

The Historical Development of Private Education in Canada

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Abstract

The Canadian educational system has been influenced by geography, population, and natural resources. In some provinces, denominational schools exist within the public school system. Although committed to a multiethnic society, private education also exists within the larger system, with religious or Christian schools considered a subset of private education. The early French and British immigrants to Canada shaped the educational system and their influence is still evident in the contemporary educational milieu, including the dual-language system and the adoption of a multicultural model. The Roman Catholic and Church of England influences were particularly strong since, unlike education in America, religion was integrated into public education. Canadian educational history passed through several stages with both public and provincially funded education under the direction of provincial governments. These included church-controlled education (1700s to mid 1800s); a more centralized authority, universal free education, and taxation at the local level (mid 1800s); the creation of provincial departments of education, a more consistent curriculum, better trained teachers, continued local taxation together with provincial grants (late 1800s to 1900); and from 1900 to the present day, the creation of Ministers of Education in each province and provincial governments playing an increasingly significant role in the shaping of policy and administration.

Geographical Setting

Ten provinces (and two territories): the Yukon, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia, comprise the second largest country in the world. Size, economic resources, and population all significantly influence Canada's educational system (White, 2003). O'Driscoll (1988) and Lloyd (2002), suggest that the

country's size and population have resulted in the uneven distribution of natural resources, thereby influencing education policies. Quebec and Ontario, for example, are the most affluent of Canada's ten provinces and tend to provide relatively well for the citizen's educational needs (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2004). Zine (2001) notes that Toronto, in particular, is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. The prairies, from Manitoba through Alberta to the Rockies, and British Columbia have also developed comprehensive educational facilities. By contrast, educational provision in the Atlantic provinces and the northern territories is still relatively underdeveloped.

Despite its great size, Canada's population, a mere 33 million, is distributed very unevenly. Over half of the nation's population is concentrated in the two central provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The four western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia have a population of less than 10 million, while between two and three million live in the four Atlantic provinces of Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. English is the national language but almost one-quarter of the population also speak French (some two million exclusively). Obviously, such diverse demographics have had educational implications for educating the children of Canada (Hladki, 1995).

Mallea and Young (1984) indicate that diversity is a distinguishing feature of Canadian citizens. This includes diversity of culture, language, and traditions. Gayfer (1978) attributes the present value placed on diversity to the settlement of the country and the multiple cultural identities of the early settlers. Johnson (1968) contrasted the historical 'melting pot' model traditionally associated with America with that of a 'mosaic' motif wherein a variety of cultural groups are united in a sense of national unity but, at the same time, retain their subgroup diversity. Shapiro (1985) has claimed that Canadian educational institutions are affected significantly by these plural cultural identities, especially the English and French historical influences.

The Historical Setting

Early in the seventeenth century, two major settlements in Canada were established by the French, in Acadia (Nova Scotia) and the colony of Quebec sited on the St. Lawrence River (O'Driscoll, 1988). The first colonists traded in furs and the earliest settlement began in 1604 when Acadia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick were established.

The French colonists were slow to settle in these areas. Agriculture encouraged more settlers, but conflict with the Indians and the British, and an indifferent government in France, retarded growth both in Acadia and Quebec. England gained control of Acadia in 1713. Later the Seven Years War between England and France finally ended in 1763 with a British victory and the conquest of the Quebec Colony which possessed an estimated population of around 60,000 (Phillips, 1957).

Education first became a matter of governmental concern after the Seven Years War because it was closely tied to religion and in Quebec served to strengthen the Roman Catholic faith. Dickinson and Dolmage (1996) consider the uniting of religion and education to be one of Canada's most historically unique cultural features while Donaldson (1998) argues that Canada's contemporary educational system has been continually shaped by its historical context.

The Emergence of Public/Private Education

To early Canadians, education was mostly a family matter. Prior to any early organization among the settlers, the native peoples of Canada (the Indians and Eskimos) were educated within the families and communities in which they lived (Katz, 1974). Basic early educational practices and beliefs were passed on to the young by an older generation in order to maintain the individual culture and social order of the cultural group.

