

FOREWORD

GRETTA CHAMBERS *Advisory Board on English Education*

An entrenched culture of education cannot be changed overnight by government decree. The fundamental reforms to which Québec's elementary and secondary school system is now being subjected will take years to work their way into the thinking of Ministry officials, school board commissioners, school administrators, teachers and parents. To the complexities associated with change from a denominational school board structure to one based on language of instruction have been added, in quick succession, new rules for school governance and a fundamental revamping of the elementary and secondary school curricula. That all represents considerable upheaval to be absorbed in a very short space of time. Much thought, work, compromise and vision will be needed to break down or out of ingrained *modus operandi* and long standing hierarchies of power.

For students, however, nothing but good can come from the basic reforms now under way, no matter how imperfectly they are implemented at the outset. Giving schools more say in their own management cannot but bring the ethos of each school closer to its particular clientele. The opening up of the curriculum to make it reflect the academic and pedagogical needs of students rather than the rigid standards of bureaucratic uniformity is as full of promise as it is long overdue.

Curriculum reform was not undertaken on behalf of Québec's English school system. One of the systemic problems faced by English education has been the little attention paid to the specific mission and needs of the English school network by a Ministry geared to thinking in terms of the majority on the assumption that decisions will be equally suitable to the minority. It is often an uphill battle to insert the English school reality into the broad scope of Ministry policy. With the consolidation of English education under linguistic boards and the advent of school

governing boards, a new era of empowerment has opened up for those responsible for English education at the Ministry and school board levels, as well as for the schools themselves. Moreover, curriculum reform, although in no way specific to English education – except in relation to immersion which, for the first time since it became part of the curriculum of many English schools 20 years ago, is now a recognized program – has been greatly influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the culture of English education.

In talking about the process of curriculum reform, Paul Inchauspé, who chaired the Task Force on Curriculum Reform whose report (1997) *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools* provided the basis of the new curriculum, has made frequent allusions to the absence of cultural content in the overall subject matter taught in Québec's schools. Culture, he explained, was treated narrowly as pertaining to specific arts and not to the broader range of courses. As for cultural diversity, it was a non-existent concept. In Dr. Inchauspé's view, culture, in the broad sense, has been given a much larger place in the English education system, particularly at the high school level, than it has enjoyed in the model laid down by the Classical College tradition in French-speaking Québec. All that is to change.

The teaching of history is a case in point. Anglophone Québécois have long been unhappy with the little history taught in their schools. The fact that their children graduate with no world view and in ignorance of other societies and cultures goes against their criteria for what constitutes a "good education." World history will from henceforth be part of the core curriculum. As for the history of our own country and province, it will now be taught right through high school as well as being deepened and broadened to include the diversity of Québec's historical and present day realities. For many students in English schools and/or their teachers, the narrow view of their national history presented in the only mandatory history course throughout their schooling was a disincentive to establishing the subject as either relevant or interesting. The new approach to social studies, including history, is more in line with a shared reality. Québec's English-speaking community, Native Peoples and the myriad ethnic and cultural communities that have become established here are to form part of a recognized, taught and learned historical mosaic.

None of this empowerment or inclusion will be determinant without the active participation of the English-speaking community in seeing to it that the spirit of the reforms reflects in practice the social and cultural

Foreword

values of the community or communities that make up present day English Québec. The battles for inclusion are not over; they have however begun in earnest. Our school system is a privileged place to make our mark on Québec education as a whole as well as on our particular corner of it. And the volume you hold in your hands is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the system we must bend our efforts to making the most and the best of. Good reading.

REFERENCE

Task Force on Curriculum Reform. (1997). *Reaffirming the mission of our schools* (Report to the Minister of Éducation). Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation.

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