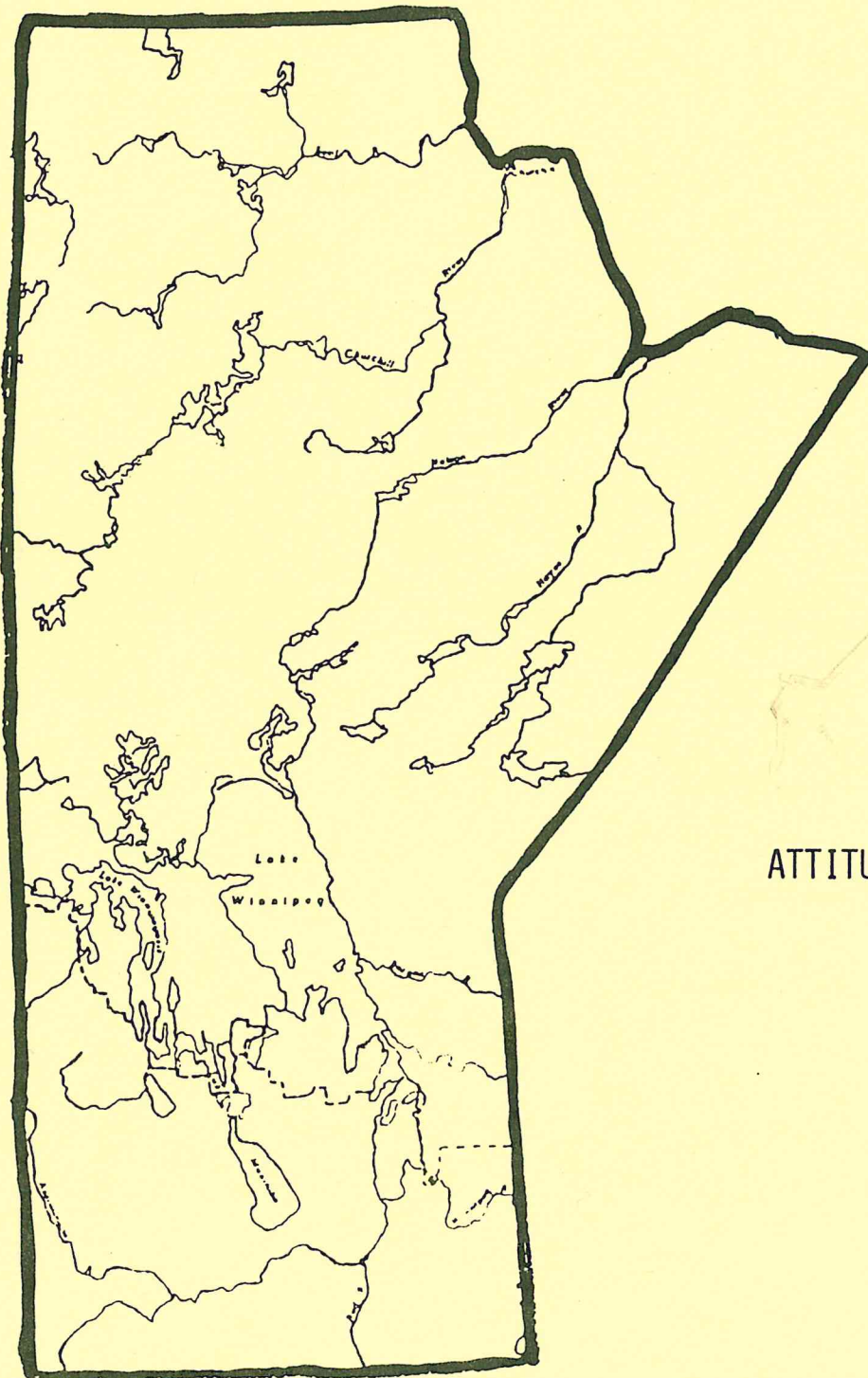


RESEARCH BULLETIN

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PROFILES ON MANITOBA

ATTITUDES OF THE MANITOBA POPULATION
TOWARD
EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

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PREFACE

The fourth Profile on Manitoba considered attitudes toward education. It dealt with attitudes on the quality of education, language instruction, sex education classes, the issue of evolution and creation, and school financing.