To the early European settlers, education was not only a family matter, but an important concern of the Christian churches (Audet, 1970). Titley and Miller (1982) describe education as being central to the maintenance of church control over the moral life of the early settlers. The parish priest often was the most educated person in the community and widely recognized as a natural leader in society. Johnson (1968) noted that the early settlers were followed by various missionaries who provided religious training and established schools.

The Reformation and Counter Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century coincided with the arrival in Canada of the first colonists from Europe. The Roman Catholic Church and Protestants alike sought to spread religious zeal and spirit to the new world. Titley and Miller (1982) noted that it was inconceivable for the churches to separate their religious and educational mandates and the colonists willingly provided land grants to aid the cause of religious education and other types of social welfare.

French Influence

Johnson (1968) describes the first missionary teachers to arrive in New France (Quebec) as four French Roman Catholic *Recollet* (Franciscan) priests. Later, Jesuit priests also joined this group. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French Roman Catholics moved westwards and by 1842, Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta had formal schooling. The foremost aim of the Roman Catholic Church in the Quebec Colony was to maintain a spiritual emphasis on the conversion of native children to the Roman Catholic faith, together with the preservation of French culture and language in the face of British Protestant cultural domination (Phillips, 1957).

Audet (1970) argues that the English in Quebec sought to ensure that both English and French culture was maintained within a peaceful setting. The English might have attempted to achieve this objective by absorbing the French into their own culture, however, Gossage (1977) notes that French Canadians made strenuous efforts to preserve their religion and clung tenaciously to their native language as a basis for the emergence of an educational system. Both Audet and Phillips credit the British with allowing French-Canadian institutions to maintain their Catholic religious faith and the use of the French language.

British Influences

In the late 1700s there was an influx of English-speaking colonists from the New England states. Early British influence in 1791 was evident in the four Atlantic provinces, Lower Canada (Quebec), and Upper Canada (Ontario). In the latter, English attitudes and traditions prevailed with education regarded as the responsibility of parents and the Church of England (Phillips, 1957).

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), an Anglican organization, opened a school in 1744 in Newfoundland. This was soon followed by many more designed to promote the Church of England and maintain its superior status. In the same period, Roman Catholic priests also arrived to cater for the many Irish settlers in Newfoundland. They were joined, in turn, by Methodist missionaries so that by the end of the 18th century, three major religious denominations were actively promoting education (Johnson, 1968).

The Anglican Church provided the basis for the educational system in Upper Canada and most of the teachers were Anglican clergy. Many

Anglican schools provided an elitist type of education, often classical in orientation, designed for the 'sons of gentlemen'. Long-standing political tensions came to a head in 1837 between the elite Loyalist families known as the 'Family Compact' and immigrants from Britain and America, more commonly known as 'Reformers' (Moir, 1959). The Family Compact provided the Crown appointed members of the legislative and executive councils of government while the Reformers had their power base in the popularly elected general assembly. It was this governmental composition that contributed to Upper Canada's distinct educational system (Adams, 1968).

From the Family Compact there emerged Scottish born John Strachan, an Anglican teacher and influential Church of England leader (Bredin, 2000). Strachan believed in educating only the potential leaders of society derived, as he believed, from the wealthy class represented by the Family Compact. By implication, he viewed the Anglican Church as an extension of the state, educating the children who would later perpetuate Anglican supremacy through their control of the legislature.

The Education Act of 1807 was the first legislation of its kind in Upper Canada. It made provision for government grants to encourage the founding of schools of Anglican character for the wealthy class. Attendance was restricted to the wealthy by locating the (grammar) schools in towns thereby requiring students to board and pay high tuition fees. No provision was made for elementary education through common schools. Some existed, but there was no government funding for them.

