

Douglas McCall

# Evolution and revolution

## Secondary school changes for Ontario and Quebec

That Quebec is not a province like the others should be apparent in many ways. In education the sheer scale of the undertaking to develop the system, and with it in due course society as a whole, seems little appreciated even within Quebec, and yet there are few parallels to it in the world. McCall compares two apparently similar documents of reform of the secondary system, in Quebec and in Ontario - its massive and confident neighbour - and shows that the real differences between them are far-ranging and have an ideological base; though whether that is because two different ideologies are at work, or only one, may be a question.

In November of 1981, the Secondary Education Review Project (SERP) tabled its Report with the Minister of Education of Ontario, Ms. Bette Stephenson. Eight months earlier Quebec's Minister of Education, Jacques-Yvan Morin, had the Quebec Cabinet adopt a set of regulations entitled the *Régime Pédagogique*. In many ways the two documents represent the educational responses of two governments with quite different ideologies to similar sets of social problems, generated by a declining economy and the advent of the post-industrial society. One of the purposes of this article is to identify the correlations between those governing ideologies and the proposed changes to school curriculum.

A second objective of this effort is to assess whether or not the proposed changes to Ontario's and Quebec's secondary schools constitute significant social change. Paulston's distinction between "innovation" and "reform" (Schwartz, 1977: 136) has been popularised in the terms "evolution" and "revolution". If school curriculum changes "cause major changes in educational budgets, in the slope of the pyramid of school involvement, in the effect of educational investment on individuals or social development, or would entail significant

ideological, structural, and programmatic changes within the educational system," then we can call those changes "revolutionary" or truly significant social change. This distinction will be explored further in the conclusions of this paper.

It is interesting to note that the SERP report and the Régime Pédagogique have both been produced in newspaper formats for generalized distribution to the population. Holmes' comment that the **SERP Report** has been carefully written to seek broad public support can be equally applied to the **Régime Pédagogique** (Holmes, 1982: 19). But only by careful examination does one begin to see the social and political orientations underlying the two documents.

A particularly relevant fact in our comparison is the similar educational histories of the two provinces. Both Ontario and Quebec have spent the last two decades in massive expansion of educational facilities and programs. These changes were led by American progressive thought, expressed in similar fashion both by the Ontario Hall-Dennis Report and the Quebec Parent Commission (Tomkins, 1977: 10-14). However, as Harris points out in his book, *The Quiet Evolution: A Study of the Educational System in Ontario*, the social underpinnings of the Ontario changes may have been "evolutionary" while Quebec's reforms may have been "revolutionary" (Harris, 1967: VIII). It is noteworthy that the authors of the SERP report characterize their document with exactly the same terminology (SERP, 1981: 2).

Before we get too upset about Quebec's curriculum "revolution" we should remember two fundamental points. First, we should recognize that curriculum is always an ideological instrument (Friedenberg, 1981: 8). In every society, someone decides what kids "ought to know" and then imposes that view on schools. Second, we should realize that both the Ontario and Quebec governments are centralizing curriculum control. This is part of a national trend which A.S. Hughes, of the Atlantic Institute, calls "the emergence of the firm hand ideology" (Hughes, 1981: 9). The Ontario Government's approach is to tighten its grip through the credit system and the periodic extensive use of standardized pupil assessment. The Quebec Government will assert its authority through the credit system, standardized assessment, a "suggested" pupil timetable, detailed program objectives, and teaching guides.

The introductory remarks in the two documents offer something to begin our discussion. Both provide an analysis that is a careful echo of society's list of complaints or questions about the school system. Neither attempts to sort out or to evaluate what "many people" are saying about schools. However, the basic differences in the documents, in my opinion, become apparent when we look for the definition of "the problem". The SERP report is primarily concerned about youth unemployment, and states that the public wants schools

to provide a "solid, basic, useful education" with "more prescription", more "discipline", and more "standards." The Régime Pédagogique uses much the same rhetoric, but also discusses the schools' failure to complete the social reforms of the Quiet Revolution of the "sixties".

### **More than education**

My analysis of the content of the curricular changes proposed by the two reports is organized in relation to the four basic functions of formal schooling; socialization, custody, selection, and education. Far too often we discuss schools only in relation to the educative function, the skills or knowledge to be imparted. The other three functions of schools have in fact a far greater impact on our children and our society.

**Socialization.** Schools socialize children by various means. The role of a student in decision-making in school and classroom will determine his or her attitude towards authority figures. An emphasis on "academic" or "practical" knowledge will favour certain types of children within the system. The school's orientations towards sex roles, international and national developments, what constitutes "proper" values, and the economic system will guide a student in his or her adult life.

