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# **Intercultural Education and Minorities: Policy initiatives in Quebec**

## **Abstract**

*Quebec in its modern period evolved into a secular society with a nationalist political, social, and educational agenda. Education was considered as an important instrument in the redistribution of social and economic reward in the society. The Quebec government introduced the policy of intercultural education with the goal of integrating minorities into francophone culture. In educational policies, stress was increasingly laid on the linguistic and cultural assimilation of minorities. By law, minorities were directed to French-only schools. The assimilationist interpretation of intercultural education has created racial antagonism in schools and minority students feel their rights have been endangered. The paper discusses educational policies and their impact on minorities.*

## **Résumé**

*Le Québec moderne est devenu une société séculière dotée d'un programme politique, social et éducatif d'obédience nationaliste. L'éducation est perçue comme un instrument important de la redistribution des richesses socio-économiques au sein de la société. Le gouvernement du Québec a adopté une politique d'éducation interculturelle en vue d'intégrer les minorités dans la culture francophone. Dans les politiques scolaires, on attache beaucoup d'importance à l'assimilation linguistique et culturelle des minorités. Les enfants des minorités sont obligés de s'inscrire à l'école francophone. Le côté assimilateur de l'éducation interculturelle a abouti à un antagonisme racial dans les écoles et les étudiants des minorités estiment que leurs droits ont été bafoués. L'auteur de cet article analyse les politiques éducatives et leur impact sur les minorités.*

The debate about the integration of minorities in Quebec is a very controversial issue that has been further sparked by the dilemma concerning minority rights vs. the protection of French language and culture. In 1975, the Quebec government passed Bill 101 that directed students from "cultural communities" to French-language schools. The Quebec government also introduced the policy of intercultural education as a part of its integration program in response to the federal policy of multiculturalism. Intercultural education is a vague term, and in practice it refers to policies, curricula, and pedagogic practices that can help nonfrancophone students to integrate in Quebec society through cultural and linguistic assimilation. This paper examines the policy of interculturalism as it has been interpreted and implemented in schools and its repercussions for nonfrancophone groups.

### **Historical Background**

The history of formal education in Quebec began with the arrival of Catholic missionaries from France, who started the first school in 1615 to educate natives with the purpose of religious conversion and cultural assimilation (Lemieux & Gendreau, 1985). The Church achieved modest results in acculturating natives and popularizing education, but its influence and control on the Quebec educational system lasted till the middle of the 20th century (Magnuson, 1980; 1992).

In 1760, when Quebec became a British colony, the English and French were contrasted not only by different languages, but by religious affiliation as well, namely Catholic and Protestant. While the English-speaking minority soon assumed control over growing trade and industrial towns, and established strong educational institutions, the French-speaking majority generally felt a sense of deprivation, because of their limited access to economic opportunities and social privileges. The French majority believed that colonial intervention in education would ultimately result in their religious and linguistic assimilation into the English minority. In subsequent years, the educational and economic progress of the French-speaking population slowed down considerably. Thus, in 1840, when attempts were made to lay the ground work for a public school system, two parallel school systems were founded on a denominational basis which later resulted in a linguistic division, i.e., French-language Catholic schools and English-language Protestant schools. In 1867, Quebec became a part of the Canadian Federation, which gave political control to the French majority in Quebec and also allowed them to protect their cultural and linguistic heritage.

### ***Modernization of education in Quebec***

In the twentieth century, modernity produced the greatest challenge to the traditional constitution of Quebec society. Rapid industrialization brought about the transition of Quebec from a traditional Catholic and rural

society to a modern, secular and industrial society. Further, the demographic change that took place due to the influx of immigrants made it religiously, culturally, and linguistically diverse.

However, the school system was slow to respond to new challenges and remained the custodian of traditional values by maintaining the status quo (Magnuson, 1980). It was not until the 1960s that reforms were undertaken to modernize the educational system.

### *The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s*

The 1960s marked a turning point for education in Quebec when the government, with missionary zeal, introduced reforms to modernize the system. During this period, popularly known as the "Quiet Revolution", the education system went through a radical process of transition from confessional to pragmatic and scientific, and from religious to nationalist orientations. This transition also drastically reduced the role of the Catholic Church in education and the government took total control.

