



Gouvernement du Québec  
Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation  
Comité protestant



# A New Start in the School



E3S9  
C66  
R46  
1977  
A  
QCSE

# 990773

Level 1269

E3 89  
C65/R46A  
M/P

E3 59

C 66

R 46

1977

A

QCSE



A NEW START IN THE SCHOOL

Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

1977



Thanks to a provincial agreement the schools are open once again and local negotiations are in progress.

But today, there is more to do than to restart a school system which was severely shaken up during the course of the 1975-1976 school year. Following this tedious ordeal, it is now necessary to regain the inspiration, desire, motivation and inclination essential to make education truly significant.

Above all, we need to work together to achieve objectives which we cannot afford to abandon.

For a long time Quebec has sought educational reform. We placed high hopes on the collective undertaking to bring about improvement and we gave strong and courageous support to it. After ten years and the expenditure of billions of dollars it would be tragic if Quebec were now to find itself an impaired educational machine - a sort of wrecked and deserted ship.

Recent years have shown that it was neither school facilities nor money that was lacking. The real problem appears to be the loss of a sense of direction and of the will to maintain and pursue goals. A new phase of reform in education - more difficult than the first - is imperative. This new phase implies a reform of our perception of the school itself and its basic orientation. The public school must find anew true meaning and value.

In the fall of 1976 the Catholic Committee presented a set of proposals for a more LIVEABLE, DEMOCRATIC and MEANINGFUL public school, which was subsequently endorsed by the Superior Council of Education. The Protestant Committee has also subscribed to these proposals, with minor changes for publication in the Protestant milieu. These are rough-hewn, even abrupt proposals, presented with no pretension of perfection. They are a call to individual and collective research to be based on procedures determined in each community.

They are addressed particularly to school staff who feel the need to develop together an educational project and who really want to make the school work.

These are proposals, not orders, for where meaning and values are involved one can never do more than to suggest and indicate possible paths.

Thus, this text is above all an appeal. Following the recent conflict and its aftermath, it issues an open invitation to each one to reassume responsibility for our schools and their educational role.

The Protestant Committee gratefully acknowledges the kindness of the Catholic Committee in permitting the free use and adaptation of its document.

The Protestant Committee  
of the Superior Council of Education

Quebec, May 1977



1. TOWARDS A LIVEABLE SCHOOL

1.1 A living educational environment

We are constantly being told that the school must be a living environment. Nevertheless, its environment should also be an educational one. Street life, gangs, beer parlors, and the underworld are all living environments too. Such environments must not however be permitted to penetrate our schools. Schools should not be a mere reflection of society. They should also influence society.

1.2 A school where the climate is relaxed

Any school is unliveable when there is constant tension. True education requires a friendly, open climate. Such adjectives may sound a bit trite but the full meaning is far from trite. In politics just as in business, the prevailing rule is that of the survival of the fittest. A school should be a place where "one mind can improve another", where one can learn how to exchange and negotiate without having to be forced into a contest of strength. We must stop "dramatizing" our schools, by recreating a climate conducive to harmonious relationships.

1.3 A school that emphasizes clear relationships

A school environment is more liveable when the rules of the game are clear and when relationships are established in a climate of mutual honesty, respect and confidence. For some, these remarks may have a moralistic ring or be taken as wishful thinking. Yet, there is little doubt that a school atmosphere becomes increasingly unbearable to the extent that trickery, strategy and dishonesty tend to infiltrate honest relationships.

Too much emphasis has been placed on conflicts and contests of strength. It is now time to stress the dynamic forces of peaceful and trustful relationships.

1.4 A school which can provide solutions to problems

A school environment is more liveable when all can ask questions with the knowledge that they will be listened to and answered. A school where questions remain unanswered, where problems are never solved, even temporarily, where negotiations drag on for fifteen months, could be classified a barbaric-type school. Even a temporary solution is acceptable when it is presented for what it is, when the reasons are stated and everyone is convinced he is being provided with the truth.

1.5 A school concerned about the quality of life

A school environment may be called liveable to the extent that everyone feels personally responsible for the quality of life within its walls. Quality of life starts with respect for the school's premises and facilities. On this subject, certain worthwhile former practices should be re-examined anew - tidiness, silence, punctuality. One has a greater tendency to be neat when the premises are clean. The library is a good place for learning silence and respect. One develops a greater tendency to be punctual when the teacher is punctual. The qualifier "public" applied to the school ought not to be synonymous with slovenliness and disorder.

1.6 A school that is respectful of the rights of children

A school becomes unliveable when attempts are made to use it for all types of crusades. Some are trying to return to the past, others are trying to draw the school into the midst

of present-day disputes, while others would launch it into utopia. But a child will be eight or fourteen years old only once in his lifetime. No one has the right to dispossess him of his youth. Let the eighth or fourteenth year of his life be a worthwhile liveable experience. That would be doing him a great favor. We must never deny children their right to be children.