The 1807 act subsequently generated a strong public outcry and determined opposition from non-Anglican members of the Legislature (Bredin, 2000). Strachan responded to the criticism by enlarging the grammar school system. Eventually the Common Schools Act was passed in 1816. It contained the first legislative provision for elementary education. Although the so-called Grammar School Act of 1807 remained intact, the new public school act proposed common schools for all children (Wilson, 1970). The Reformers were triumphant and a compromise between the two rival political groups resulted with Strachan becoming Upper Canada's first Superintendent of Schools.

Canada East (Quebec)

Before the Fabrique Act of 1824, formal education in Canada East (Quebec) was controlled by a British, Anglican organization known as

the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, created by an Act of 1801. Adams (1968) indicates that it was an attempt by the English-speaking minority to introduce a free school system. Power was delegated to a board of commissioners in order to appoint teachers and control the curriculum. The commissioners were granted special favors by the colonial government and the Church of England (Adams, 1968). The commission was soon perceived as a threat to the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church amongst the predominantly French-speaking Catholic population.

Audet (1970) notes the changing roles of government and the churches at this time. The government was attempting to replace the churches as the principal power in education, but the Anglicans continued to exert their leadership and influence. Adams (1968) noted that by 1820 there was a three-way tug-of-war in education in Lower Canada between the Royal Institution Board, Catholic priests, and legislators.

The French-speaking population viewed the rapid growth of Anglican schools as a deliberate attempt by the British to Anglicize them and thereby threatening their language, religion, and culture. Sensing the need to react, Roman Catholics finally gained a majority in the popularly elected Assembly and passed the *Fabrique* Act of 1824 (The *Fabriques* were a group of church members who managed temporal affairs in the parishes). The Act provided for the establishment of schools under church control (Johnson, 1968). The *Fabriques* were given total control of the administration of schools, with one quarter of the running costs derived wholly from church revenues. That is, the money that the churches collected in their congregants' tithes, offerings, as well as money from centralized diocese funded approximately one fourth of the total cost of education in their respective parishes. This satisfied the Roman Catholic hierarchy because the power of the Church was preserved through its power to regulate and direct education. The Act also paved the way for a denominational system of schools in Lower Canada or Canada East.

Adams(1968) indicates that a subsequent Education Act of 1841, designed to promote an inclusive school system, while simultaneously providing for separate schooling of Catholics and Protestants, was passed in acknowledgement of the Roman Catholic clergy's loyalty to the British colonial government during the rebellion of 1837. The uprisings in Upper and Lower Canada resulted from attempts to loosen England's colonial control over Canada. The rebellion by French-

speaking settlers was not supported by the clergy, since the uprisings mostly were fueled by a current economic recession, not religious ideation. Following the rebellions, however, unrest sharpened among Upper and Lower Canadian clergy, since Protestant and Catholics were in the respective majorities of the provinces. Moreover, the current majorities were in potential danger of control due to the continued influx of American settlers moving to Canadian territories. The clergy desired minority protections in the establishment of local schools—regardless of whether the majority in a given province was Protestant or Catholic. Consequently, the 1841 Act, which formally established the dual system of schooling in Quebec (Bowman, 1991), enabled a Catholic or Protestant minority in a particular locale to dissent and legally establish its own school system including full control over the educational process (Hiemstra, 1994). This general principle continues to hold particular meaning to Canadians (Hayday, 2003).

A further Act of 1846 placed the administration of public education largely under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. Formal standards and school inspectors were established for local schools. Since Catholic priests and nuns typically were the most educated individuals in their local respective communities who prospectively met the established requirements, they tended to dominate the local school districts. Predictably, this generated Protestant opposition which resulted in the government establishing two separate education systems. Two school commissions also were set up to manage and organize the Catholic (mostly French) and the Protestant (mostly English) private schools (Adams, 1968; Vriend, 1994).

