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Youth Workshop

Susan Mason  
June 5 - 6, 1987

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## YOUTH WORKSHOP

June 5 - 6, 1987

Baha'i Centre  
Whitehorse, Yukon

Thirty-three delegates attended the YUKON 2000 Youth Workshop. Three of these were over twenty-five with the rest ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-four. Half of the thirty were of native ancestry. There were delegates from Whitehorse, Ross River, Old Crow, Carcross, Burwash Landing, Mayo and Faro. There were highschool graduates, drop-outs, Yukon College and university students, people taking correspondence, high school students and some who had experienced trouble with the law.

The agenda for the workshop included discussions on the education system from grades one through twelve, training, Yukon College and employment. However, the discussion centred on education, focussing on high school and the problems encountered there.

There were several recurring issues, the major one being teachers. Everyone considered teachers to be the most important people in education. There was agreement that if a teacher liked and was interested in their subject the students learned more, enjoyed even "irrelevant" subjects and were more inclined to stay in school. If teachers were not interested, then even interesting subjects became boring. Everyone thought that teachers should be evaluated on the amount of interest they show in the course and by how much interest they generate.

Counsellors were also discussed. All agreed that counsellors should be qualified. They are an important part of the school system and if they are not properly trained, they can cause problems rather than help to solve them. They need more knowledge on what they are supposed to be doing.

There was a major concern about high school graduates who are unable to write a coherent essay. When this happens over and over, it means there is something wrong with the education system. There were suggestions about the curriculum and the system that are recorded further on in this paper. There was a variety of different ideas to improve education from completely changing the school system to improving the curriculum.

Another issue concerning the curriculum was teaching by memorization and regurgitation of names, dates, and places rather than teaching principles and how to apply them. All the groups believed there should be more problem-solving and communication skills taught in school.

There were concerns about the students who come in from the smaller communities to Whitehorse for grades ten through twelve. There is no orientation, inadequate living facilities and the students do not know very many people in Whitehorse. There were suggestions to develop a support group for all the out of town students to provide them with an orientation to the school and bring together students who are experiencing similar changes and difficulties. This would help them establish their own support system in Whitehorse.

The last recurring topic was Yukon College. Everyone would like to see more first year courses that are transferable to university. This would encourage more Yukon students to

attend the College. Also, everyone would like the curriculum developed and advertised throughout Canada to get more people to come in from outside to attend the College ... and possibly to stay in the Yukon.

The following report outlines the major problems and suggestions brought forth by the participants. These have been grouped under general headings with the comments and problems coming first, followed by suggestions for dealing with each. The headings are: Teachers, Mainstreaming, the Current Education System, Out of Town Students, Drop-outs, Miscellaneous Comments on Grades 1-12, Training, Yukon College, Employment and General.

The format and agenda were developed during informal meetings with representative from Yukon College, F. H. Collins Senior Secondary School, private industry, the Department of Education and the Department of Economic Development. Participants in the workshop discussed the topics in small group sessions and reported back on discussions to the main group.

The report will be used in future stages of YUKON 2000 work. It provides, along with other consultation, information on the issues facing young people in the Yukon economy and possible actions to address them.

## Teachers

- o The attitude and interest of the teacher in the course that s/he is teaching makes all the difference in the students' learning and becoming interested in the course. If the teacher likes the course, then the students learn more and become interested. If the teachers is bored or not interested in the subject matter, then the students, even if they were originally interested, lose their interest and do not learn as much as they could.
- o There is a lack of respect for (or possibly a lack of knowledge of) their students and their backgrounds on the part of some teachers. Many teachers from "outside" do not know what to expect from smaller places. They do not know anything about the community or the culture of the people living there.
- o There are not enough evaluations of teachers' performance. Evaluations should include their ability to generate the students' interest in the subject.
- o Counsellors should be trained as counsellors. They should have specialized training in either career or personal counselling. There should also be more counsellors so when a student needs to talk to one, there is a counsellor available.
- o Teachers in a small community often have to teach more than one grade and all of the subjects in all the grades. Many teachers do not have adequate training for this.
- o Teachers should not pre-judge or categorize students by their appearance (ie. leather jacket therefore bad

student, neat clean clothes therefore good student). Rather teacher should look at students' abilities.