The list of proposed changes for Ontario's schools will do little to change the current ideological stance of those schools. Student participation in decision-making is to be improved by a vague call upon schools to "develop strategies." Practical or "every-day living" aspects will not merit the status of special courses, but instead will be "intertwined" in the regular program. Little mention is made of new sex roles in our society. Values education is changed only by producing a teachers' guide. The national aspects of the compulsory history course will be de-emphasized. A new, optional Economics course designed to "improve understanding of our economic system" will be offered, but it must simultaneously teach students about our political system.

The Quebec Régime Pédagogique, however, is full of significant changes. There are legislative measures guaranteeing the students' rights to participate in decision-making. New compulsory courses on Technology and Ecology are established to help the student in "practical living." A rewritten, compulsory "national" history course is to focus on Quebec's development. A compulsory course on Economics is also featured. In addition, all students will follow a Home Economics course, and specific guidelines to eliminate sex-role stereotyping are a feature of all new curricula, educational materials, and teaching guides.

**Custody.** The length of time a student is required to stay in school is a major political decision made by every government. The economic and social consequences of laws governing pupil attendance in schools affect the entire population.

The SERP report proposes that Ontario's Grade Thirteen be abolished and the present curriculum "compressed" into twelve years. The economic and social consequences of such a change tend to reflect the conservative orientations of the government in power. An economist's analysis of the proposal, prepared for the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, notes that the disappearance of Grade Thirteen will depress the future wages of highly educated workers by flooding that particular labour market, will increase the proportion of public financial support given to university-bound students (as opposed to other types of students), and will redistribute the wealth of Ontario's society towards Capital and away from Labour (McInnis, 1981: 1-2). Furthermore, the authors of the SERP report note that the increased academic pressure on poor or failing students (usually working-class children) due to the "compressed" curriculum could increase student drop-out. The authors hope that a more relevant curriculum will offset this concern.

Quebec's changes are limited to the creation of a twelfth year for technical-vocational studies. This additional year is required because the Régime delays the differentiation between academic and vocational programs within the secondary school. Such a delay is consistent with the Quebec Government's socialist orientation, which would try to offset the division which normally separates working-class children from others in the school program. However, it remains to be seen whether or not these students will remain in school for this additional year.

**Selection.** Schools help to sort and select students for placement in their future careers. The mechanisms used for this process include standards for pupil evaluation, student certifications, the criteria used for access into other institutions or alternative private schools, and the atmosphere and rules for pupil discipline.

Before continuing our comparison, it might be useful to examine the differences between Ontario's Community Colleges and Quebec's CEGEPs. The Ontario Colleges were established as an alternative to university studies, providing vocational or technical education for students of nineteen or twenty years of age. They currently attract about 15% of the high-school-leaving population (SERP, 1981: 8). Quebec's CEGEP system was established as an intermediate step between the secondary school and university, as well as a place for technical or vocational education. Students can opt between several academic, vocational, or mixed tracks. Approximately 56% of seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds leaving high school go into the

CEGEP Ministère de l'éducation, 1978: p.3).

The proposed changes to Ontario's secondary schools would not greatly alter the status quo. A four-track system of course difficulty is reduced to three, in order that the "basic" track be more relevant for preparation for technical colleges and employment, and the "advanced" track offers a four-year wait for university instead of the current five. The present system of two different high-school-leaving certificates is changed to a single diploma (a possible contradiction in philosophy to other changes). The current system of credit accumulation, the use of standardized test items from a provincial "pool", and a loose framework of provincial exams will be maintained, although they will be made more restrictive.

The private school network in Ontario will not be touched by SERP. The changes to student discipline reflect a conservative orientation. Free time within the pupils' timetable is to be eliminated, the SERP researchers explored increasing "sanctions" to improve pupil behaviour, and the basic recommendation is that each school develop a Code of Conduct for pupils. In short, the changes reflect governmental satisfaction with the societal status quo.

In Quebec, the Régime Pédagogique will dramatically affect the selection process within schools. Standardized pupil evaluation is to occur at four grade levels instead of two within the public system. The "passing grade" for secondary subjects is increased from 50% to 60%. However, this apparently conservative step will be offset by the introduction of a "Mastery Learning" concept in all courses. Mastery learning theory stipulates that course content should be designed so that all pupils reach a certain level. In other words, all students should "pass" to the next level.

Quebec's private schools must follow the same programs, a requirement which, with a centralized curriculum, will reduce the attraction to those schools. A dramatic change is made regarding student discipline as well. Quebec's answer to pupil misbehaviour is to involve the students in school decision-making and to establish student rights. The measures within the Régime Pédagogique will be complemented by a Youth Protection Act, a Student Ombudsman, and a booklet on student rights and responsibilities prepared by the Quebec Human Rights Commission. The net effect of the Quebec reforms is to take another step towards egalitarian practices within the school.

