

## **The Hall-Dennis Report (1968)**

Surrounded by much fanfare, the Ontario Provincial Committee of Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario submitted its report, *Living and Learning*, to the legislature in 1968. Now better known as the Hall-Dennis Report (after its co-chairs the Hon. Mr. Justice E.M. Hall and Mr. L.A. Dennis), it contained 258 recommendations for educational reform in the province. Its important status in Ontario history is due to its propositions denouncing Ontario's regimentation of schools and classroom practices, as well the ensuing discussions it stirred up.

The committee was initially struck in 1965 by the Department of Education with a mandate to assess the state of education in Ontario and to recommend methods for revising the elementary division. However, from the outset, the committee's intended scope grew to encompass all levels of public education. After receiving briefs from 112 groups, 30 individual experts (including the controversial Marshall McLuhan), two years of public hearings (from 1965-1967) and numerous visits of committee members to Russia, England, Ireland, the United States, Japan, and Israel, the ensuing report tackled a great number of issues: Traditional versus progressive approaches, bilingualism, fears of "Americanization", concern for national unity and identity, the preservation of Canadian cultural diversity, the equalization of educational opportunity, provision for Canadian Native education, funding responsibilities, centralization versus decentralization of administration and the unique demands of a fast-changing urban-technological society.

On the whole, its most important recommendations seem to have fallen in line with mainstream progressivism. It advocated an "individualized programme of instruction for the development of the potentialities of the child", the "removal of corporal punishment", and the de-emphasis of "competition in the classroom" and "rote learning." School, declared the report, should be "viewed as a place of personal growth and development based on a learning process of self-discovery" (p. 9). It called for the replacement of the present system based upon rigid expectations, segregated grades and subjects with the introduction of a system of education revolving around the individual needs of the student, with a minimum of supervision and guidance.

The Department of Education initially applied its recommendations with seeming enthusiasm and rigour. For the next 5 years it embarked on a series of reforms along the lines outlined by the report. Program consultants in the regional offices helped teachers with individualized programming, curriculum guidelines replaced prescribed courses of study, and the Department even funded a number of experimental school configurations. In total, Premier Bill Davis stated that over 70% of the Committee's recommendations related to curriculum were implemented. Unlike the Department, however, the media, academic and teaching communities seemed to polarize on the report.