

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
7TH COUNCIL, 53RD SESSION

TABLED DOCUMENT NO. 17-53

TABLED ON JUNE 19, 1974

Goller defends Northern teachers

By AL GOLLER

Paul Robinson lost his rose-tinted glasses - so he says. I have to agree that he went public like a strutting peacock. In full colors. What disturbs me is that he

we teach school - which is a full-time job!

You speak of philosophy handbooks and we agree that they are just that; moreover, that the curriculum must be developed. the programs

Mr Goller is head of the N.W.T. Teachers Association

waited until after he resigned to take on the Department of Education. Surely, if things were that bad he would not have kept his head in the sand like an ostrich during the past 5 years!

In defense of teachers who, in fact, innovated much of the philosophy of the Department of Education while attempting to teach children, and develop a curriculum for the school programs; our Association must speak out!

Paul's working philosophy towards teachers in simply 'change or get out'. This type of attitude has been adopted by some of our Superintendents and consequently, we have had many excellent teachers and Northern educators who have, in fact, become so discouraged with education that they have gone to Southern Canada where their efforts are appreciated. The majority of them have much better positions than they've ever had in the North.

Consider the situation in Fort Simpson: three principals in the last 13 months, and another new principal and vice-principal will be in the Thomas Simpson school next August. Moreover, the teacher turnover rate has been phenomenal in that community - 100 per cent during the last 18 months!

Coupled with the above problem of a high turnover rate is that teachers were hired to fit the housing available in certain communities. Coppermine is a prime example. As a result of this and the Department's policy of hiring inexperienced teachers during the past few years, how can we justifiably expect curriculum to be developed at the community level? How can we expect continuity in the school program, with a high turnover rate?

"What is actually happening in the classroom? Has any attempt been made to help the child develop pride and understanding of himself and then aided that child in his understanding of himself, of fellow Northern-Canadians and world brothers and sisters?"

Yes, many many teachers, in fact, have taken the challenge of the new philosophy before it was written up by the teachers themselves. After all, some of us have been in the North a decade and over. Some of us have, in fact, been doing the things ten years ago that Paul Robinson is now saying should be done. Some of us had the guts to institute our programs in our own quiet way, have the conviction that all is not bad in Northern education, and will not become discouraged by the negative statements of people like Paul Robinson who are only now saying let's take down the academic walls and let in some light. Some of us are concerned with more than a philosophy and, in fact, have developed a curriculum for our students while designed, the objectives outlined, and the goals must be met. We can expect some help from the Department of Education, moreover, the Curriculum section, to produce resource materials of a general and specific nature. If, indeed, those produced by the Curriculum section, have become public relations materials, it would seem that this was the fault of the Curriculum Chief as we believe he had a hand in distributing these across the North American continent. Surely, Paul Robinson cannot insinuate that teachers are using resource materials as public relations with students. Much of the resource material is, in fact, used for teaching purposes. Some can be used by any teacher in any classroom in the N.W.T.

The article written by Paul alludes to teachers classifying native children as "exceptionals" and creating classes especially for them. Where are these classes? Surely, he must admit that there are children - irregardless of what their color of skin may be - who need help which a specialist can only give. As you are aware, our Association as well as the Mental Health Association and many other interested groups and individuals, have called for at least one educational psychologist to

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be recruited by the Department of Education. As a result, we now have one for the entire N.W.T.

We like to think that the Department of Education and School Boards are approachable, moreover, that through sincere, consistent, prolonged efforts new concepts will be accepted - if they have validity.

What is evident is that we need a co-ordinated effort from all organizations and groups of people who have a responsibility or an interest in Northern Education. Paternalistic attitudes reflected by Paul Robinson toward Native Organizations are unacceptable. Why not allow Native Organizations to speak for themselves? Surely, you must believe that they have some degree of sophistication, organizational abilities and intellect.

The philosophy of change outlined in Mr. Robinson's article is to pit one organization against another, and one culture against another. Surely, this is the first rule of any colonialist. It is unacceptable to us. We have seen this philosophy in operation during the philosophy writing session of "Learning in the Middle Years". As a result, we presently do not have the working relationship between all groups interested and responsible for Northern Education at this time. Surely, Paul Robinson must take some credit for this as he has categorically castigated all Euro-Canadians who are involved in Northern Education.