Canada West (Ontario)

In the early nineteenth century settlers were moving westwards across Canada, founding towns and villages, and many American teachers often were employed in rural schools. In due course it was decided to formalize a set of rules, including a requirement that all teachers must either be Canadian citizens or swear allegiance to the Canadian government. The Common School Act of 1816 was significant because it formalized the possibility of establishing uniquely Canadian schools for all children in any locality where there were 20 or more potential pupils (Wilson, 1970). District, or grammar schools, whose origins stemmed from the 1807 legislation, were not affected by this act and continued in their original format. A Methodist minister, Egerton Ryerson, is credited with being the educator who gave Upper Canada its school

system (Johnson, 1968). Influenced by the Ontario system, he shaped Canada's entire English-speaking public school system. As Assistant Superintendent of Education, Ryerson travelled throughout Europe and the United States to view various educational systems before issuing a Report to the Canadian government in 1846.

Wilson (1970) described several components of this report. Education was to be Christian, meaning that Scriptural truth and Christian principles would be embraced in the classroom, and compulsory, to ensure a free education for all children, regardless of their social class background. Ryerson also promoted practical education, including a curriculum conducive to preparing students to live and work in society.

Two Common School Acts (1846 and 1850) resulted from Ryerson's Report. As Superintendent of Schools for Canada West, Ryerson's proposed Act of 1846 gave Upper Canada a provincial school system, normal schools, and a supervision and inspection programme (Brendin, 2000). The system followed the Irish National Schools model, dividing the population into Catholic and Protestant entities, and giving both the freedom to instruct in their own principles of religion. The Act of 1850 introduced a property tax to finance public schooling thereby accomplishing Ryerson's goal of universal, free education for all children.

While Ryerson's ideal was a unified school system, Johnson (1968) claims that he also upheld the principle of separate schools in Canada West. Ryerson recognized the need for separate Catholic education, but he did not seek to extend its privileges. Instead, Ryerson desired that separate schools continue to promote a Protestant philosophy of education as a forerunner to the creation of an 'English' Canada.

After an unsuccessful attempt to unite the two provinces in 1841, Ontario and Quebec, joined by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, formed a broader confederation. In 1867 Canada became known as the Dominion of Canada by virtue of the British North America Act. The other five provinces subsequently followed until Newfoundland completed the Dominion of Ten Provinces and Two Territories in 1949. The Canada Act of 1982 gave the country its first formal constitution, independent of the long-standing British affiliation, although Elizabeth II retained her honorary title as Queen of Canada as part of the act (Canada has full sovereignty over its realm).

After the passage of the Act of 1850, individual provincial public education systems became more organized and began to develop their own specific educational laws (Phillips, 1957). Provincial departments of education, an organized curriculum, and better trained teachers soon followed. In addition to local taxation, provincial grants were also made available to support education.

The Atlantic Colonies

The area known as Acadia, functioning under French rule, established its first schools before 1713 (Phillips, 1957). Within their own milieu, the Atlantic colonies struggled with emerging school systems, each independent of the other. That is, there was no unified educational system, curriculum, or means of funding the schools in the respective colonies. Newfoundland's first colony was established in 1610 and its first school was formally opened in 1726 by an Anglican, Henry Jones. Johnson (1968) reports that by 1763, half of Newfoundland's population were Irish fishermen, hence the arrival of Roman Catholic priests in 1770. Methodist missionaries followed soon after. Rowe (1964) noted that it was not until 1836 that the first Education Act was passed, providing financial assistance to schools. Further legislation in the 1840s increased denominational grants (Rowe, 1964). In 1850, the Church of England, in growing competition with the Methodists, tried to have grants subdivided between the two denominations. That is, the Church of England desired that any monies allocated for private education be shared between schools operated under Methodist and Church of England auspices. However, the Methodists stood firm and, in later years, the government established equal grants for Anglicans, Methodists and Roman Catholics alike. An Act of 1892 also recognized the Salvation Army as a denomination for the award of school grants. Many years later (1954) the Pentecostal Assemblies established an educational presence for the first time.

