

# Book Reviews

**Norman Henchey and Donald A. Burgess.**  
**BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE.**  
**QUEBEC EDUCATION IN TRANSITION.**  
Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1987.  
294 pp. \$21.95.

Informative. Perceptive. Stimulating. Timely. Henchey and Burgess have admirably met the challenge set forth in the Preface where they state that "the book is addressed to our fellow Quebecers, English and French alike, and to those outside Quebec who sometimes have considerable difficulty in keeping *au courant* with the changing vista of the Quebec educational scene." Coming a quarter century after the Parent Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education report (1963-1966), the authors provide us with an impressive tapestry of what has taken place in such a short period of time. Statistics on enrollment patterns and financial outlay are marshaled to point out the deep-rooted refashioning that has occurred. Each level of education comes under close scrutiny, and if the overall inventory proves to be positive, this does not prevent the authors from raising serious concerns about some of the shoddy skein found in the tapestry. Much has been done, but can it be sustained? Much is operative, but is it effective? Wheresoever does this lead?

The book's structure follows closely the preoccupation of the writers, both professors in a faculty of education. As such its presentation is in the form of a handbook that can both be adopted for classroom use or left to stand alone as a basic reference tool. Although often technical, the book reads surprisingly well. Chapters draw things together just like a good traditional lesson plan. There are numerous tables, all of which are understandable. A workable index and a comprehensive bibliography are

included. And to round things out, the book contains a series of useful appendices (terms and expressions, key dates, excerpts of government legislation) that provide a wealth of information to the attentive reader.

The first part of the book is historical and sociological in scope, and it does a fine job of drawing forth the elements of continuity and uniqueness that constitute the changed educational scene in Quebec today. Themes of survival and identity, confessionality, dualism, and pluralism flow naturally, and the authors are to be congratulated for being able to handle this with the discernment and sensitivity that is required. Education, language, and such cultural underpinnings still elicit more passion than reason in *la belle province*.

In the second part of the book, the nitty-gritty of Quebec's educational system unfolds. Chapters on governance, on elementary and secondary education, on post-secondary education, on adult education, on teachers and teaching, and on the economics of education provide the reader with a detailed overview of what is taking place. Although all chapters possess their particular qualities, special mention has to be made about the one on adult education that provides unquestionably the best comprehensive synthesis that we have in English on the topic.

Taken together it is here that the magnitude of the undertaking really shows itself, for contemporary education in the province has not only changed in scope but its very texture has been altered, also. The litany of green papers, commission reports, action plans, and so forth, generated since the Parent Commission indicate just to what extent education has become a state industry in Quebec. The intrusiveness of the central apparatus "pops" before one's eyes when reading 1984-85 figures for a Ministry of Education that includes over 1700 employees at an annual cost of \$103 million (Canadian currency, thank God!). The impact of this technocratic monstrosity reaches down to the very core of what is taking place in the schools. As the authors point out in their survey of curriculum development in the elementary and secondary systems, the counter reformation initiated by this *aparatchik* has virtually reversed the thrust of Parent Commission recommendations: "Freedom was replaced by control, individuality was replaced by the need for equality, and choice replaced by restrictions, all undertaken in the name of quality education." There is indeed much to be concerned about. If the amalgam is not out of hand, it certainly is not, in the eyes of Henchey and Burgess, living up to its expectations despite a very impressive track record in numerous domains.

From this critical perspective the book unfolds into its concluding section where the synthetic qualities of the writers bubble forth. Policy issues that emerge from Quebec's past or that spring from the changed socio-

political context of the 1980s are incisively explored. The uniqueness of Quebec's legacy (language, religion, and other such factors) is certainly there, but so too are the issues of technological change, population redistribution, meaning in education, and so forth. Here more than ever one recognizes just how closely intertwined Quebec education is with North American educational developments. Taken as a whole, this section of the book is necessary reading for anyone concerned with the future of education in the province – with the future of Quebec society itself. It is mind-expanding and it leaves no one indifferent.

Certainly there are numerous shortcomings with the Henchey-Burgess endeavour. So little is said, for instance, about the spectators who are watching the drama – the students. We can count them, but they remain faceless as to their wants and needs. Similarly if some actors, like the teachers, take on a profile, numerous others like the administrators, the educational specialists, and the civil service mandarins are completely obscured in the shadows. From a very personal – and jaundiced – perspective, I must also add my disappointment with the uneven treatment given to the province's unique network of colleges of general and vocational education, the popularly labeled CEGEP (*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*). The homework just was not done. Such remarks, however, are not meant to detract from the overall accomplishment. It is always tempting to conceive someone else's book.

The one distressing feature about the accomplishment is that it promises to be a critical success known only to the educational brahmans. Whatever led to the choice of a little-known Alberta concern to publish the book is far from certain. Aside from the fact that the publisher had difficulty in situating diacritical marks where they belong when printing French text, it is clear that the company lacks marketing insight. After speaking to nearly a dozen colleagues, both English- and French-speaking, with a few coming from outside Quebec, it becomes obvious to me that the book is virtually unknown six months after its launching; only two knew of its existence. That is unfortunate!

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