1.7 A school that is able to transform and to grow

A school environment is liveable to the extent that renewed growth and recovery are possible there. Young students are often insecure persons. It is the business of the school to show confidence in them and permit them the chance to overcome error, for elsewhere in life, mistakes can often be fatal. Recent years have shown us that the schools themselves are insecure and vulnerable places. They can be threatened and destroyed by conflict. Because a school is an educational institution, it must also be able to demonstrate a capacity to bounce back and revive itself. This is especially true for confessional institutions claiming a base of spiritual faith, for renewal is one of the products of such faith.

2. TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

2.1 An accessible school

A democratic school is a school that is open to all. Out of a sense of justice, school reform made education geographically and financially accessible to all young persons. The intention has been that nobody might truthfully say he had once wanted to go to school, but resided too far away or his parents could not afford it. This one benefit of the reform must be protected



against new obstacles that have recently arisen. For instance, in 1975-1976 many students were obliged to return to their homes "because of picket lines" or "locked school doors". Other disillusioned students abandoned school for good. Democracy at school could eventually disappear through the use of slogans and propaganda.

## 2.2 A school accountable for its actions

A democratic school is not divorced from the political process. In other words, it is a school that is aware of the positions of governments. A public school has to be accountable to the public for its own actions and performance. It is one thing to accept that school issues be debated on the political scene, but it is another matter when the school is being made the arena for political disputes and used as a pressure tool. When there is a mixture of both, the dispute is falsified and the school is abused.

## 2.3 A school that guarantees equality of opportunity

A democratic school is one that wants to provide everyone with an equal chance to develop his natural talents. Comprehensive-type school programs were created to this end. Nevertheless, one is aware that secondary schools are finding it difficult to reduce the gap that tends to separate students, that new barriers have cropped up, or rather, that old barriers have been painted over with new terms (weak streams, enriched streams).

Perhaps there would be something to gain by clearly denouncing the myth of equalitarianism which is a deformation of the principle of equality of opportunity. Providing an equal chance to everybody does not necessarily mean that all students must learn at the same speed. What it does mean is every student



should be able individually to find what he is looking for. This is no more than ordinary common sense. At any rate, no school should ever lose faith in the intellectual ability of its students.

#### 2.4 A school that respects disparities

A democratic school may be destroyed not only by propaganda, but also by norms. The egalitarian bureaucratic ideal too often ignores differences or disparities, whether they be social, ethnic, religious, cultural or regional. Yet, to support and coordinate different component parts and communities of interests is more healthy and economically sound than to insist upon one single model. It is also more democratic.

#### 2.5 A school that caters to excellence

Public schools must cultivate excellence and favor the emergence of an elite. Not a class elite but a natural elite. We are not afraid of using words here that may sound a bit suspicious because the concept of an elite has now become taboo. So that no one can accuse us of being nostalgic and of perhaps wanting to return to the past, permit us to quote some lines from UNESCO's Faure Report. "It must above all not be concluded from the vices of elitism as practiced in blocked societies that a healthy conception of elitism and educational democratization are incompatible. (...) Elitism of the kind which forges a power-equals-class link into the system will prevent the emergence of an authentic elite, but by democratically widening the basis of education to enable all individual aptitudes to find fulfilment, stimulates the rise of a natural elite. (...) Only in those societies in the process of achieving their integration through a widespread dismantling of their social barriers can the tasks of education to select and distribute

lose their negative, filtering aspect and take on the positive feature of promoting human achievement." (Learning to Be, UNESCO 1972, pp. 59-60.)

## 2.6 A school that can evaluate

The influence of the egalitarian myth along with the uncontested adoption of certain teaching methods have resulted in the situation that public schools are afraid to render judgments. In refusing to pass judgment, our schools are in danger of being unjust because of their very pliancy.

Schools no longer judge because it takes both courage and a set of criteria to form judgments. Yet, the very concept of democracy includes accountability for one's acts, hence to make judgments.

If schools are to have any real meaning, they must be able to make judgments. A school must evaluate itself. It must evaluate student achievement, help students to evaluate their own performance, both their successes and failures alike. Children, moreover, have a profound need to be judged. Judged in a friendly and respectful way, but be judged. Someone who is never judged remains indeterminate. So it is with children. To permit a child to enjoy his childhood does not mean that he has to live inside a vacuum of irresponsibility, without any rules or guidelines.

To never judge a child is to betray that child, for life itself judges. Nothing shows greater lack of respect or concern for children than a phrase like "Go ahead and act as you please". This was the language of old-time liberalism.

2.7 A school that does not belong to any special clan

Many parties would like to adopt the school to have it serve their particular cause. A democratic school does not belong to the State, nor does it belong to the teachers, administrators, parents, workers, or to the church. It exists for the students and their entire educational training. Whoever appropriates a school, alienates it. And an alienated school rapidly becomes an alienator too. We must always guard the freedom of the school and be on the look-out for recurring constraints.

