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The Educational Literature of the Quiet Revolution

One may question the success of the "Quiet Revolution", but few would venture to suggest that it did not result in a widespread modification of the educational scene. Québec's *prise de conscience* in the early 1960's was built upon the premise that, given the tools, a French cultural enclave could assert itself in North America. Educational reform, consequently, came to be perceived as the common denominator for a mini-renaissance. Whereas in the past French Québec had turned to its traditional value system for survival, it now, with surprising abandon, seized upon improved educational opportunity as the panacea. In examining this period one is immediately struck by the attention given to the matter of education. Books, articles, briefs, reports, letters to the editor, and all manner of public and semi-public gatherings dissect and re-dissect the issues. For an awakening Québec, the exercise appeared to provide the perfect platform for participation. "L'Éducation, c'est votre affaire" became more than a catchy slogan; it became a national banner.

general studies

Although an interpretative history of these years remains to be written, several useful chronicles have appeared. Louis-Philippe Audet, the dean of Québec educational historians, has published his *Bilan de la réforme scolaire au Québec*. Prepared as an inaugural address, it has all the weaknesses inherent in such an undertaking. Nevertheless, the slender volume provides the reader with a concise yet exhaustive listing of events affecting the Province's educational

scene from the mid-1950's until 1969. Audet, in collaboration with Armand Gauthier, has also produced the best single descriptive survey of the accomplishments of the period. Originally published in 1967 and re-edited in an expanded version in 1969, their *Le Système scolaire du Québec: organisation et fonctionnement* was conceived as a text for use in teacher training. In its detail-filled chapters the components, structure, and financing of public education are explored in an approach that uses the past to explain the present. The authors, who write with the authority and immediacy of participants in the reform movement, are nevertheless able to situate the educational crisis in Québec as part of a greater crisis affecting all emerging societies in their quest for security. Also, in a paper read in 1969 before the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada, Arthur Tremblay gives a statistic-crammed evaluation of the progress under his tenure as Québec's first deputy minister of education. Comprehensive and encouraging, the guide provides the potential researcher and/or graduate student with a wealth of suggestive topics for development. It does so, however, at the expense of balance. From reading the article one obtains the impression that the road between "what was" and "what is" had absolutely no obstacles. This is far from the case. Yet to be critical of this is to expect too much from an essay that was intended to be brief and retrospective*.

We have arranged the rest of the literature in chronological fashion. Varied as it is, the material nevertheless fits into four phases of development that chronologically overlap while retaining their organic distinctiveness: 1) Phase of Reform Consciousness; 2) Phase of Reform Theorizing; 3) Phase of Reform Implementation; and 4) Phase of Reassessment.

reform consciousness

The mythology of the "Quiet Revolution" has ascribed to *The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous* a primary role in prodding reform consciousness. Jean-Paul Desbiens, the personality behind the pen name, Brother Anonymous, seemed to say what everyone vaguely suspected: every-

*For complete citations and further references consult the bibliography at the end of the article.

thing was not well in the Provinces's educational sphere. As he was to point out, its programs at the public secondary level were little else than mutations of the primary school curriculum taught by teachers who were ill-equipped to do the job. Pious statements rather than informed judgement characterized the approach of the Department of Public Instruction. Finally if something was not immediately done to improve the teaching of French as a mother tongue, national disaster beckoned. Had these reflections been made by an ordinary mortal, their impact would have been of limited consequence. Considering, however, that Desbiens was a young Roman Catholic teaching brother, his highly personal study prodded a major furore and, at the same time, created a Quebec best-seller.

It is, however, an over-simplification to state that Brother Anonymous was the precursor of change. Audet and Gauthier have justly emphasized the importance of the 1950's in the process especially as regards the seminal influence of Arthur Tremblay's study for the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Constitutional Problems (1956). Prepared as a contribution in the debate engaged by the Provincial autonomists of Duplessis against the centralizing tendencies of Ottawa, Tremblay's annex pinpointed many of the deficiencies of the existing school system and suggested possible remedies while keeping in view future demands. Important as the study may have been, it took some time before receiving its due attention. Premier Duplessis had decided that his Royal Commission was to have a low-profile, and copies of its report remained unavailable to the public.

Québec of the late 1950's, however, was well in the throes of change. Its confessionally inspired and directed educational system was already and unknowingly being transformed. As Roger Magnuson pointed out in a much neglected essay, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Québec education could only decrease because of changing demands being placed upon the educational milieu. By the 1950's it was calling upon all of its resources just to keep up with the demand. A lowering of the number of religious vocations coupled with increased school retention rates necessarily meant that a new body would emerge as the power broker.