1.0 QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The initial group of questions consisted of statements to which the respondent was asked to disagree or agree. Neutral responses and "don't know" were also accepted. These statements were closely modelled after, and in some cases were taken from, the Gallup poll on public perceptions of education conducted annually in the United States.

| <u>TABLE 1</u> | |
|---|-------------|
| "OVERALL, HIGH SCHOOL IS EASIER NOW COMPARED TO TEN YEARS AGO." | |
| (percent) | |
| AGREE | 42.3 |
| NEUTRAL | 10.6 |
| DISAGREE | 30.4 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>16.7</u> |
| | 100.0 |
| "DISCIPLINE IS A PROBLEM IN MANITOBA SCHOOLS." | |
| (percent) | |
| AGREE | 70.8 |
| NEUTRAL | 9.2 |
| DISAGREE | 13.2 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>6.8</u> |
| | 100.0 |
| "ALL STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN ABOUT COMPUTERS." | |
| (percent) | |
| AGREE | 68.2 |
| NEUTRAL | 8.8 |
| DISAGREE | 21.6 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>1.4</u> |
| | 100.0 |

| "IT IS LESS IMPORTANT FOR A WOMAN TO GET TRAINING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL THAN A MAN." | |
|--|------------|
| | (percent) |
| AGREE | 9.6 |
| NEUTRAL | 3.1 |
| DISAGREE | 85.9 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>1.4</u> |
| | 100.0 |

| "EVERYONE SHOULD BE REQUIRED TO PASS A STANDARD PROVINCIAL EXAM IN ORDER TO GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL." | |
|---|------------|
| | (percent) |
| AGREE | 70.2 |
| NEUTRAL | 21.7 |
| DISAGREE | 6.2 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>1.8</u> |
| | 100.0 |

In addition to the data recorded in direct response to the questions, interviewers are instructed to note additional comments volunteered by the respondents. In the case of the perceived quality of education, many respondents indicated they could not easily compare now with ten years ago, but could make a comparison between now and twenty years ago. Presumably, in light of the patterns of responses provided in Table 1, there is a reasonably strong opinion on the part of the respondents that overall quality (as measured by discipline, demands of curriculum, ability to use English, et cetera) has declined in the last twenty years. Hesitancy to make this comparison for the last ten years, as well as the indication that 50 percent of the respondents feel that the overall quality is improving, suggest that a reasonably large number of Manitobans feel that educational quality is currently improving. The basis for this perception cannot be completely assessed in this survey.

Background socio-economic variables can play a major role in understanding the basis for opinions. In this case, the patterns of responses were evaluated against gender, age, education, degree of religious commitment, income, and location (Winnipeg and non-Winnipeg).

There are no significant differences in perceptions about the quality of education on the basis of location (Winnipeg versus non-Winnipeg) or income (above/below \$21,000).

2.0 CONTENT OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A number of different issues pertaining to curriculum content were addressed in the survey.

2.1 SEX EDUCATION AND RELATED ISSUES

Generally speaking, Manitobans are very supportive of sex education classes being offered in the school system. Over 88 percent of respondents indicated that sex education classes should be voluntary or required, as shown in Table 3.

| <u>TABLE 3</u> | |
|--|------------|
| "HOW DO YOU THINK HIGH SCHOOLS SHOULD DEAL WITH SEX EDUCATION? DO YOU THINK SEX EDUCATION SHOULD BE REQUIRED, VOLUNTARY, OR NOT OFFERED AT ALL?" | |
| | (percent) |
| REQUIRED | 41.6 |
| VOLUNTARY | 46.8 |
| NOT OFFERED | 7.9 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>3.7</u> |
| | 100.0 |

A comment frequently volunteered by the respondent indicated that support for either a required or voluntary sex education course was conditional on parental input. This comment was offered sufficiently frequently to warrant highlighting this aspect of the response.

Birth control information and its availability in the high schools also received considerable support from the respondents.

| BIRTH CONTROL INFORMATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS. | | | |
|---|------|---------|-------|
| AGE | FOR | AGAINST | |
| (percent) | | | |
| 18 - 24 | 99.3 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| 25 - 44 | 90.2 | 9.8 | 100.0 |
| 45 - 64 | 76.9 | 23.1 | 100.0 |
| 65+ | 64.0 | 36.0 | 100.0 |
| Chi Square = 69.8 Phi = .306 Spearman Correlation = .301 (P = .0001) | | | |

2.2 LANGUAGE TRAINING

The respondents are generally supportive of students learning a second language.