In 1961, the Lesage government passed a series of laws, collectively known as the *Grande charte de l'éducation*, that totally transformed the educational system. The laws addressed the critical problems of quality, accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness of education in Quebec (Quebec, 1982). These laws also redefined the role of education in the socio-political and economic development of the province. However, it was the nationalist ideology that eventually set the tone for the succeeding debate in education. In the subsequent years, the nationalist agenda made education a key instrument for cultural and linguistic preservation (McRoberts, 1991), establishing a discourse in which the French-speaking majority mediates the distribution of social rewards (Dickinson, 1991).

As part of the educational reforms, a Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education, popularly known as the Parent Commission, was established in 1961. The Commission's report laid the foundation of the modern system of education in Quebec, recommending that the government should play the decisive role in education (Magnuson, 1977).

In accordance with the Commission's recommendations, the government established the Ministry of Education in 1964 through Bill 60. A new advisory body called *Le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* was formed to advise the ministry on educational matters, under which the Montreal Catholic School Commission (MCSC) and the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM) were created. Both these boards oversee pre-school, primary, and secondary levels of schools. Similarly, a new network of colleges was also created at the preuniversity level, and was known as

*Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP)* (Henchey & Burgess, 1987).

## Intercultural Education

### *Integration of minorities in schools*

Quebec's political discourse has been primarily based on the power conflict between anglophones and francophones, and is termed as a French struggle against the influence of the English minority within Quebec and the majority in Canada. Since the 1960s, all succeeding governments in Quebec adopted policies that tend to control the province's economic, cultural, and political resources and maintain their autonomy (Quebec, 1983).

Within this scenario of English-French tension, other societal groups in Quebec have been marginalized. Among the French population, the decrease in birth rate and increase in nonfrancophone migration created an exaggerated fear regarding the extinction of French culture and language. As a result, the Quebec government's social and educational policies increasingly stressed the linguistic and cultural assimilation of cultural groups into the French majority.

Currently, people of French origin comprise 81% of Quebec's total population, English-speaking groups make up 9%, and the remaining 10% of Quebec's population is composed of people of diverse linguistic groups.

**Table 1**

### *Population of Quebec: Cultural diversity – 1851-1991*

Census Year	French %	English %	Others %
1851	72.2	24.2	0.6
1871	78.0	20.7	2.3
1901	80.2	17.6	2.2
1931	70.0	15.0	6.0
1951	82.0	12.2	5.9
1971	79.0	10.6	10.4
1981	80.2	7.7	12.1*
1986	81.4	8.9	9.7*
1991	81.0	9.0	10.0*

Source: Statistics Canada, 1851-1991

\* Since 1986, Statistics Canada included the option of multiple responses to the category of ethnicity or racial background. The asterisk indicates people with mixed ethnic background.

The statistics show that while there is a steady increase of francophones in Quebec, anglophones have been on the decrease. The allophones, or the other linguistic groups, have been slowly increasing between 1970-80 (Statistics Canada, 1991). However, during the last ten years the proportion of the three linguistic groups remains relatively steady. The majority of the nonfrancophone population is concentrated in the metropolitan area of Montreal. In Montreal, people of French origin make up 59% of the population, while people of English origin make up 18.2%, and the remaining 21.8% belong to mixed or other linguistic groups (Statistics Canada, 1991). This cultural and linguistic diversity has made little impact on the educational policies and practices that were historically evolved for a "homogeneous" student population in schools, bipolarised in the two school systems.

### *Evolution of intercultural policies*

Diversity has been a visible fact in Canada since World War II. Gradually, a vocabulary emerged in the political discourse that stratified Canadians as majority, minority, visible minorities, immigrants, linguistic minorities and so on, implying an unequal social and political status. The federal government responded to the cultural diversity of the population by initiating a constitutional process that would recognize the need for equal access to social, economic, political, and educational opportunities for all groups in society, regardless of ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic background (Talbani, 1991b). In 1971, the federal government introduced the policy of "multiculturalism." The policy became statute law in 1988, indicating the Canadian government's commitment to social justice and equality. The policy provided constitutional guarantees for the preservation of minority cultures, languages, and religions and also granted minorities protection from discrimination and racism.