While this was taking place, other strains became evident. The Mouvement laïque de langue française was calling for the establishment of a non-sectarian school system in the province.

In the early 1960's it was involved in the publication of *Justice et paix scolaire* and *l'Ecole laïque*. These two collections of essays attacked the retrograde orientation of the school system. They called for division along cultural rather than religious lines. And, as was to be expected, they led to the publication of other books that attempted either to elaborate or refute the non-confessional theme. More often than not, this exchange generated more heat than actual light. At the same time the issue of religion became entangled in the struggle for a second French-Language university in Montréal. In a brief published by the Association of professors of the University of Montréal entitled *L'Université dit non aux Jésuites*, it was argued that a separate charter, at that moment, went contrary to sane planning. Quite polemical in approach, the document implied that a university under the hegemony of the Jesuits was not in the best interests of the people.

If this frontal attack on the religious establishment was part of the times, it was not the only sphere where demand for change was making itself felt. Gérard Filion in his *Les Confidences d'un commissaire d'écoles* wondered about the merits of local school boards, the lack of interest of parents, the poor qualifications of teachers, and the financial constrictions confronting public education. Penned by one of French Canada's better known editorialists, the book asked serious questions about the effectiveness of the school system and it did not mask its criticisms of the Department of Public Instruction. Two years later with the upheaval at the Jacques-Cartier Normal School and the publication of Jacques Tremblay's *Scandale au D.I.P.: l'affaire Guérin ou le Frère Untel avait raison*, the image of the Department of Public Instruction was once again tarnished. In both instances, and in line with what was being written in the newspaper and periodicals of the period, the average Québécois was obtaining a much better picture of what was missing than what was necessary. This unbalanced critique, however, was about to change.

In late February 1961, a newly-elected Liberal Government took the first step in fulfilling an election promise by creating a Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education. The so-called Parent Commission went to work immediately and although it took two full years before starting to detail its findings, its very presence led to a good deal of organized educational soul-

searching and speculation. Some of the notable published studies came from such ideologically diverse interest groups as the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the Fédération des Collèges Classiques, and the Association des Professeurs de l'Université de Montréal. Their contributions, although differing in means of bringing about change, all agreed that there was a need to organize a system of education that would meet the socio-economic reality of Québec. The brief of the professors of the University of Montréal entitled *La Crise de l'enseignement au Canada-Français* proved, in retrospect, to be the most perspicacious. More than many other single document of the period, it isolated those areas of concern that were to be explored by the Parent Commissioners. To its credit it also insisted that the Commissioners avoid imitating too closely the existing system in France.

reform theorizing

The second phase of development, that of Reform Theorizing, began with the publication of the two volumes *Rapport du comité d'étude sur l'enseignement technique et professionnel*. Chaired by Arthur Tremblay, the man who became known as the architect of Québec's Department of Education, the committee on technical-vocational education was to have an important impact on the tone and direction of the Province's educational reform. Mandated to examine the entire operational structure of technical-vocational education and to report back to the Royal Commission of Enquiry, the Committee's report did not mince words. In its view Québécois were not being adequately prepared for the job market due to a thoroughly confused system that had no long range focus. There was a need for planning, for direct government involvement, and for improved standards.

Filled with useful statistical data, the Tremblay study, in addition to several reports of lesser importance prepared by committees on continuing education, on physical education and leisure time, and others, provided a core of information used by Mgr. Parent and his commissioners in the preparation of their five volume *magnum opus*. Commonly referred to as the Parent Report, the *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education* proposed a structural approach to reform. Conscious of the problems created by increasing numbers of students, by the scientific and tech-

nological revolution affecting the Western World, by changing living conditions throughout North America, and by the accelerating shift in intellectual attitudes, the commissioners called for the creation of a centrally directed school system that guaranteed:

- 1) equality of basic educational opportunity for all,
- 2) greater accessibility,
- 3) schooling that prepared for life in an evolving Quebec society.

In fine detail the report set forth its plan for a Department of Education and for a reorganized school system that carried the learner from pre-school to university with a multitude of permutations and combinations provided by comprehensive schools, by institutes, and by a variety of continuing education opportunities. The pattern of organization that ran so forcefully throughout these proposals was also found in the numerous corollary aspects dealt with in the report. From the question of participation to Eskimo education it seemed possible to solve every problem by adequate planning and directed activity.

The Parent Report, coming when it did in the genesis of the Quiet Revolution, was a fine example of the systems approach that seemed to underlie the spurt of reform activity then transforming Québec. Change was predicated upon detailed master-plans that supposedly took into account all possible eventualities. These master-plans were in turn "managed" by experts, the so-called technocrats, who were responsive to the population that made its will known via a plethora of consulting bodies. The theory was excellent. Time, however, was to bring about numerous modifications of the original intent.

