Like modernization attempts, the book both succeeds and fails. Although the individual addresses are well written and do give a global perspective on development, and the case studies are examples of individual attempts to improve the life of the people, the overall effect is one of disappointment. I suppose it could be equated to winning the battle, but losing the war. Somehow the reader is not convinced: a. that the Atlantic region can really be classed as an underdeveloped area; b. that the fault/blame for this non-industrialized state lies with the educational system; and c. that the attempts to change or to develop new policies will improve the situation. Perhaps Tony Burton put the conference, and therefore this text, in proper perspective when he said that "the conference raised the question of how to approach hinterlanders who will not take a hint." (p.359) As a former Nova Scotian may I suggest that the metropolis-hinterland approach will not work in this context - not as long as the problems and solutions are to be defined by the metropolis for the improvement of the grateful hinterlanders.