

## EDITORIAL: MINI-SPECIAL ISSUE ON BILL 23

This issue is unique in more than one way. It is the second of our general issues containing a mini-special issue. And this mini-special issue is truly distinctive, unprecedented even in journal annals, in being the result of a shared concern and simultaneous call across three education journals in Quebec: *Revue des sciences en l'éducation, Formation et profession*, and the *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* (MJE/RSEM). The call invited authors to reflect on the implications, locally and internationally, of Quebec's Bill 23 (now law), with its greater concentration of powers in the Minister of Education and its accelerated streamlining of teacher preparation. The lead special editors on this mini-special issue at the MJE/RSEM were Simon Collin (UQAM), Geneviève Sirois (Université TELUQ), and Paul Zanazanian (McGill). In their mini special issue editorial, they further explain the issue's focus as well as introduce the three featured articles. We turn first to the special issue editorial followed by the general issue editorial.

This thematic mini-special issue of the *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, which we, Simon Collin, Geneviève Sirois, and Paul Zanazanian, are co-editing, is the result of an unprecedented collaboration with two other Quebec scholarly journals: *La revue des sciences de l'éducation* and *Formation et profession: revue scientifique internationale en éducation*.

This partnership took as its focus the social debates sparked by Bill 23, a bill which provided for, among other things, a greater centralization of school governance, the abolition of the Comité d'agrément des programmes de formation à l'enseignement, reform of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, and the creation of a National Institute for Excellence in Education. Bill 23 (now passed) raises major issues relating to the institutional autonomy of regulatory bodies and school governance,

the management of school data and the evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and training practices.

The adoption of this law also led to an unprecedented mobilization of education researchers and teachers' unions. By responding to the call for papers sent to all three journals, the various contributing authors have each provided an important contribution, enriching these debates with a scientific and critical analysis of public policies that affect the governance and regulation of the entire Quebec compulsory education system, as well as the professional practices of its players. The controversy continues, even as scientific analysis of the effects and implications of this transformation remains a work in progress. The dialogue continues!

The three articles that make up this thematic issue explore Bill 23 from a variety of theoretical angles. Based on their extensive scientific expertise in Quebec education policies and policy implementation, Christian Maroy, Honorary Full Professor in the Faculty of Education at the Université de Montréal, offers an enlightening critical essay on Bill 23 and its possible implications for teaching professionals. In particular, the author points out that this law runs the risk of hyper-regulating the practices of teaching professionals by combining statistical monitoring of their performance with change strategies based on decontextualized and standardized scientific knowledge. There is also a risk of over-accountability on the part of teaching professionals, based on a simplistic theory of change. In so doing, Bill 23 is likely to amplify certain already-documented shortcomings of what is known as Results-Based Management.

Andréanne Langevin, a doctoral student in educational sciences at McGill University, describes the gradual changes recently introduced to education in Quebec with the adoption of Bills 40 (2020) and 23 (2023). She argues that the (re-)centralization of powers implemented in the two bills can be seen as the culmination of a neo-institutional trajectory in public action, which unfolded subtly, through a succession of progressive changes. The author focuses on five specific sections of these two bills, drawing on the results of an exhaustive review of the literature produced by or submitted to the Quebec National Assembly prior to the adoption of Bills 23 and 40, as well as the discussions held as part of the specific consultations and detailed studies of these laws. She highlights the idea that the “step-by-step” centralization implemented in the bills, while officially intended to strengthen the coherence and efficiency of the education system by decentralizing decision-making powers to schools and parents, makes it all the more difficult for strong opposition to emerge. Diffuse and gradual changes thus tend to fly under the radar and escape collective awareness.

In their position piece, Maryse Potvin, professor of the Faculty of Education, Université du Québec à Montréal, and co-holder of the France-Québec Research Chair on Contemporary Issues in Freedom of Expression (COLIBEX), along with Simon Bilodeau, who holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Université du Québec à Montréal, offer a critical examination of what they believe to be Law 23's centralizing and authoritarian tendencies. They draw on Michel Foucault's notion of the panopticon and James C. Scott's theorization of the key causes of the collapse of major state projects. Potvin and Bilodeau's analysis points to the risks inherent in the application of Law 23, where the monitoring, controlling, standardizing, and punishing of key educational actors can easily infringe on their professional autonomy, limiting actors' ability to exercise their expertise to its fullest potential. At risk, the authors worry, is the free flourishing of our democratic institutions.

We hope that this mini-thematic issue on Bill 23 will contribute to a collective reflection on the implications of this law. We are confident that the articles in the MJE/RSEM issue will help to frame this law within a broader context, even as they shed light on issues of power, efficiency, and autonomy in the education system. Such a discussion will enable us to move beyond knee-jerk reactions, instead promoting informed dialogue based on rigorous state-of-the-art knowledge. We therefore encourage readers to read these three articles, and to do so in conversation with the contents of the special issues on Bill 23 in *La revue des sciences de l'éducation* <https://revuescienceseducation.ca> and available in *Formation et profession: revue scientifique internationale en éducation*, 32 (3), 2024, <https://formation-profession.org/fr/>

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