- o Teachers should not reinforce peer pressure groups, ie. this one is a "jock", this one is a good student, etc.
- o Teachers should not be racist or prejudiced, especially in the Yukon where there is such a large native population.
- o There are concerns about sexual abuse in the classroom.

#### Suggestions

- o Teachers should be very carefully screened before they are hired. They are the ones who must set the mood for learning. If they are not interested, it is hard for the students to be interested in the subject. Teachers should be people who are interested both in their subject and in their students.
- o Teachers should have respect for other cultures and be willing to learn about them. There could be seminars during the summer to teach them about the cultural backgrounds of the students.
- o Teachers should not be hired if they show any sort of racism or prejudice during the interview. Prejudice in the classroom should be grounds for dismissal.
- o Teachers should have evaluations done regularly throughout the year. Both student evaluations and school board (Education Department Inspector) evaluations. If the teacher is not up to par, there is the option of re-training or upgrading before "firing" the person.

- o Indian students should be encouraged to go into the field of education.
- o Teachers for the small communities should be the "cream of the crop". They have to have the widest range of education to be able to teach multi-grades. To assist them, maybe people in the community could be trained as teachers' aides.
- o Counsellors should be trained as counsellors. If a teacher wants to switch to counselling s/he should be sent back to university to learn how to be a counsellor. Career counsellors should get more training to be able to answer questions about all options.
- o There should be at least one counsellor available at all times. Possibly have two full-time counsellors and two part-time teacher/counsellors in the high school. Counsellors should regularly travel to schools in the communities where there are not full-time counsellors.
- o Teachers who are willing to put in extra time for extra-curricular activities should be encouraged, not necessarily by monetary means; possibly by giving awards to teachers who did extra work when they give the awards to the students at the end of the year.

## Mainstreaming - The Current Educational System

- o Current school system is geared to the "average" student.
- o There are no alternatives for people who have different learning styles.
- o Since no one is "average", school tends to move too fast for some, too slow for others.
- o Students get classified as being "different" if they do not fit into the mainstream.
- o Remedial classes have bad connotations. They are labelled as second rate, which is embarrassing for the students.
- o System is geared to academic courses; anything below or different is considered to be a failure.
- o System oriented: if you conform, you pass; if you do not, you fail.
- o In primary school some students proceed to the next grade without the actual "pass" from the previous year.
- o "Education is not designed for students", it is geared to meeting the needs of the government, finance and politics. The system is not user oriented. It is one of the first areas to be hit by budget cuts because it is an easy way to reduce spending.
- o Schools seem to be run by committees to whom the student's education is not the first priority.

- o Students have no say in the decision making process. The committee makes all the decisions without getting the students' opinions. There is no grievance process for students or, if there is one, the students are not aware of it.

### Suggestions

- o Some feel that the whole system has to be revised. School is supposed to teach students to read, write, add, subtract and solve problems. When people graduate from grade twelve and are not able to write an essay, something is wrong somewhere.
- o People do not think in the same way, ie. some look at columns of numbers and the answer "pops" into their head vs. others who go through digit by digit to arrive at the answer. Changes should be made to accommodate these differences. Teachers should be trained to be able to teach by different methods.
- o Students should be divided into groups of people who think and learn in the same ways after about grade three. The first few grades should be teaching basic skills like basic research skills, group dynamics and inter-personal communications.
- o Students should be assessed by professionals (teachers who have taken extra training to be able to do the assessing) for learning style - linear, horizontal, spatial, etc. and learning ability - speed.
- o Grades: advancement should be based on mastery of concepts. Subjects should not be taught to tests (ie. only teaching what is being asked on these tests). If

students are interested in parts of the subject then they should be able to explore those areas more.

- o Students should advance at their own rate. The system should be flexible enough to accommodate both slow and fast learners. There should not be any stigma attached to either group. If the teachers do not make any special distinctions, the students would probably follow their example.
  
- o System should be able to adapt to the individual needs of the student, otherwise it fails at what it is intended to do - teach people!
  
- o The administration of education should be restructured to be more responsive to the educational needs of the student.