The policy of multiculturalism received general acceptance all over Canada, except in the province of Quebec, even though the latter had a significant population of minority groups (McRoberts, 1991). In Quebec, it was commonly believed that the policy of multiculturalism would undermine French Quebecers' autonomy and eventually result in cultural extinction of French language and culture. The Quebec government addressed the issue of the cultural diversity by defining its priorities based on two factors: (1) controlling the selection of immigrants in response to the specific economic and cultural needs of Quebec society; and (2) the harmonious integration of new-comers of all origins with the French-speaking community (Quebec, 1990: 6).

It was the second priority which procured the greatest attention of the policy makers in Quebec. In 1968, the government created the *ministère de l'Immigration*, whose function was to "facilitate the settling of foreign

nationals in Quebec” and “ensure their harmonious integration into Quebec Society” (Quebec, 1990: 7). The policy of interculturalism was introduced by the Quebec government in 1983 as an alternative to the policy of multiculturalism. The goals of interculturalism were a radical departure from the policy of multiculturalism; while the multiculturalism policy supports cultural survivalism, interculturalism appears to promote the perspective of assimilation (Talbani, 1991b).

The Quebec government introduced two major policy apparatuses to promote the integration of nonfrancophones into French culture. The first was related to linguistic exclusiveness and the second to cultural integration. The aim was to make the exclusive use of French language and acculturation as the necessary conditions for access to social and economic privileges in Quebec. The policy on culture states:

One of the objectives of this new orientation in collective life is to create a society where French is the language of the main sectors of public activity, and in which Franco-Quebec culture can develop and prosper while respecting the surrounding cultures. (Quebec, 1983)

In 1990, the Quebec government presented another policy statement on cultural communities. The principle of integration continued to be the foundation on which the Quebec government established its policies to respond to cultural diversity. The general orientation of this policy is based on the following issues: (1) sharing French language as the common language of public life; (2) right of full participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of Quebec; and (3) to build a pluralist society in which people of different origins identify themselves as full-fledged Quebecers (Quebec, 1990: 44).

The policy statement emphasizes the need for all Quebecers to integrate into the new reality of the society. However, major expectations to adapt to Quebec's society are placed on newcomers, who are required “to learn and master the host language”, familiarize themselves with “the cultural codes of the new society, and redefine one's identity to reconcile these values with those of one's original culture” (Quebec, 1990: 45).

### **The Language Controversy**

#### ***Access to schooling***

The French language plays a pivotal role in the social, political, and educational discourse of Quebec and has become a strong symbol for Quebec nationalism since the 1970s (Kwaterko, 1992; McRoberts, 1991). It

is considered a parameter to measure the survival of French culture and francophone autonomy as well as the degree of assimilation of other cultural groups (Talbani, 1992a). The importance of language in social and political spheres has been expressed through the classification of social groups into francophones, anglophones, and allophones.

Traditionally, immigrants to Quebec either sent their children to English schools for reasons of economic and social prestige or were directed to that sector because of the confessional nature of instruction in the Catholic school system (Lafériere, 1980). The French system was restricted to Catholics whereas the Protestant system was English and admitted all religious groups. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1968-69) reported that 85% of immigrants and more than 75,000 francophones attended the English system at that time (Magnuson, 1980).

The government and educators in Quebec deemed language instrumental in integrating minorities into French culture. Thus, the major thrust of the integration policy was placed on the popularization of the French language among nonfrancophones (Quebec, 1977; Quebec, 1978).

To this purpose, the Quebec government introduced various laws to foster the French language. In 1969, the Bertrand government introduced Bill 63 that included provisions to encourage the use of the French language, while also accepting the principle of free choice regarding the language of education. However, the Bill failed to satisfy the nationalists' expectations (MacDonald, 1981).

To diffuse nationalist fervor, the Bourassa government passed Bill 22 or "the Official Language Act", in 1974, to replace Bill 63. The legislation made French the language of the province and the primary language of the work place. It permitted access to English schools only on successful completion of an English competency test. However, Bill 22 failed to silence the language controversy. For nationalists, the Bill did not go far enough to protect French interest, and, for nonfrancophones it went too far (MacDonald, 1981). As a result, the succeeding nationalist government of the *Parti Québécois* introduced Bill 101, or *Charte de la langue française* (the Charter of the French Language) in 1977 (Quebec, 1977). This Bill made it mandatory for all immigrants and nonfrancophones, including those who were born in Quebec or any other province in Canada, to attend French language schools. The English system was only accessible to those children, one of whose parents had received primary education in English in Quebec.