2.8 A school that recognizes necessary constraints

A democratic school is not a "laissez-faire" kind of school. Because some people perceived it to be so, others are now demanding a return to stricter disciplinary measures in order to transmit to students the meaning of effort. In reality, an understanding of the meaning of effort emerges from personal desire and not from constraints. Effort derives from inner motivation, from determination to develop and to cooperate. That is why development of a student's desire to learn and his self-autonomy suffer as much from a relaxation of disciplines as from a stiffening of disciplinary measures. Youth display desire and effort only when they feel themselves involved in projects with which they are fully associated. In this way, are they able to discover the necessity and use of rules or constraints as indispensable factors in the accomplishment of joint projects.

### 3. TOWARDS A MEANINGFUL SCHOOL

#### 3.1 A school that can define its goals

For a number of years now, everything seems to indicate we have lost sight of the ultimate goals of education. We must regain the courage to state that the school's first duty is the development of human beings and good citizens, something which greatly surpasses the learning of a trade or access to higher education and individual self-development. When the man in the street declares that schools have ceased to educate, he is criticizing the fact that most schools have forgotten their principal end. Obviously, schools have to be something more than expensive community reservations or parking lots for society's youngsters until the time has come for harnessing them to the assembly production line.

Among the school's goals is the training of the intellect or mind. Social and moral training are also school goals. These goals must be restated or reinstated without any illusions about the size of the task. It is a formidable one demanding courage, but an incontestably necessary task.

#### 3.2 A school dedicated to unity

To be meaningful, a school should help its student body to understand the interrelationships of all disciplines, disciplines that have, to date, been carved or chopped up to no end. This chopping up of subject-matter can be attributed to the constraints of administrations and teacher unions. It is also the result of too much specialization on the part of teachers. In a broader sense, this compartmentalization is the outcome of a technical mentality which continuously strives to break down an entity into its component parts. It is the pattern upon which most of education has been built.

Youngsters are saturated with disparate and unrelated facts of knowledge. It is not easy for them to distinguish the interactional factors in the body of knowledge they have acquired so as to give it coherent meaning. Our secondary schools need interpreters more than they do specialists, adults who are capable of showing students how acquired facts or information, science, art, religion and life are all inter-related.

### 3.3 A school that recognizes values

A meaningful school is a school that recognizes that values in education cannot be set aside. It is agreed that schools are full of scientific truths and objective facts. But one cannot fully live on scientific truth alone. Life demands reasons for living, values that can give meaning and purpose to life.

Yet, values cannot simply be taught. They have to be demonstrated by human beings and reflected in their daily conduct. Youngsters must be able to live in contact with persons who understand the meaning of friendship and joint responsibility, who place a high premium on loyalty; people who do not equate success with money; in short, persons who respect intelligence and who know what they themselves stand for in life.

### 3.4 A school that helps youth to give form and structure to their lives

To be meaningful, a school should be able to lay down certain moral guidelines. But schools refuse to intervene under the pretext of respect for human freedoms and pluralism. Maybe to establish closer relations with their students, adults are inclined to reject their role of explaining essential qualities.

The youngsters of a confused or permissive-type school are often disappointed in adults who never take a stand. And yet, it is precisely the teacher's influence that enables the student to grow.

This is not an individual or personal role only. The school itself must contribute leadership. There was a rare time when the school was held in almost sacred awe. Now commonplace in the etymological sense of the term signifying its accessibility to all, the school has lost much of its true meaning. The democratic challenge now lies in an effort to combine accessibility with value, respect for the rights of individuals with dedicated leadership.

### 3.5 A school that calls for a common concern

One must admit that it is rather difficult for schools to recover their true meaning outside the framework of a common concern. A school does not live on the fringe of society, for education, without doubt, constitutes the most humanizing factor in social existence. It is an entirely social phenomenon which raises questions about all facets of living societies. Both the most hidden and obvious desires of a society are scrutinized and questioned at school. A society reveals its innermost self, and what it aspires to be, through its system of education and its educative process. That is the reason why education gives rise to so much debate, apprehension, and even anxiety.

### 3.6 A school that does not forget the religious dimension

Religious faith has contributed much to our present way of life. It has been closely associated with our past, and will be, we believe, with our future. The religious dimension cannot

be neglected by the schools of this land, if they are to be truly purposeful. Of course, owing to the variety of situations that exist, finding the proper means of joining the accepted goals of a school and the religious stance of the persons or groups it represents, is a task that belongs to each individual school. At the same time, a school is duty-bound to consider religion and the Bible as a source of motivation and stimulation in the search for the ultimate ends of life rather than as a threat to human freedom. The purpose of religion is to give depth and breadth to human experience. "Reality can never suffice for explaining reality" (Fourastié).

#### CONCLUSION

We believe that the foregoing proposals are part of a set of "objective conditions" essential to educational activity. Without them, quality education risks remaining no more than a token phrase which thousands of collective agreement clauses will never manage to guarantee.

We are also aware that written texts have little power to alter reality. To infuse the school system with new vigor and purpose ultimately demands that it be remodelled from within by the hands of its most vital sculptors - those men and women whose daily task is "to teach school".

---

Quebec, May 1977





L'ÉDITEUR OFFICIEL DU QUÉBEC  
SERVICE DE LA REPROGRAPHIE  
Juin 1977

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION



QCSE003677

Réalisé par  
la Direction des Communications  
Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

50-240