## Curriculum

- o Not enough Yukon and northern content.
- o Many students do not feel that they are prepared to enter university after graduation, nor do they feel that they are prepared for the work force.
- o Curriculum at present is being taught to tests, ie. only taught what is going to be on tests, usually only facts and figures. There is too much regurgitation. There should be more problem solving and interpretation.
- o The current curriculum is too structured, there is no self-directed learning so there is very little responsibility on the part of the students, no "ownership". All this makes going into university a huge step.
- o Need more options, especially in junior high. Some courses are a waste of time (Consumer Education).
- o Courses should not be dropped because they don't draw enough students.
- o There is very little emphasis on communication skills and problem solving.
- o Courses are not standardized. They are not taught at same level from province to province/territory.
- o Modified courses encourage those who are lazy to drop back and do the easier work. This can be abused by some.

- o Students graduating from modified courses can not go on to university because the modified courses are not considered to be at the graduate level.
- o Not enough support provisions for parents who teach their own children in their own home.
- o Some consider school to be more social than learning.
- o English - needs to be more balanced with creative and critical writing and grammar and not so much memorization - not usually up to university entrance levels.
- o Career counselling - not preparing students for choosing courses to take in university.
  - Need more information on career options, what type of school (university, college, technical, trade school) would give the best training.
  - Lack of training in job applications and resumes.
- o Sex education - left too late
  - Students know what is taught before going to the class, the only new things that they learn about are diseases.

#### Suggestions

- o System should make school a challenge and fun. Around every corner is something new to learn. It needs to make students and teachers develop a positive attitude towards learning.
- o Teach essay writing and precis writing and grammar BEFORE grade twelve.

- o Curriculum should be Yukon oriented, we should not be on the same curriculum as B.C. There should be more Yukon history both before Gold Rush (Indian) and after. Yukon authors could be studied in English, Yukon landforms in geology, etc.
- o Need to have less memorization of facts, more current, meaningful information, ie. relevant principles as opposed to names, dates and places.
- o Problem solving and logic. There should be at least one course on these. If this was combined with communication skills, maybe there could be one course in each grade from junior high through to graduation.
- o If the class size for a course is too small to warrant a separate teacher, maybe two courses could be held concurrently, with more self-guidance rather than dropping the course. Another option is to advertise the course better, make it sound more appealing to get more students.
- o Some feel that elementary school is a waste of time and that students should be pushed then, when they are still enthusiastic rather than later on, when they are not.
- o Guidance course - have a workshop to determine needs of students, change the curriculum to meet these needs.
  - Should have labour laws explained so students know their rights and their employers' rights.
  - Should have a few classes on how to fill out applications and prepare a resume.
  - Could use this class for group dynamics.

- o Career counselling - should be able to provide course descriptions, entrance requirements and deadlines, and explanations on how to read calendars and set up timetables.
  - Should be able to advise students on which courses would be best to take for their career choice.
- \* Courses in the last two grades should be closer to university entrance level courses. It would help to have them structured more like university with more responsibility on the student for learning.
  
- o To help prepare students for the workforce and give them ideas about what sort of career they would like to have here, should have some fieldwork in high school. Students could go to a business or government office or department to assist or even just observe how the place operates. They could spend a few hours each week going to different places. This would show the students what sort of careers there are here in the Yukon right now. For the many students who do not have a permanent career goal, this would give them ideas about what is available.
  
- o There should be updated text books available for people who want to teach their children at home. People should be aware that this option is available. There should also be someone that the parents could contact if they need assistance with any of the course material.

### Out of Town Students

- o Students coming into Whitehorse from the smaller communities for grades ten to twelve face many problems that are similar to the ones that students leaving home to go to university or college face.
- o They have to adjust to a new, bigger community, a bigger school with corresponding larger class sizes and new people. They leave behind their community with their established support system.
- o No orientation is provided for the "out of towners".
- o The counsellors do not seem to help these students.
- o They register for options at the beginning of the fall semester while the Whitehorse students register during the preceding spring so the options available are restricted; they are not able to take the courses that they are interested in.
- o Some start to skip out of classes when they get into Whitehorse because there are more interesting things to do here. In the communities, school is the only thing to do.
- o The smaller communities lack all the facilities of the larger ones, ie. recreation centres, gymnasiums, different kinds of playing fields (soccer, baseball, tennis courts), year round swimming pool, etc.