Nova Scotia, formally Acadia, came into existence in 1713. In the beginning, education was a private affair. The first school act, passed in 1766, gave authority to the Church of England to establish schools. Thereafter, Nova Scotia became a haven for Loyalists who developed religion and education in the province (Hamilton, 1980). An Act of 1780 established monetary provision for grammar schools, and in 1808 legislation was passed to establish common or elementary schools (Mathis & Pearl, 1999). Weeren (1993) indicates that for the most part Nova Scotia decided to allow local communities to decide for themselves

how best to handle private education, although by the 1860s there was a general mandate that teachers were to respect the Christian religion and Christian morality.

Phillips (1957) suggested that education in New Brunswick was markedly inferior to that in Nova Scotia. Until 1783, the province was not extensively settled. Thereafter, the area experienced an influx of Loyalists and issues such as Confederation in the 1860s dominated provincial politics. However, in 1858 the Parish School Act was passed, allowing New Brunswick in order to use a property tax to fund its basic public school system. This act defined New Brunswick's non-sectarian school system but it was the cause of later political strife due to the desire of some people to provide separate school legislation. Final settlement of this issue was not realised until the Common School Act of 1871 which made the non-sectarian principle binding on all.

The colonial education system also existed on Prince Edward Island (Hamilton, 1970). The colony was started in 1769 as Ile St. Jean, but later renamed Prince Edward Island. In the early 1800s, some private and many 'home' private schools existed as a result of Protestant / Catholic rivalry and whether or not the Bible should be authorized for use in public schools. The Public School Act of 1877 reformed existing legislation so that all schools became non-sectarian.

The West

At the time of Confederation in 1867, that part of Canada still to be known as the western provinces was basically an uninhabited region stretching from the Great Lakes west to the Pacific and north to the Atlantic. In western Canada, the Hudson Bay Company supported education and by 1808 provided teachers for the children of its labourers in the Red River Valley of Manitoba (Lupul, 1970). The Company also encouraged all religious denominations to establish churches and schools in the west and provided financial assistance to both Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike.

The area between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains eventually became the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Phillips (1957) noted that denominational schools began in 1859. In 1875, the Northwest Territories Act provided for further school support. Lawr and Gidney (1973) noted that in most settlements where one faith was predominant, denominational schools were formed. The Free Land Homestead Act of 1872 encouraged migration to the west, and the first

state control of schools was enacted by the passage of an ordinance in 1884. West of the Rockies, the first Vancouver Island colonial school was established in Victoria in 1852 (Lupul, 1970). By 1865 there were five such schools in the area. The Common School Act of 1865 gave Vancouver Island a free, but highly centralized and non-denominational school system, wholly financed by government.

Lawr and Gidney (1973) highlighted the fact that many new settlements often attracted more than one religious group and it therefore became very difficult for teachers to form a common school. Protestants often sent their children to non-denominational schools, but they were still schools which reflected Scripture reading, hymns, and prayer. This practice became a compromise for the various Protestant groups but one that attracted the necessary funding for schools. The only denomination to remain independent of this practice was the Roman Catholic Church.

Between 1857 and 1862, the mainland colony of British Columbia saw several denominational schools established. In 1866 Vancouver Island and the colony of British Columbia united in order to form the province of British Columbia, and public education was introduced by way of the Common School Ordinance of 1869. Raptis (2002) notes that since British Columbia's inception, cultural diversity has been one of its hallmark characteristics.

Twentieth Century Private Education

The 1850s saw growing efforts to establish a national school system (Foster & Smith, 2001) as Canada moved towards confederation. Egerton Ryerson, the former Head of Education for Upper Canada, lobbied to establish a national educational office (Hodgins, 1897) that would separate church and state, thereby negating any sectarian education. For both Upper and Lower Canada, this could potentially have unified culture and strengthened nationalism. Adams (1968) believed that this would have canceled existing separate school legislation. At the same time, however, Catholic clergy continued to press for a wider range of inclusion for separate schools.