As one volume after another of the Parent Report made its appearance and as proposed reforms obtained public hearing, further studies were added to the already impressive inventory of reform proposals. Often coming from the newly instituted Department of Education, these studies expanded existing concepts. Of special note was the "Education Documents" series that provided readable treatises on comprehensive schools, on colleges of general and vocational education, and on educational financing. Although careful to remain within the general parameters of the Parent Report, each treatise added its own particular stamp. In the case of the volume entitled *College Education and the General and Vocational*

Colleges, the end result was something that, when applied, meant the stretching almost out of recognition of the Parent Report proposal.

While this was taking place other studies were complementing the work of the Parent Commission and the newly created Department of Education. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Taxation*, tabled in 1965, provided several important chapters on educational finance. The reforms projected by the Parent Report necessarily meant increasing demands on the traditional sources of finance. Because of this, tax experts called for the shifting of the burden from the already over-taxed property holder. School taxes were seen as a social responsibility to be shared by all sectors of the community. Finally, P. Angers' *L'Enseignement et la société d'aujourd'hui* opened a series of philosophical and practical parentheses that elaborated upon the humanistic conceptions expounded in the second volume of the Parent Report. Concerned with the imperative of general education, the author previewed the need for a less mechanistic approach to educational change. In 1963, however, this was a conception that received scant attention.

reform implementation

The Parent Report was not gracefully accepted by all. Established interests openly voiced their dismay and disagreement. These attitudes found expression in essays published in periodicals such as *L'Action nationale*, *Relations* and *Prospectives*. The sociologists Gagnon and Gousse in an article entitled "Le processus de régionalisation scolaire" pointed out how certain groups did everything within their power to sabotage the proposed changes. In the final analysis as Pierre Bélanger underscored in his essay on the establishment of the comprehensive school, opposition was not very significant because reform activity operated within a framework of national survival.

Those who favoured the *status quo* or very limited change massed their forces in mid-1963 to block the passage of Bill 60 that proposed the establishment of a Department of Education and the creation of a Superior Council to advise the Minister. The struggle, which in a certain sense boiled down to a power play between church and state, as L. Dion analysed in his studies on pressure group politics, created a considerable

literature both then and later. Yet when the smoke had cleared away after considerable compromising that permitted protagonists to feel that their honour remained intact, Québec emerged with a new organizational framework. As Paul Gérin-Lajoie, the first Minister of Education, stated in his book *Pourquoi le Bill 60*:

Notre salut, notre progrès, notre épanouissement seront notre oeuvre collective ou ne seront pas. Pas d'émancipation économique fructueuse, pas d'avancement politique, pas de progrès culturel sans un système d'enseignement puissant, organique, dynamique, intégré à la société canadienne française, lui donnant un stimulant nouveau et en recevant un appui ferme. A ceux qui disent que nous allons trop vite et que nous voulons tout faire à la fois, je réponds que nous avons un retard d'un demi-siècle à rattraper et qu'il est dans l'histoire des peuples, des moments où il faut *tout faire à la fois*, parce que tout se tient.

From this point on the tempo of reform was rapid. One regulation after another obtained ministerial promulgation. Rarely did a month pass without Government information services reporting a significant transformation or advancement. The pace of change was so intense that the need for keeping the public abreast with the modifications often outran the Government's ability to do so. Publications such as H. P. Proulx's *La Réforme Scolaire au Québec 1967-1968*, however, fortunately bridged the gap. Written in layman's language this pamphlet and similar tracts and articles listed in chronological order what was taking place and did an excellent job of explaining what the reforms meant to the schools, the students, and the community.

The innovations of these reform years have started to receive some scholarly attention although much remains completely untouched. One of the first to try his hand at evaluation was Guy Rocher with his 1968 study on school administration. Writing from the vantage point of a member of the Parent Commission and that of a sociologist exploring institutional change, Professor Rocher set forth a series of practical assumptions that could serve as the foundation for further study. The emergence of a network of general and vocational post-secondary institutions — referred to as Institutes in the Parent Report, although rebaptized and known to the public as Cegeps — also receives consideration in studies by Sabourin, Watson, and Gingras. Sabourin's survey article entitled "Some aspects of Post-Secondary Education in Quebec" although very general and concerned with the roots of the Cegeps, nevertheless offers valuable information. Cicely Watson's contribu-

tion is a comparative study of the developing community college system in Canada. As such it sheds light on the purpose, organization, programme, and financial operation of Québec's colleges of general and vocational education. In both cases attempts at evaluation remain limited. The final result is much more descriptive than anything else. Paul-Emile Gingras' *La Vie pédagogique des collèges, 1960-1970* does not, however, follow this pattern. In a well documented and clearly written piece of research, the author delves into the day to day academic operation of the colleges. His concern for trends is evident and he highlights those aspects that require, in his view, reinforcement or change. Finally, Alphonse Riverin modestly attempts to situate higher education in a community perspective in his *L'Université et le développement socio-économique*. Written by the first rector of the University of Québec, the book suggests the need for institutions of higher learning to be closely integrated in the society that nourishes their existence. He then goes on to point out how this can and is happening to the benefit of the Province as a whole.

