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The Past Went That-a-Way

Enrolment in English education in Quebec

What is the evidence that education for the English-speakers of Quebec is any worse off than that for the French-speaking population? Contrary to the angry suspicions of those who feel threatened by the directions recently taken by the politics of the province, there is little sign that the Quebec government has been anything but scrupulously fair to all concerned in its educational action, as far as it lies in its power to be so. Nevertheless, as Donald Burgess explains, the projections for English schools for the next few years show a hair-raising and far steeper decline in enrolments than the government seems to have anticipated, and no foreseeable chance of recovery beyond that under the present terms of admission. The chief cause of this reduction, to what appears certain to be a radical and permanent change in its relative strength, is the recent flight from the province of large numbers of the next child-bearing generation of English-speakers — a result of the socio-political climate and arising indirectly, rather than directly, from the actions of the governments of Quebec.

The past went that-a-way. When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavour of the recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.

Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*.

Marching backwards is always a tricky activity, even with the use of a rear-view mirror, but attempting to predict the future of English-language education in Quebec is downright perilous. Demography, like economics, is a somewhat inexact science and, quite often it seems, the same data lead to surprisingly different conclusions. Here, in pre-referendum Quebec, population forecasts concerning the relative strengths of the two main linguistic groups quickly assume important political dimensions.

As the debate rages on the relative strength of the French language in Quebec, and how much protection it needs, and the future of the English minority and its institutions, demographic projections have become the major weapons. As a result, Quebec demographers have become crucial to the political debate. What elsewhere would be the most academic of specialities is highly emotional and hotly debated. Demographers have become the soothsayers of Quebec's future.¹

A recent example, which has received front-page headlines in both the English and French press in Quebec, is a study entitled *Les futurs linguistiques possibles de la région métropolitaine de Montréal en 2001*.² This report, prepared for the Québec Ministère de l'Immigration, indicates, *inter alia*, that whereas the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) has stopped the threat of erosion of the French majority in Montreal, there are no indications that it will provoke a massive exodus of the Quebec English community. According to the report, the English community will retain "its relative strength." To many anglophones in Quebec this reassurance, if such was its intention, surely came as something of a surprise since other prominent headlines during the past few years had spoken of school closures, teacher surpluses, the flight of head offices, and other indicators of a community undergoing contraction rather than retaining "its relative strength." A demographer would point out, however, that school closures and teacher surpluses are occurring in the French-language educational sector too, and that logically it is quite possible for both linguistic communities to shrink in absolute numbers and yet retain their relative proportions. In any event, some might argue, the year 2001 is still over two decades away and, if the rate of social and political change in Quebec over the past two decades is any guide, it is pointless to attempt to predict what might happen between now and 2001.³ There are some obvious attractions in this somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude, but they are of little value to educational planners and others concerned with or for the future of English education in Quebec.

While long-term prediction is admittedly somewhat hazardous, there is now a good deal of agreement, at least among English educators, as to the short-term future of the English-language public educational sector at the kindergarten, elementary, and secondary levels. The general consensus is that English-language enrolments are now in a position of general decline, at the rate of about 10% per annum; and that by 1985, the provincewide enrolment will only be about 50%, or even less, of what it is now. According to one recent study "there were no indicators found that would lead to the conclusion that the decline will stop or even diminish in intensity at the end of the five year period."⁴ According to another study: "For this predicted decline to be less than inexorable, a remarkable number of events would have to occur. They are all, in my opinion, highly unlikely."⁵ If these predictions are correct, and we shall examine the evidence below, then the consequences will be profound.

Time-lags with evidence

What then is the evidence? First of all, it is important to realize that there is a considerable time-lag in collecting data on a provincewide basis. The significant trends that have developed during the past two or three years do not yet show in the official statistics as published by the Ministry of Education. As of this date (January 1979) it is quite possible that the Government does not yet know about them. But they are known to the individual school boards at the local level and, to some extent, to the Island Council at the intermediary level. The ideal methodology involved is to establish a correlation for the enrolment data at the three levels (Province, Island Council, School Board) for the years in which data was available from all sources. The school board enrolment data, because it is the most recent and perhaps the most reliable, is then used to develop projections at the Island of Montreal and provincial levels. It is assumed that the impact of the relevant variables, such as the birth rate, migration, and Bill 101, will only have been fully realized in the 1978-79 enrolment data.

The following Table shows the actual enrolment data for the English-language sector of the eight school boards that are included in the *Conseil Scolaire de l'Île de Montréal*. It will be noted that enrolments have declined in every school board for each of the past three years and that the overall loss of 11,585 students in 78-79 represents a decline of about 10% on the island of Montreal.