**Education.** The fourth task for schools is to equip students with the appropriate skills and knowledge. What is most relevant for students to learn? Obviously, the requirements will vary from society to society, from era to era. The elements for discussion here revolve around who in society, or which agency, will provide the information or the skills. By examining this aspect we may determine the

ideological orientations of educational changes.

One should note the similarities in the approaches of the two provinces. Both are moving towards a broader, more general, and compulsory curriculum. The student in Grade 7 and 8 in both Ontario and Quebec will have almost no choice in electives. The Ontario student must obtain 56 credits from compulsory courses out of a possible 120; the Quebec student has to get 40 out of a possible 176. However, when one analyzes the specifics, it becomes clear that in fact many courses in Ontario will become obligatory, because of the arrangements in the credit system (Holmes, 1982: 17). In Quebec, the Régime stipulates a pupil timetable establishing very little student choice. The theme of centralization is consistent in both models; the differences arise in the content.

The rationale for SERP's changes to curriculum content are best reflected in the following extract:

Many people felt schools were not successful enough in helping students develop the skills and attitudes that will lead to personal satisfaction and productivity in the world of work. Employers, for example, have made it clear that they value communication skills and attitudes such as reliability, acceptance of responsibility, and ability to work well with others...

The Ontario answer, to the lack of correspondence between the curriculum of secondary schools and post-industrial society, is better co-operation between government and school boards. The expanding gap between technology and schooling will be bridged by "contracting out" education to corporations and an increased use of "work study" programs. Specifically, SERP recommends close school-business co-operation, tax incentives to encourage employers to set up private training programs, and the introduction of younger students to "work-study" programs which place the child in an office or factory. The proposals favour local control and the private sector.

The Quebec approach is quite different, once again reflecting its socialist direction. The State is perceived as the instrument best equipped to ensure the relevance of schools, and therefore provincial control of all aspects of schooling is the basic feature of the Régime. Detailed course objectives, "manuals" for each course, and teaching guides will be carefully prepared for each subject. Pedagogical research and professional improvement for teachers are also to be centralized, to ensure the application of the Régime.

### **A quiet revolution does not lie down**

If we return to Paulston's distinction between "reform" and

"innovation" (or "revolution" and "evolution" in this context) we may justifiably conclude that Quebec's Régime Pédagogique is a serious attempt to change the "pyramid of school involvement", through its changes to the socialization and selection functions of schools. Moreover, the Quebec changes are linked, through the content of several of the new compulsory courses, to a change in the ideological status quo of the province. Ontario's changes, while not being ideologically neutral, do appear to represent only "innovation" or "evolution" from the status quo. No major social change is being reflected in the proposals of SERP.

A second criterion for assessing the "evolution" or "revolution" question is provided by Kazamias and Epstein (1968). Their model stipulates that "revolutionary" educational change will be linked with a "national" crisis or a significant stage in the nation-building process. Such changes will be expressed in educational "blue prints", and will address issues such as secularization, modernization, and centralization. It is evident that Quebec's changes are clearly linked to the election of a nationalist movement which gained power in 1976 and is openly involved in "nation-building". The Régime Pédagogique clearly addresses issues of religion, modernization, and centralization. Indeed the Régime is only part of a complete overhaul of the educational system. The SERP report tends to avoid such issues, and is not part of a major re-organization of the system.

A third criterion is the depth and breadth of the changes attempted. Quebec's reforms are clearly associated with all four social functions of the school, whereas Ontario's proposals tend to deal only with the educative role. The Quebec Ministry of Education has paid a great deal of attention to curriculum, teaching methods, teaching guides, and educational materials, to the atmosphere within the school, and to the teacher-pupil relationship. Each component is clearly linked to a plan. Indeed, the White Paper produced by the Quebec Ministry is called just that, "A Plan of Action." The SERP report, on the other hand, does not try to delve into the in-school processes. Whenever these processes are identified as problems, SERP recommends investigation by other agencies rather than proposing specific solutions.

Magnusson has described the changes made to Quebec's schools in the sixties as being created by the secular, centralizing, nationalistic, and egalitarian forces of the "Quiet Revolution" (p.102). The Régime Pédagogique clearly continues this process. Although in Ontario a recent major restructuration and financial reorganization is reported within the Ministry itself, its educational changes in the previous decade have been described as "innovation" because each specific component was changed in isolation, generated little public debate on the social consequences, caused no restructuration of the system, and was implemented in a compartmentalized manner (Harris, 1967: VII). The SERP report continues this trend.

In conclusion, the SERP and the Régime can be seen as products of their societies and the ideologies of their governments. Ontario's reforms are summed up in the SERP report. But Quebec's Régime Pédagogique is only the pedagogical tip of an iceberg that includes changes to school-board re-organization, school financing, parental involvement, and school governance. As we examine and discuss each of the documents, we should note their connections to government orientations in other sectors of society. This comparison is offered as a beginning to such discussion.

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