Adams (1968) suggested that a notable piece of legislation was enacted in 1863 just prior to Confederation. During this time frame, Canadian politics was embroiled in numerous controversies surrounding Canada's sovereignty. With the bloody Civil War raging in the United States, Canada became concerned about nationalistic

issues, such as the maintenance of a sufficient militia and a unified educational system. Statesman Richard Scott took advantage of the nationalistic genre to focus on education's role in Canada's nationalism. His proposed bill to nationally support religious education failed in 1861 and 1862, but eventually was modified and passed in 1863. The Scott Bill, as it was popularly referred to, was drawn up under the direction of Roman Catholic clergy, in order to extend provisions to separate schools. Sissions (1959) indicated that through this Bill, separate education became an integral aspect of Canadian education. By 1867, when confederation was achieved, any hope of a Canadian national system of education was extinguished (Pesze, 1999). Section 93 of the British North American Act placed education in the hands of the ten provinces. Today, the national Canadian government only superintends directly military/defense education and education related to the status of Aboriginal peoples (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2004). The 1867 Act also guaranteed the right of religious minorities to exist as part of the educational system (Foster & Smith, 2001). Stamp (1970) claimed that, at the time of confederation, church, state, and educational leaders coexisted in a relatively harmonious working relationship.

Phillips (1957) described the development of public schooling in Canada as having progressed through four stages. The first was characterized by church-controlled education and lasted from the early 1700s through to the mid 1800s. Stage two, which extended to the late 1800s, saw the introduction of more centralized authority, universal free education, and taxation for schooling at the local level. Stage three, the early 1900s, saw the development of provincial departments of education, a more consistent curriculum, better trained teachers and the start of provincial government financial support for schools. The fourth stage, since the Second World War, has been characterized by the appointment of Ministers of Education in each provincial government and a far greater involvement of government in all aspects of education

Contemporary Canadian provincial governments fund a diversity of schools including the public school systems, the separate school systems catering for Roman Catholic and specific Protestant denominations and, finally, a variety of private or independent groups (Easton, 1988). Most of the new Pentecostal Christian education operates within the general guidelines of the latter group.

There are relatively few non-religious, private schools in contemporary Canada and those that do exist tend to be small in size. However, O'Driscoll (1988) reported that private school enrollments

had started to increase in the 1970s. By the late 1980s there numbered approximately a quarter of a million students and presently around a third of a million Canadian children are educated annually in approximately 1500 private schools. The Western provinces tended to have more elementary students than the Eastern provinces (Easton, 1988). O'Driscoll described private schools as generally operating 'quietly in the background, with a minimum of government interest, regulation, or support' (p. 184). Private schools in Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland receive no government funding. In Quebec and the four western provinces, provision is made for public funding subject to various forms of government control.

All private schools in Canada operate under provincial or territorial acts, there being no general national act of education (Kroeker, 2004). Approximately six per cent of Canadian children participate in some form of private education (Davies, Aurini, & Quirke, 2002). Funding for private education varies from province to province. It is nonexistent in the Yukon, but as much as 75% in Quebec (Axelrod, 2005; Public Funding of Private Education, 1984).

The Role of Multiculturalism

Mallea and Young (1984) reported that the federal Canadian government formally adopted a multicultural policy in 1971, rather than the assimilation of diverse cultures into one. As such, individual Canadians are encouraged to continue practising their own unique cultural identities, while simultaneously deriving pride in being Canadian citizens (Davies, 1999). English-speaking people still constitute the majority of the population. The French-speaking minority remains relatively stable but there has been a marked increase in a variety of non Anglo-French ethnic groups, including Europeans, Asians, and Blacks—as well as new religious sects. Originally concentrated in the prairie provinces of western Canada, new multicultural groups currently comprise over one-quarter of the Canadian population. Obviously, this has intensified the diversity of variables that now influence education. Hladki (1995) argues that diversity in education is a cornerstone for all contemporary Canadian education policy. Rufo-Lignos (2000) also claims that the public/private debate in education remains fluid and ongoing and will require continual reassessment. Knowledge of Canada's educational past is an essential foundation for future dialogue on a subject that affects all Canadians.

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