Table 1
ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOL ENROLMENTS
BY SCHOOL BOARD, ISLAND OF MONTREAL

School Board	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79
Jerome Le Royer	7283	7143	6993
M.C.S.C.*	37021	34414	30841
Sainte-Croix	3120	2894	2583
Verdun	1691	1471	1367
Sault-Saint-Louis	6017	5758	5417
Baldwin-Cartier	9455	8815	8148
P.S.B.G.M.**	48481	45783	40422
Lakeshore	16630	15478	14400
Totals:	129698	121756	110171

(*Montreal Catholic School Commission. **Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.)

Source: *Conseil Scolaire de l'Île de Montréal*, 1978.

As the island of Montreal contains about 60% of the total provincewide English-language school population this decline appears significant. However,

before one can project this trend into the future and apply it on a provincewide basis it is necessary to look at the variables involved. Some of them, such as fertility rates and migration patterns, lend themselves to a certain amount of statistical analysis and can be projected forward on the basis of current trends. Others, such as the overall political climate, the degree to which parents might opt for private or French-language schools, the extent to which Bill 101 is applied or modified, are less amenable to objective analysis and thus enter the realm of speculation. A brief discussion of the variables follows.

Traditionally, the single most important factor in determining school enrolments in Canada has been the birthrate. It is well known by now that the birthrate has dropped below the replacement level in most parts of the Western world. In Quebec it has declined from a high of 45 per 1000 about one hundred years ago to a low of 13.8 per 1000 in 1973. The most dramatic part of that overall decline has occurred in the past twenty years, during which the rate slipped more than 50%, from 30.3 per 1000 in 1952 to 13.8 per 1000 in 1972. In a relatively short period of time Quebec has shifted from the province with the highest birthrate in Canada to that of the lowest. The consequences of this decline have been far more severe in the French-language sector than in the English. According to Blacklock, French-language elementary enrolments declined at the rate of 13.6% between 1965-71, whereas the English-language decline during the same period was only 3.5%. This evidence lends support to the statement that "there was a greater fertility rate decline in the French language population than in the English language population."⁶ It also supports a second proposition to the effect that English-language school enrolments in Quebec are more strongly influenced by social and political factors than by a straight-forward application of birth and fertility rates.

Not just the birthrate

In this connection, it is pertinent to enquire about the post-war baby-boom, the period from 1945 to 1959 in which the annual number of live births in Canada increased by 60%. According to the demographers, this baby-boom generation began to enter the childbearing age range in 1969-70. It is therefore reasonable to look for a slight increase in Kindergarten and Grade 1 enrolments beginning in 1977 or 1978. Blacklock examined the English Kindergarten to Grade 3 enrolments in the PSBGM for the past three years and found no evidence of any such increase. In fact, as Table II illustrates, there was a greater decline at the school entry age than in later elementary years. The decline for the current school year at the Kindergarten level was a massive 30.3%. However, it should be noted that the PSBGM did not fully apply the regulations of Bill 101 in 1977, but did so in 1978.

Table II
PSBGM ENGLISH LANGUAGE ENROLMENTS, KINDERGARTEN — GRADE 3
1976-78

Year	K	% Change	I	% Change	II	% Change	III	% Change
1976/77	3068		3549		3196		3233	
1977/78	2877	- 6.2%	3126	-11.9%	3108	- 2.8%	2954	-7.0%
1978/79	2005	-30.3%	2437	-22.0%	2479	-20.3%	2873	-2.7%

Source: Blacklock, *Enrolment Changes and the Implication for English Language Education* (unpublished), 1979, p. 10.

Similar statistics for English-language Grade I enrolments at the Island Council level demonstrate a similar pattern of decline as indicated in Table III.

Table III
ENGLISH LANGUAGE GRADE I ENROLMENTS, ISLAND OF MONTREAL,
1973-78

Year	Grade I	Decrease	% Change
1973/74	10,142		
1974/75	9,899	243	- 2.3%
1975/76	9,398	501	- 5.0%
1976/77	8,663	735	- 7.8%
1977/78	7,767	896	-10.3%
1978/79	6,494	1,273	-16.4%

Source: *Blacklock, p. 16.*

It should be noted that this pattern of decline will progressively work its way up through the elementary and secondary school systems and will intensify the overall decline as recorded in Table I. As indicated in Table II the rate of decrease more than doubled at the Kindergarten and Grade I and II levels. Clearly, the declining birth rate is no longer the single most important factor in determining Quebec's English-language school enrolments.