| "DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE?" | |
|---|------------|
| (percent) | |
| YES | 73.0 |
| NO | 23.4 |
| NEUTRAL | 3.4 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>0.2</u> |
| | 100.0 |

| "ARE YOU FOR OR AGAINST VOLUNTARY IMMERSION PROGRAMS TO ALLOW HIGH SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY STUDENTS TO BECOME FLUENT IN A SECOND LANGUAGE?" | |
|---|------------|
| (percent) | |
| FOR | 75.8 |
| AGAINST | 14.0 |
| NEUTRAL | 7.4 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>2.8</u> |
| | 100.0 |

When asked what second language was preferred, respondents indicated the following:

Gender influences the pattern of responses. Women are more likely than men to favour both the prayer and national anthem starting the school day.

| NATIONAL ANTHEM STARTING THE SCHOOL DAY | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|-------|
| | FOR | NEUTRAL | AGAINST | |
| | (percent) | | | |
| MEN | 73.0 | 12.8 | 14.1 | 100.0 |
| WOMEN | 85.4 | 10.7 | 3.9 | 100.0 |
| Chi Square = 26.705 Phi = .187 Spearman Correlation = -.139 (P = .0001) | | | | |
| PRAYER STARTING THE SCHOOL DAY | | | | |
| | FOR | NEUTRAL | AGAINST | |
| | (percent) | | | |
| MEN | 58.1 | 12.7 | 29.3 | 100.0 |
| WOMEN | 68.3 | 17.3 | 14.4 | |
| Chi Square = 25.217 Phi = .182 Spearman Correlation = -.071 (P = .0001) | | | | |

Needless to say, respondents with a strong religious commitment are much more likely to be for the school day starting with a prayer. The association between these variables was by far the highest of any cross-tabulation done in the preliminary analysis. Interestingly, religious commitment also was associated with support for the national anthem.

| NATIONAL ANTHEM STARTING THE SCHOOL DAY | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|-------|
| IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION | FOR | NEUTRAL | AGAINST | |
| | (percent) | | | |
| VERY IMPORTANT | 83.9 | 7.2 | 8.9 | 100.0 |
| SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT | 78.7 | 12.8 | 8.5 | 100.0 |
| NOT TOO IMPORTANT | 75.0 | 14.0 | 11.0 | 100.0 |
| NOT IMPORTANT | 46.2 | 42.3 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| Chi Square = 32.074 Phi = .206 Spearman Correlation = .133 (P = .0001) | | | | |

"THE NEXT QUESTION DEALS WITH WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SCIENCE CLASSES."

"AS YOU KNOW, EVOLUTION TEACHES THAT HUMANS EVOLVED FROM LOWER FORMS OF LIFE, WHILE CREATION TEACHES THAT HUMANS WERE PLACED ON EARTH BY GOD. HOW DO YOU THINK THESE IDEAS SHOULD BE TAUGHT? DO YOU THINK ONLY EVOLUTION SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN BIOLOGY CLASSES, DO YOU THINK ONLY CREATION SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN BIOLOGY CLASSES, OR DO YOU THINK THAT BOTH SHOULD BE TAUGHT?"

| | (percent) |
|------------------------|-----------|
| ONLY EVOLUTION | 11.1 |
| ONLY CREATION | 10.6 |
| BOTH | 72.4 |
| NEUTRAL | 2.3 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | 3.6 |
| | 100.0 |

From this table, it appears that the respondents favour a balanced presentation in schools. Those who favour only evolution or only creation are clearly in the minority.

Interesting influences on the responses are provided by age, gender, education, and religion.

Older respondents were more likely to favour "only creation", and less likely to favour either "only evolution" or "both".

| EVOLUTION/CREATION | ONLY EVOLUTION | ONLY CREATION | BOTH | NEUTRAL |
|---|----------------|---------------|------|---------|
| AGE | (percent) | | | |
| 18 - 24 | 10.6 | 6.6 | 82.1 | 0.7 |
| 25 - 44 | 16.4 | 7.9 | 74.2 | 1.5 |
| 45 - 64 | 7.8 | 18.1 | 70.0 | 4.2 |
| 65+ | 1.4 | 15.3 | 77.8 | 5.6 |
| Chi Square = 41.425 Phi = .236 Spearman Correlation = .018 (P = .0001) | | | | |

In summary, these results seem to indicate that Manitobans are quite open-minded about the current debate over evolution and creation viewpoints, and wish to see both taught in biology classes. Whether these patterns persist in the event that the debate sharpens remains to be seen.