The impact of Bill 101 could be seen in the French-Catholic secondary schools, whose demographic structure of French schools was totally

altered due to the enrollment of nonfrancophones. The chart below shows the changing ethnic composition of the Catholic school system.

**Table 2**

***Linguistic groups attending MCSC French secondary schools***

Census Year	French %	English %	Others %
1984-85	83.5	1.5	15.0
1986-87	74.7	1.7	23.6
1988-89	69.8	1.8	28.4
1990-91	65.3	1.6	33.1

Source: Montreal Catholic School Commission,

Since the government undertook the task of enforcing language laws, there has been a significant increase in nonfrancophones attending French schools and French immersion courses. According to education statistics, there was an increase in anglophones attending French schools, from 7.8% in 1976-77 to 13% in 1982-83. However, the Quebec government's target was to channel more allophones to French schools. In 1976-77, only 17.9% of allophones were attending French schools, while 82.1% were attending English schools. In 1982-83, 44.9% were attending French schools and 55.1% were in English schools. Currently, 90.2% of the total student population attends French schools and only 9.8% attends English or native language schools (Quebec, 1992). As the enrolment of students from cultural communities in French Catholic schools expanded tremendously, it resulted in the shrinking of the Protestant School Board, which primarily serves the anglophone communities. The increasing enrolment of nonfrancophones in French schools indicates the success of the policy of popularizing the French language.

***Cultural integration and education***

The linguistic and cultural policies had far reaching implications for nonfrancophones in Quebec. The general education policy orientation in Quebec stresses the effective and smooth passage of minority students to Quebec's French culture while maintaining their own cultures at a private level. In the 1970s, the Quebec government took various measures to integrate immigrants into Quebec's French society. Two important steps in this respect were the creation of the *Centres d'orientation et de formation des immigrants* and *classes d'accueil* (welcome classes). These two programs aimed at introducing newcomers to Quebec's culture and society and teaching them the French language. Thus, the curriculum includes language lessons and an "initiation guide to Quebec life" (Quebec, 1983).



In 1981, the government expanded the mandate of *Ministère de l'Immigration* and named it the *Ministère des Communautés culturelles et de l'Immigration*. Besides overseeing immigration policies, the ministry's responsibilities included the implementation of government policies concerning cultural communities. Another policy initiative was taken in 1986 when Quebec's National Assembly issued a "declaration on ethnic and race relations" that assured equality for all citizens of Quebec (Quebec, 1990: 7). In these policy statements, the major emphasis is laid on the protection of French language and culture and, fundamentally, the protection of the interest of the French-speaking population.

There are no programs in schools, as a part of regular curriculum activities or otherwise, to inform students about or acquaint them with racial or cultural diversity in schools and in the society. As a matter of fact, there is no specific government policy that would promote a cultural dialogue among various societal groups. The Protestant School Board, in 1988, issued a report of the task force which studied the introduction of multicultural/intercultural initiatives in schools (PSBGM, 1988). However, no curriculum change has taken place to implement the recommendations. Intercultural initiatives have been taken up by some schools, where the majority of students come from cultural communities. Studies have shown that in most cases the initiatives are confined to celebrating annual or biennial cultural evenings. These cultural evenings introduce students to the music, dance, and cuisine of various cultural groups represented in the school (Talbani, 1992b). Thus, intercultural education is "meant" for minority students and not for French Quebecers.

Slight progress has been made regarding the hiring of minority teachers, counsellors, and administrators. Occasional seminars or conferences are also organized to introduce teachers to intercultural education, but no effective change has been made in two fundamental areas, namely, curriculum and teacher training (Talbani, 1992a).

The Montreal Catholic School Commission had shown apathy in the past in enrolling non-Catholics in schools. Currently, it is slow about responding to the educational concerns of minorities. Students from so-called allophone groups comprise almost 33% of the Catholic school population (MCSC, 1992), but minority representation among teachers and staff is less than 10% (Norris, 1992).