In the past, the loss of school enrolments due to declining birth and fertility rates has to some extent been offset by international immigration, especially since most female immigrants were of child-bearing age. In Quebec, the majority (a conservative estimate is 66%) of immigrants of school-age elected to attend English-language schools. This is no longer the case. Successive legislation by Quebec governments has either restricted English-language enrolment to those who had proven knowledge of the English language (Bill 22), or has forbidden it entirely except to certain well-defined groups (Bill 101). International immigrants now have no choice but to enter French-language schools. The Quebec Government has also acted in establishing its own Ministry of Immigration to work in collaboration with the federal government to ensure that provincial

priorities are respected. In 1977, for the first time in recent history, the number of French-speaking immigrants to Quebec exceeded English-speaking immigrants.⁷ It seems highly unlikely that the malady of declining English-language enrolments can be cured any longer by heavy doses of immigration.

Perhaps of even more significance than international migration has been the effect of migration between the provinces. Table IV compares the number of children gained to the province by international migration with the number lost by inter-provincial migration. It will be noted that the losses by inter-provincial migration exceeds the gains due to international migration by over 50%. The losses would be even higher than this if the two age ranges were strictly comparable.

Table IV
COMPARISON OF INTERNATIONAL AND INTERPROVINCIAL POPULATION
CHANGES (CHILDREN) PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, 1968-76

<u>Year</u>	<u>International Migration</u> (Under 18 years)	<u>Interprovincial Migration</u> (Under 15 years)
1968/69	+ 1722	— 5280
1969/70	+ 309	—10322
1970/71	— 925	—10500
1971/72	— 999	— 5612
1972/73	+ 933	— 4737
1973/74	+4842	— 293
1974/75	+6303	— 2316
1975/76	<u>+5947</u>	<u>— 2970</u>
	+20132	—42040

Sources: Statistics Canada, *Interprovincial and International Migration of Children in Canada 1975-76* (Catalogue 81.216), p. 29. R.W.E. Jackson, *Implications for Education of Recent Trends in Live Births and International and Interprovincial Migration of Children*, The Canadian Educational Association, Toronto, 1977, p. 33.

As the majority of interprovincial migrants are those who would normally attend English-language schools, the assumed loss to the English-language school sector during the period 1968-76 was considerable.⁸ It should be further noted that these losses were taking place prior to the election of the *Parti Quebecois* and the passage of Bill 101. There is no evidence to suggest that this migration will reverse itself, but even if it were to do so, the majority of newcomers would legally be required to attend French-language rather than English-language schools.

High school leavers: province leavers

There is one other migration pattern that is worthy of attention. This concerns a population group that has no immediate impact on school enrolments, but is highly significant in terms of future enrolments. In a study of the English-language high school leaving group between the years 1971-76, Caldwell found that 31% of them had already left the province and that a further 20% were definitely intending to leave. It appeared that this exodus represented a 50% increase compared to a similar group of high school leavers during the period 1967-71, and again it should be noted that this phenomenon was occurring prior to the election of the *Parti Quebecois*. Caldwell's findings are summarized in Table V which, by any standards, represents a unique migration pattern that is extremely high for one group of the population.

Table V
**OUT-MIGRATION OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS,
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, 1971-76.**

<u>Remaining in or moved out of province</u>	<u>Metropolitan</u>	<u>Remote</u>	<u>Total Weight</u>
IN	70%	66%	69%
OUT	30%	34%	31%
	100%	100%	100%

Source: G. Caldwell, *Out-Migration of English Mother-Tongue High School Leavers from Quebec 1971-76* (unpublished), Bishop's University 1978, p. 30.

To a certain extent the departure of high school and CEGEP graduates is to be expected if only because they are the most mobile of all population groups, but a one-third loss in a five year period is not only high in itself, but has two important consequences for future school enrolments. First, they represent future parents; and second, they represent an important segment of the cohort whose children are eligible to receive English education by virtue of acquired rights in the context of Bill 101. If English-language high school graduates continue to leave in such numbers, the pool of those eligible for English-language instruction will very quickly diminish.

Bill 101, or the Charter of the French Language, was passed into law on August 26, 1977, just prior to the beginning of the 1977/78 school year. Chapter VIII of this law outlines conditions for the language of instruction, and section 73 carefully defines those eligible to receive instruction in English:

72. Instruction in the kindergarten classes and in the elementary and secondary schools shall be in French, except where this chapter allows otherwise.