### Suggestions

- o There should be exchanges between the larger and small communities so that the students would:

- a) meet people - start their new support system
  - b) learn where things are located both in the schools and in the community
  - c) get some exposure to larger and better facilities
  - d) on one exchange, in the spring, the students should have the opportunity to pre-register for courses in the following fall
  - e) students from larger communities would benefit from the exposure to a small community.
- 
- o Yukon Territorial Government can help to set up the exchanges by providing information and assistance with transportation.
  
  - o There should be a support group established for all of the out of town students. This would also include at least one faculty member and possibly (hopefully) some Whitehorse students. Once it is started, it could arrange orientation sessions each year with returning students showing the new ones around.
  
  - o There should be a counsellor to whom the out of town students could go in to see when they are having problems. This counsellor should be aware of who these people are. S/he should monitor the progress of the students in school and if they are having problems, intervene to find out what they are and try to help them.
  
  - o Teachers (again) need to make their classes interesting to keep students interested in school.

## Drop-outs

- o Why?
  - Not teaching subjects that interest students; they find them boring or irrelevant.
  - Not interested in school.
  - Not allowed to work at subjects that they are good at. This causes anger and frustration with the school system.
  - Do not like or not compatible with teacher(s).
  - Parents attitude not supportive of student attending school.
  - Drug and/or alcohol abuse.

## Suggestions

- o If the differences between the student and teacher can not be worked out, the student should be allowed to transfer to a different class. This should not be held against the student because it takes two people to have an argument or dispute of any sort.
- o Try having different courses like a work skill program or a lifeskill course.
- o Transfer potential drop-outs to Yukon college to either a trades training or upgrading course. Sometimes the different method of teaching where the responsibility of learning rests upon the student will encourage the student to finish the course.
- o Should develop alternative education programs because not everyone learns or thinks in the same way. Some people can not learn in the way that subjects are being taught.

- o Teachers (again) are usually major factors in people dropping out. If the teachers like their subject and are interested in teaching it, the students tend to stay in class and therefore, in school.
  
- o Students who are rebels should not be expelled. A counsellor should spend some time with them to find out where their talents are and to channel them into using those talents more productively.

### Miscellaneous Comments for Grades 1 - 12

- o No facilities for handicapped students, ie. F.H. Collins Senior Secondary School has two floors with no elevator. This means that handicapped students receive a second rate education because they are limited by the facilities.
- o Students who are bussed to school often can not join in extra curricular activities because the bus is their only means of transportation.
- o Schools get locked up after the day is over when there are some students who would like to use the gymnasium or workshops.
- o Student/teacher ratio is too high. Students tend to get "lost in the crowd".
- o Yukon students have an "inferiority complex" when meeting students from outside.

### Suggestions

- o Government should look into upgrading existing facilities to accommodate handicapped students by putting in elevators and ramps, braille the doors.
- o On days that there are extra-curricular activities a mini-van could take all the bus students who stay to participate in the activities home when they are over.
- o Encourage teachers to become involved in extra-curricular activities.

- o There should be more teachers hired to make the class sizes smaller. Smaller classes mean each student receives more attention. There could also be training made available so that people in the communities could be trained and hired as teachers aides.

## Training

- o Need more information on what training programs are available now, which ones are coming up.
- o Need to have a great variety of jobs available to be trained in, ie. not just mechanics.
- o Work experience program at F.H. Collins Senior Secondary School helps to keep people from dropping out of school.
- o Training people "outside" often loses those people to places out of the Yukon.
- o Apprenticeship programs - union vs non-union apprenticeships - should have non-union shops with quality control because unions cause problems. Unions - last hired, first fired and no promotions for competence.
- o Need more career counselling, not only for high school students but for public in general. Need to know things like: which types of jobs are available now? Which have a surplus of qualified people? What are the labour market trends?

## Suggestions

- o Advertise training programs more effectively using different media: television, radio, newspapers, posters and flyers.
- o Have co-op programs available in different fields of study. In these, students go to school for half the time and work for the other half.

- o Encourage Yukoners to take their training in the Yukon and to return when they are finished. BUT....do not force them to do this.

