

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
6TH COUNCIL, 37TH SESSION**

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 5-37

TABLED ON JUNE 27, 1968



May 16, 1968

CONFIDENTIAL -

Not for release before
tabling during the 37th
Session of Council

Sessional Paper 1-37

Tabled on June 27, 1968

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 5
(Second Session, 1968)

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

DISPOSITION

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

In response to a request made by Council at its 36th session, the Director of Education has prepared the following statement on curriculum development in the school system of the Northwest Territories.

Introduction

Since the inception of a public school system in the Northwest Territories, the curriculum used throughout the district has been a combination of the programs of various provincial areas of southern Canada subject to an extensive degree of adaptation, especially in the lower grades, to suit the needs of the indigenous people. The Mackenzie District has used the Alberta program; the Keewatin the Manitoba program; the Baffin area the Ontario program; and northern Quebec, the program of the Quebec Protestant School System. Students progressing through the schools in these various localities have written such examinations and met such standards as may be in effect in the provincial areas concerned at any given time.

Present Program

The work of adaptation and development of special material for use in the northern school programs has been the result of the combined efforts of the Curriculum Section of the Education Division, Northern Administration Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and individuals or committees of teachers working in the field. A good deal of material has been prepared from both sources and copies of this have been made available to teachers throughout the system. Because little work of this kind has been undertaken anywhere else and the cost of publishing such material is very high due to its limited circulation, the progress made in this work has always been less than many would have liked. However, it is doubtful that much increase in the amount of this material would have been possible even with greatly increased expenditure of funds or a larger number of workers. Independent and knowledgeable observers have frequently expressed commendation for the quality and diversification of the work which has been accomplished.

A northern reading series consisting of sixteen books for the first three years of primary grades, is proceeding very satisfactorily: some of the first books should be produced by September, 1968. The first two books consist of a pre-primer printed in full colour, along traditional lines using a vocabulary control and other accepted principles of reading instruction, and a book consisting of action verbs with appropriate illustrations. In both books the illustrations will be based on the northern environment.

Schools in the North will soon receive copies of My First Speller which has just recently come from the printers. The Language Arts course for the primary division, in which the teaching of English as a second language is integrated with other language activities, is proceeding satisfactorily and these materials will be ready for use next fall. To the Department's knowledge, this is the first time that a language and reading program integrated in all facets, has been attempted for any school system. It should provide a smooth transition from the oral language program to the reading and written program.

When considering the curricular needs of the Northwest Territories school program, one must at all times keep uppermost in one's thinking the peculiar diversity of the school population of approximately 8,000; about 36% are Eskimo, 19% Indian, and about 45% are classified as "other". It can be seen from these figures that nearly one half the children in the Territories are neither Indian nor Eskimo and of this group a very large percentage is of southern Canadian origin. This is particularly true in the Mackenzie District where better than 58% of the student body is neither Indian nor Eskimo. In turn, over 90%

of the student body in most of the Arctic Regions is classified as Eskimo. This diversification factor is one of the most influential in affecting every aspect of the northern school program. Unfortunately, many people in the South, as well as some in the North, seem to forget the presence of this situation. So often in reading or listening to comments on the northern scene, one could easily gain the impression that the entire area was peopled with an Indian or Eskimo population and that other groups were negligible in size.

Basic Problems of Specialized Curriculum Development for the Northwest Territories

The education program of the Northwest Territories, or any other similar region, is confronted with at least four special objectives present only to a limited extent, if at all, in most southern school systems. The objectives and requirements of an ordinary school system are present in the North to the same degree and with the same incidence that they are found elsewhere. However, over and above this, the northern program must:

- (a) Allow for the adaptation of regular material, especially at the lower grade levels, to bring it in line with the experience, environment, and needs of a special group of students, in this case the Indian, Eskimo, and Metis children. Without dwelling on this aspect of the school program, the importance of which has often been pointed out, there can be no doubt that extensive adaptation must occur in most aspects of the program presented. Southern programs as they stand have very limited use, especially in the primary grades.
- (b) To some extent running counter to the necessity for adaptation as outlined in "a" above, it is equally important that the northern curriculum, even with its adaptation, provide a transition for students, especially for the indigenous population. One of our major objectives in the whole northern program is to provide a medium whereby young people from the Indian and Eskimo cultures may provide themselves with an understanding of, and preparation for, participation in a southern type of culture. This is only possible if important elements of the curriculum in all areas of the program emphasize this aspect. A curriculum which failed to provide for such a transition would fail dismally in one of its major responsibilities to at least half our northern students. Building this into our program in the North is a highly skilled and taxing undertaking, since in few places in the world has it been attempted in a manner which is readily applicable to the northern scene.
- (c) The third, and to some extent most difficult, special objective for a northern curriculum, stems from the necessity we face to provide non-Indian and Eskimo children with a school program of standards comparable to those of a purely southern-type system and thoroughly viable when transferred to such a system. The large percentage of southern oriented Canadians whose children are being raised in the North, regardless of whether it is for a period of months or for the full period of their school careers, naturally insist that their children receive the same advantages and meet the same requirements as would be the case if they were living in the South. Northerners from the South make it abundantly clear that they are not prepared to accept a "watered down" school program for their children since they realize that within a few years the vast majority of them will be required to take their place in a southern environment and meet southern standards.
- (d) The presence of our Indian and Eskimo people with their rich culture and traditions places a heavy demand on the total northern school program to provide an opportunity for the best features of these ancient societies to be retained so that they may have the obvious advantage of being truly representative of the best of both cultures.

To achieve this result in a program which by its very nature tends to overshadow the traditional ways of age-old societies is incredibly difficult. Many will argue from very sound bases that such development cannot be artificially planned; that it tends to be largely incidental; that the decisions are made virtually unconsciously by the members of the minority societies, not by any deliberate intervention on the part of the dominant group. Nevertheless, this objective must be maintained throughout all aspects of curriculum planning in our northern schools.

It is hoped that the references to these four special objectives as underlined above will serve to emphasize the complexity of the task which confronts curriculum planners in the northern scene and to provide some basis of explanation for what is sometimes referred to as the "glacially slow progress" in the development of a northern curriculum. When we speak of a "northern curriculum", we should not envisage something which is narrowly and restrictively "northern" but a program which is constructively Canadian peculiarly suited to the needs of northern students. Any other approach represents a serious disservice to those we are here to serve.

"Youth Must be Served"

Everyone of us today is made very aware of the divergence in the needs and aspirations of the younger generation as contrasted with those of their parents. One of the most typical developments of the past fifteen years is the enormous pressure which this divergence has placed upon society in all parts of the world. In the North this is as true as it is anywhere else. The only difference is that our northern youth are not as yet quite as vocal in their demands as youth in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to overlook the fact that this divergence is present and growing. We would be performing our duty most inadequately if we were to present a program to the youth of the North based upon standards and requirements suggested solely by the adults of the area. So often mothers and fathers express desires and aspirations for their youngsters which are, for the most part, a reflection of what they hope and wish the youngsters would accept, rather than a reflection of what the young people themselves need and insist upon. It would be comparatively easy for us to design a northern program which resulted in the young people of the North being trapped in the North throughout coming years because we had failed to provide them with the things they know they need to make them free. Language can be one of the most restricting of all factors which surround such a generation. At all costs we must make sure that these young people are given the greatest possible access to every opportunity present in the Canadian society. Command of language, either French or English, perhaps both, must be built into every facet of the school program or else we serve our native youngsters badly. This in no sense implies an attempt to eradicate or destroy their own tongues.

The Future of Curriculum Planning in the Northwest Territories

It is assumed that when the new Department of Education for the Government of the Northwest Territories, as established under the Director of Education and the Territorial Government, assumes responsibility for the education program in the Territories, the work of curriculum planning will proceed. Present plans call for the establishment of a curriculum section with a staff of specialists trained and experienced in education in the various important fields included in our program. This section, presumably, will carry on the work which is at present underway in the Curriculum

Section of the Northern Administration Branch of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Ottawa. During the coming months it is planned to:

- (1) Decide the size and type of organization required for curriculum work in the territorial Department of Education;
- (2) Recruit staff for the positions which are established from our present staff, both in the field and in the Branch, and from the provinces;
- (3) Secure professional advice on trends which should be followed in the curriculum work from:
 - (a) the present teaching and curriculum staff;
 - (b) comparable curriculum departments in provincial organizations, where such exist;
 - (c) education departments and faculty members in various universities where research and curriculum development in related fields is underway;
- (4) Determine the needs and aspirations of the younger generation and apply them to the curriculum.

It should be understood that under the new organization revolutionary and extreme changes are not anticipated. Instead, we hope to proceed carefully and thoughtfully along present lines or along new lines which may be established from time to time as new information or advice is received. The development of an effective curriculum section in this department will be a slow and careful procedure directed at all times toward the achievement of the objectives outlined above, seeking solutions to the problems that confront us, and coupled with the usual objectives of a modern school curriculum.