73. In derogation of section 72, the following children, at the request of their father and mother, may receive their instruction in English.
- A) a child whose father or mother received his or her elementary instruction in English, in Quebec;
 - B) a child whose father or mother domiciled in Quebec on the date of the coming into force of this act, received his or her elementary instruction in English outside of Quebec;
 - C) a child who, in the last year of school in Quebec before the coming into force of this act, was lawfully receiving his instruction in English, in a public kindergarten class or in an elementary or secondary school;
 - D) the younger brothers or sisters of a child described in paragraph C.

As children eligible under paragraphs B, C, and D progressively move through the system, it is clear that the only group eventually eligible to receive instruction in English will be those under paragraph A, that is, those whose father or mother received his or her elementary instruction in English, in Quebec. Caldwell has already documented the very high out-migration of English-language high school leavers, and Statistics Canada reports that the majority of interprovincial migrants are between the ages of 20 and 44 years of age.⁹ The majority, then, are of childbearing age, and unless they subsequently return to the province, represent an irreplaceable loss to the cohort whose children are eligible for English-language instruction.

Discovering the corpse

According to Blacklock, “it appears that a very rapid decline of students with eligibility to English language education is imminent” and “within the next six to eight years will probably result in a 60% to 80% decline of enrolment eligible to attend English language classes.”¹⁰ In addition, Lavery records that “over half of the English Protestant school population are now enrolled in French Second Language programmes of the immersion type,”¹¹ while some parents have voluntarily decided to enrol their children in the French-language sector schools, thus losing the right for English-language schooling by the next generation. It remains to be determined how many children will be permanently diverted to the French-language sector by *les classes d'accueil*.¹² At the moment, the only mediating factor is section 85 of Bill 101, which states:

The Government, by regulation, may determine the conditions on which certain persons or categories of persons staying in Quebec temporarily, or their children, may be exempted from the applications of this chapter.

It is unclear how many children will enter English-language schools under the provisions of this section, and even the addition of the so-called “Canadian

Option”¹³ to Bill 101 would be unlikely to have much effect unless the flow of emigrants were reversed.

In the words of one leading English-language educator, “I really think that English education died some time ago and that we are only discovering the corpse.”¹⁴ The evidence, as outlined in this paper, makes it difficult to think otherwise. There is some indication that the birthrate has at last bottomed out, and in the last couple of years the number of live births in Quebec has actually begun to increase. However, as indicated earlier, the crude demographic statistics are no longer the vital ones. Socio-economic and political influences are now paramount. English-language public education is clearly in a critical situation. The ultimate question is not whether it will retain “its relative strength,” but in what condition it will emerge from the crisis.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Graham Frazer, “The demographer becomes king,” *The Saturday Gazette* (January 20, 1979), p. 45.
2. Province du Québec, *Les futurs linguistiques possibles de la région métropolitaine de Montréal en 2001*, (Ministère de l’Immigration, Québec, January, 1979).
3. For population projection see:
Janice J. Tait, “Educational Planning for the Future,” *McGill Journal of Education* Vol. XII, No. 1 (Spring, 1977), pp. 133-146.
Technical Report on Population Projections for Canada and the Provinces 1972-2001 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 91-516, 1975).
4. Thomas Blacklock, “Enrolment Changes and the Implication for English Language Education,” unpublished paper (January, 1979), p. 36.
(Thomas Blacklock is Chief Planning Officer for the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.)
5. Robert M. Lavery, “Future of English Education in Quebec,” unpublished paper (January, 1979).
(Robert M. Lavery is Director General of the Lakeshore School Board, Island of Montreal.)
6. Blacklock, *op.cit.*, p. 8.
7. *Montreal Star*, “French Lead Entries to Quebec,” October 25, 1977, p. 1.
8. Caldwell (1978) found “that the difference between the out-migration of English and French mother tongue Quebecers is over tenfold. Indeed the out-migration of the English mother tongue population of Quebec to other Provinces was (in the period 1967-71) thirteen times the same out-migration amongst French mother tongue Quebecers, and three times what it was amongst others (other mother tongue).”(G. Caldwell, “Out-Migration of English Mother-tongue High School Leavers from Quebec, 1971-76,” unpublished paper, Bishop’s University, 1978.)

9. *Interprovincial and International Migration of Children in Canada 1975-76* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 81-216).
10. Blacklock, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
11. Lavery, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
12. *Les classes d'accueil*, literally "welcoming classes," were intended originally for the children of immigrants, to orient them to the French school milieu. They provide free day-care services for children aged four years and up, and are now available to English-language parents who want their children to receive French-language primary instruction. Free door-to-door transportation is provided.
13. The "Canadian Option" is the proposal by which English-speaking children from other Canadian provinces would be permitted to attend English-language schools in Quebec. Under the provisions of Bill 101 they are now required to attend French-language schools.
14. Lavery, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