3.0 SCHOOL FUNDING

The final set of issues concerns school funding. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree to the following two questions:

| "ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL SHOULD BE REQUIRED TO PAY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION." | |
|---|------------|
| | (percent) |
| AGREE | 27.7 |
| DISAGREE | 66.1 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>6.2</u> |
| | 100.0 |

| "PRIVATE SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT RECEIVE GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT." | |
|--|------------|
| | (percent) |
| AGREE | 42.0 |
| DISAGREE | 48.8 |
| DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE | <u>9.2</u> |
| | 100.0 |

The pattern of response does not vary significantly by gender, location, or income. However, religion does influence responses when private school funding is concerned.

| NO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS | | |
|--|-----------|----------|
| IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| | (percent) | |
| VERY IMPORTANT | 31.2 | 68.8 |
| SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT | 53.5 | 46.5 |
| NOT TOO IMPORTANT | 62.8 | 37.2 |
| NOT IMPORTANT | 57.7 | 42.3 |
| Chi Square = 43.326 Phi = .249 Spearman Correlation = -.244 (P = .0001) | | |

careers, and an unreasonable expectation that limited exposure to computers will be a significant advantage in the job market. Indeed, many seem to labour under the misapprehension that computer programming is a growth career. Most knowledgeable insiders predict that programming as it is practiced today will not be widely used in five to ten years, when most computer users will employ elegantly simple software which can be learned rapidly by novices.

There is concern over the ability of graduates to employ English correctly, and some evidence that English is valued more than computer skills. Interviewers do report some hesitancy in the patterns of response which sought to juxtapose computers and English, and this last speculation must be viewed as tentative.

SEX EDUCATION

Manitobans demonstrate very strong support for sex education being taught in schools, provided that there is parental input. (This last aspect was volunteered by many respondents.) In addition, there is strong support for birth control information and information on venereal disease being available in the school. It is apparent that Manitobans feel that students require knowledge in this area, and that education is perceived as an important step to responsibility in personal relationships. Contrary to recent public statement and other informal surveys, Manitobans generally appear not to believe that education on sex can be left solely to family and friends, and wish to see the school system become actively involved. Of course, it is important to remember that 47 percent of the respondents wished voluntary sex education and 42 percent want required courses, and that parental input is important, but overall the pattern is very supportive of an active role for the education system in this area. While age is important in explaining the pattern of responses, in that older respondents are more likely to be against sex education classes and against birth control information in the high schools (there was no such tendency for information on venereal disease), it is important to note that a majority of those over 65 wished to see sex education classes (required and voluntary) and birth control information in high schools.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Despite the largely negative views on the government's language legislation (reported in Profile No. 1), Manitobans are supportive of second-

concept that these views be given equal treatment. What the survey is unable to do is to probe issues such as whether non-Christian views of creation are to be taught, or whether the philosophical problems on the origins of human life on earth are to be treated in a biology course. A basic problem to be addressed by educators is where science ends and philosophy begins, and to what extent biology courses are to treat questions of theology.

The pattern of responses is very strongly related to the importance that respondents attach to religion. Those who state that religion is important to them are more likely to feel that only creation should be taught in biology classes. Those for whom religion is not particularly important are more likely to favour only evolution. The support for equal treatment seems uninfluenced by religion. Education is related to the issue of evolution and creation. Respondents with more education tend to respond "only evolution" more than those with less education. Gender also influences the response, with men favouring "only evolution" more than women.

These inter-relationships clearly demonstrate that extreme views which would see only evolution or only creation presented in biology classes are clearly in the minority. The survey sheds no light on how teachers or teaching materials are to be monitored to ensure balanced treatments of both viewpoints, or to what extent non-Christian interpretations of the origin of life are to be integrated into creationist views. This latter aspect of the debate, as yet undeveloped, may have important ramifications for a province such as Manitoba with its diversity of cultures and religions. In an important sense, these results reflect opinions taken before what we can expect to be vigorous public debate. The protagonists will consist of those who insist on only evolution as part of biology courses, and those who wish a balanced treatment. The real challenge will fall to teachers, who ultimately may be required to present the two or more views on the origins of life and to separate science and theology. The survey does not shed light on the actions that residents may take to force a school board to adopt a particular position, although this is an important policy problem.

APPENDIX A