## Yukon College

- o Good for those people who do not want to make the drastic change from both high school and Whitehorse (small city, home, family, friends) to university/college and outside all at once.
- o Provides more options for those people who do not want to leave the Yukon but who do want to continue their education.
- o Should offer a wider range of programs to encourage students to remain in the Yukon for their training.
- o For non-Whitehorse students it is more affordable to go "outside" for post-secondary schooling because they get the Yukon Grant if they go out.
- o Should try to get co-op programs started.
- o Upgrading - almost all positive comments:
  - Paid to help support themselves. Some (not many) take advantage of this; they go to school just for the money.
  - Mostly self-directed so you only get out of it what you put in. The responsibility is yours.
  - You proceed at your own pace, not the "average" student's pace.
  - You learn to be more responsible.
  - There is a more mature and quiet atmosphere.
  - There should be more updated text books.

## Suggestions

- o Should not be mandatory for Yukon students to attend Yukon College. Some want to go outside to get the

experience of a different place. Most seem to end up back in the Yukon. If it is mandatory to stay, they might not continue their education or if they do, they might leave when they are finished and not come back. There would also be feelings of anger and unfairness because Yukon students have always been given assistance to go outside to continue their education.

- o Need to know the statistics on how many people go outside to school and come back to live in Yukon and how many stay here for their schooling and end up living here.
- o To get more Yukoners to attend the college there should be a full range of "100 level" courses available that are transferable (preferably) to all Canadian universities. This would encourage high school grads to remain in Whitehorse for at least one year (probably two). It would make the transition from high school to university less drastic. There would probably be less dropping out because students would have a solid base when they do go out to finish their degree. They would only have to cope with a new place not a different school system and a new place.
- o Should promote Yukon College outside of the Yukon to bring in people from all over the country. Once people are here, at least some will want to stay. Could promote recreation activities (cross-country skiing), scenery, etc.

## Employment

- o First job
  - In one group most were offered it
  - Some applied directly to employer
  - Some applied at Canada Employment
  - No one used the newspaper
- \* Implies that who you know is important
  
- o Criteria for being hired:
  - Attitude (respectful, confident, enthusiastic)
  - Experience
  - Appearance (clothes, posture, cleanliness)
  - Resume
  - Speech
  - Qualifications (depends on job)
  - Education (sometimes)
  
- o Experience is more important than high school education.
  
- o Most of the groups feel summer jobs should only be for Yukon students but some felt that they should be open to any student. Some feel that university students who come north for the summer take jobs away from Yukon students.
  
- o Many students do not know how to find a job.
  
- o Students start out expecting really high wages, usually by June they become more realistic (after they have missed two months wages!). Also, only those students who live at home can afford to work for low wages.

- o Most students do not know about the different funding programs available, nor about how to set up a small business.
- o Many employers unwilling to hire students because they are too short term.
- o Short term funding is too restrictive.
- o Non wage workers need recognition.
- o Not enough support for single parents. The cost of daycare is too high.

Suggestions

- o Should have more emphasis on hiring Yukon youths before young people from other parts of the country.
- o Jobs should be geared towards the different types of students - high school, university and college.
- o There should be workshops for students to explain funding programs, job search techniques and basic knowledge on how to start a small business. These should be advertised in the schools, television radio and newspapers.
- o Should try to get employers to hire more students by getting them involved in the different funding programs.
- o Daycare needs to be subsidized for single parents. Employers should be encouraged to hire single parents - possibly for half days, possibly by making funding available for employers to hire them as an incentive.

- o Need a homemakers allotment.
  
- o Need to include non-wage economy in the Yukon's gross national product.

Miscellaneous - General Comments

Why do people leave the Yukon?

- too small of a population to support a wide variety of career opportunities
- cost of living too high
- too isolated.

How could people be encouraged to live here?

- advertise outside for various positions and opportunities
- tax breaks
- incentive programs (ie. low mortgage rates)
- subsidized airfares for one trip a year
- expand Yukon College to have post secondary education available that people from all over Canada would like to attend and possibly stay here.

Most people would like to develop tourism rather than mining or other primary industries. Suggestions to do this:

- make tourism jobs more prestigious
- provide incentives to develop "tourist traps"
- improve highways
- encourage tourism careers (make the counsellors aware that they exist!).

Medical facilities need to be improved in the smaller communities. Possibly a doctor in each or at least an efficient medevac.

Everyone would like more fresh produce!....so promoting agriculture in the Yukon is a MUST!