reassessment

No sooner had some of the proposed reforms of the Parent Report achieved fruition than doubts started to be openly voiced. L. Potvin, after agreeing with the Parent Report's desire for greater participation of parents, for the improvement of teacher qualifications, and for a renewed role of the Church in education, went on to question the trend towards co-education and the growing encroachment of the State in educational matters in his 1966 work entitled *Aujourd'hui l'école, problèmes actuels d'éducation*. Other studies, although not willing to be quite so explicit, aired similar misgivings. In 1967 a feature article prepared by C. de Lorimier and R. Vézina, two militant unionist teachers, carried the sense of disapproval one step further. It asserted that the needs of the teaching profession were being ignored and that the entire reform movement was heading towards a disastrous end. Because of the partisan nature of the article, it received limited attention from opinion makers. It was to be, however, only a matter of time before this was to change. The following year with the publication of R. Haumont's *La Grenouillère: essai d'analyse du Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec* a minor scandal erupted. The author, who had been a

divisional director within the Department of Education before his resignation, attacked in a virulent manner his former employer whom he referred to as the *machine monstrueuse*. In a back-door gossip approach that tore apart people and policies, his personal disillusion was underscored by a mass of supporting and often revealing information.

The reaction expressed in *La Grenouillère*, though extreme, echoed a growing conservative sentiment. The élan of the Parent Commission years was at an end. Rapid change had often led to confusion and more and more Quebecers were asking for time to think and to weigh alternatives. This perception of things paralleled a burgeoning uneasiness resulting from the linguistic issue in the St. Leonard, *McGill français*, and Bill 63 conflicts of the late 1960's. Consequently, the educational literature of the time appeared to address itself to particular problems, often seen as resulting from the inadequacies of the Parent Report recommendations. Some of those writings such as Arès' *Faut-il garder au Québec l'école confessionnelle?* and Rondeau's *Pour une éducation de qualité au Québec* simply expressed the need to reassert the positive elements of the pre-reform era. Some such as Fortier's analysis of the academic organization of the Cegeps attempted to streamline the operation, and others such as Thérèse Fabi in her *Persécution des enseignants au Québec? Pour une revalorisation de la profession* aimed to reorganize priorities. All in all, however, it was clear: the reform theories of Parent Report years were no longer sacrosanct.

Even though the introspection described above led to a conscious slowdown in educational change, it is inaccurate to assume that the propensity for reform came to an end. Difficult questions were being raised as regards the slavish attention given to structural modification. Perhaps, rightfully so! A new well spring of reform appears to have been tapped by the expression of these reservations, witness the publication in 1969 of the *Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur l'enseignement des arts au Québec*. Established to supplement the findings of the Parent Commission, the Rioux Commission, as it has come to be known, created such tremors that a year elapsed between the tabling of the report and its publication. Acknowledging indebtedness to the Parent Report, and very often following its pathways, the Rioux Commissioners ventured far beyond structural considerations. How, they asked, did the existing culture and soc-

ity affect the learner? How, in turn, could this dynamic combination of learner and learned modify traditional conceptions and values?

The Rioux Report was too controversial at the time to be handled. As is often the case in such circumstances, it was relegated to official oblivion. Yet sympathetic chords were struck. The re-examination of the reforms of the Quiet Revolution, then in progress, appeared to underscore one constant: educational reforms fit within an administrative mould. It now began to appear to some that greater attention should be given to the role of the human being in the educational process. With the publication of 1969/70 *Annual Report of the Superior Council of Education*, appropriately subtitled *Educational Activity*, this concern appears to have received a certain degree of consideration. The Superior Council claimed that the time was ripe to make an inventory of what had taken place so as to assess what was lacking. It called for an individualization of instruction and a re-orientation of the educational system towards the primary goal of enabling the learner to educate himself.

Quebec's Quiet Revolution may have figuratively been put to rest, but the literature of the sixties, like the events of the sixties, suggests that an era of profound educational developments and reform has only begun.

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