In 1989, due to increasing minority pressure and racial tension in schools, the Catholic School Commission promised to develop a policy outline. The Commission, admitting the under-representation of minority groups in schools and school boards, stated that fundamental human rights will be respected and discrimination and under-representation in hiring

practices will be eliminated (MCSC, 1989). The Commission also brought out a policy outline for intercultural education. The major segments of the intercultural policy are: (1) to provide equal opportunities to minority groups, by hiring (minorities) in various positions in schools; (2) to involve cultural communities in school boards and in schools' activities and make their representation more equalised; (3) to sensitise teachers to the cultural diversity in schools; and (4) to undertake curriculum initiatives that would familiarise students with different cultures and to enhance cultural harmony.

The Commission has yet to formulate a comprehensive policy to implement intercultural programs. Some of the policy initiatives taken by the Catholic School Commission reflect the cultural bias against nonfrancophone students. The MCSC has quietly encouraged *de facto* segregation of minority students from Quebecers of French origin (*Québécois de souche*). Due to declining school enrolments, the School Commission brought together anglophones, francophones, and the "welcome classes" under the same school premises; however, the students of one background were kept apart from the other to avoid the infiltration of other cultures into French culture. The number of English students was also restricted due to the concern that English culture might be absorbed by French students (MacDonald, 1981).

In 1990, the Catholic School Commission sent a questionnaire to parents that included a question asking their preference regarding the segregation of students on the basis of race and ethnicity. It created an uproar in the public and, under great public pressure, the question was withdrawn from the questionnaire. The issue of segregation has its supporters in influential interest groups within the field of education. Reacting to this co-existence of students from various backgrounds, one of the most influential teachers union, *Alliance des professeurs de Montréal* and the largest teachers union, *Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec*, have proposed a 30% ceiling, or quota on the immigrant component in any school (Berthelot, 1990; Moore, 1990). The quota, to them, would "ensure quality of education for natives (francophones) and the integration of Quebec's newcomers" (Berthelot, 1990). In 1989-90, 90% of students in some elementary schools of Montreal were from minority groups, their mother tongues were neither French nor English. This is an indication that some schools in Montreal have been converted into ghettos of "visible minorities". MCSC has thus encouraged practices that contradict its policy proclamations of equality and non-discrimination.

The dilemma facing policy makers in Quebec is that, on the one hand, they want to keep French-Quebeckers free from influences of ethnic cultures and, therefore, propose segregation; on the other hand, they find that

this would make it difficult to assimilate other cultural groups into French culture (Kwaterko, 1992). As far as the nonfrancophones are concerned, they feel that the educational policies are imbued with cultural biases that impede students from cultural communities to gain equal participation in education.

### Conclusion

The policy initiatives taken in Quebec regarding intercultural education had dual purposes. Firstly, they aimed at dislodging the cultural hegemony of the English language and culture, as an attempt to arrest the process of control by anglophones over the distribution of social reward. Secondly, through reproducing and instilling French culture in minorities, they attempted to maintain and perpetuate a new discourse of power that would safeguard French interest.

The rise of nationalism in Quebec has instigated a campaign to assimilate nonfrancophone groups into French culture and has also resulted in racial and linguistic antagonism. It is unlikely that minorities pose any threat to francophone hegemony given the immense diversity among them and their small number (merely 19%, including anglophones). On the contrary, minorities fear that their rights will be threatened if the nationalist fervor controls Quebec.

If educational policy makers assume that the purpose of intercultural education is to initiate nonfrancophone students into French culture, then there is no need for any special programs, since compulsory French-language learning and the predominance of francophone culture will ensure their acculturation. This also means that the school as a cultural agency will remain under francophone control; diversity at high levels of decision making in school boards, and among teachers, policy makers, and administrators will be discouraged.

However, the increasing diversity in student population makes it imperative that the policy is redefined in such a way to meet the needs of the diverse student population so that a dialogue is created among different societal groups and French Canadians. For this very reason, it is important that such curriculum initiatives should be undertaken that can create cultural harmony and that the intercultural policy is consistently implemented in all schools so that each group is exposed to the cultural experiences of other groups. An absence of policies may create ghettos of ethnic communities, who will be useful and functional members of Quebec society, but whose cultural identities will be a private matter, with no national significance. Porter has noted that "the development of ethnic communities as psychic shelters can perpetuate ethnic stratification" (Porter, 1972). The

intercultural policy must also address the issue of racism, equality, and sharing mutual cultural experiences between the French and other societal groups.

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