

THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN QUÉBEC: A REFORM WHOSE TIME HAS *FINALLY* COME

WILLIAM J. SMITH, WILLIAM F. FOSTER *McGill University*
HELEN M. DONAHUE *English Montreal School Board*

ABSTRACT. "If we are going to reform education, what's worth reforming?" is a question that has preoccupied policy makers, analysts and educators for the past two decades, as various "waves of reform" have swept in and out of the education scene. Among several popular targets of reform, governance has consistently been emphasized as an essential component of any comprehensive reform package. The purpose of this paper is to analyze, with the aid of a brief historical backdrop, the current reform of educational governance in Québec. In their analysis of the reform policy as revealed to date, the authors question whether the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful completion of the intended goals of reform are present or planned.

RÉSUMÉ. "Si nous devons réformer l'éducation, qu'est-ce qui vaut la peine d'être réformé?" Telle est la question qui préoccupe les décideurs, les analystes et les éducateurs depuis vingt ans, tandis que diverses "vagues de réformes" ont balayé le milieu de l'éducation. Parmi les cibles favorites d'une réforme, la gestion du système scolaire a toujours occupé une place de choix dans les projets proposés. Le but de cet article est d'analyser sur une brève toile de fond historique, la réforme actuelle de la gestion de l'éducation au Québec. Dans leur analyse de la politique de réforme telle qu'elle est apparue jusqu'ici, les auteurs se demandent si les conditions nécessaires et suffisantes pour voir aboutir les réformes envisagées sont présentes ou prévues.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

Although an ever aging population is preoccupied with public health care, education remains a priority concern on the public policy agenda. There are popular books attacking education (e.g., Lawton, 1995), those defending it (e.g., Robertson, 1998) and those simply trying to understand it (e.g., Dryden, 1995). Some people have lost faith in the public school system and argue for a free market approach to education

that will allow schools to become more efficient and successful. However, for the majority who still believe in a public school system, the question is not, "Should we leave education to the private sector?" but rather: "How can we restructure a system of education that will provide effective and efficient schooling to all the nation's children?" and: "If we are going to reform education, what's worth reforming?"

As suggested by the Editorial introducing this special issue, various "waves of reform" have attempted to provide answers to these questions. As noted by the editors, some reform efforts have focussed on standards, others on curriculum, teacher education or classroom instruction. Among these different foci, educational governance is one theme that has received considerable attention. Governance reform tends to focus on such matters as: the powers and duties of the ministry of education, school boards, schools and other bodies; the size and structures of these bodies; responsibility for the funding of education, control of curriculum, and the like. The purpose of this paper is to analyze, with the aid of a brief historical backdrop, the current and future directions of the governance reform of education in Québec. However, contemporary thinking on education reform recognizes that the reform of any given element is only meaningful in light of what is happening to all the other inter-connected components of the system, hence the emphasis on *systemic* reform (see e.g., Lusi, 1997; Caldwell & Spinks, 1998).

Background

Since the founding of Canada in 1867, the constitutional framework for education has been contained in section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. Except for specialized domains where the Federal Government has authority (e.g., First Nations), section 93 gives the provinces exclusive jurisdiction over education, subject to certain restrictions. In brief, these restrictions arise from sub-sections (1) to (4) which prohibit legislation which is prejudicial to the denominational rights which Catholics and Protestants had by law in 1867. Because section 93 incorporates rights by reference to pre-Confederation legislation, it has always been a matter of interpretation – and controversy – as to what rights are actually protected (Smith, 1994). Contrary to popular belief, Québec did not have a province-wide dual-denominational school system in 1867. Such a system was a post-Confederation creation enacted in 1869. Had this legislation been enacted before 1867, as originally intended, all denominational school boards would have been

protected under section 93. However, the only constitutional protection actually afforded was to Catholics and Protestants in Montréal and Québec City and to Catholics and Protestant minorities elsewhere in the province to dissent from participating in the majority system.¹

For approximately 100 years these constitutional *nuances* were of little practical concern to anyone as education was administered by the Catholic and Protestant Committees of the Council of Public Instruction, direction from the State was minimal and Catholic and Protestant school boards functioned in "splendid isolation" from each other and the State. This state of peaceful denominational coexistence came to an abrupt end with the advent of the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s,² and the beginning of educational reform in this province. The major strands of this reform movement and the changes in the constitutional framework which pre-dated the current reform will be briefly described below.

The first strand of reform is concerned with overall centralization or decentralization of authority, traditionally between the Government and school boards, with schools being subsumed under the latter. During the Quiet Revolution, the most significant governance reform was the re-creation of the Ministry of Education [MEQ], which had not existed in Québec since 1875. If education was previously the preserve of the Church, it now belonged to the State which henceforth would decide where we were going and how we would get there. Despite policy talk to the contrary (e.g., MEQ, 1978), this centralist transformation was to characterize Québec education until the present day.

The second major strand of reform has been about school board restructuring. Although the regionalization and consolidation of existing school boards recommended by the Parent Commission³ was accomplished without too much difficulty,⁴ the fundamental change it proposed – replacing Catholic and Protestant school boards with denominationally neutral "unified" boards – did not proceed at all. The quest for unified boards was soon abandoned and replaced by a call for linguistic school boards, a move that obtained some measure of consensus in the Catholic community but not in the Protestant community, which was loath to give up the protection of minority rights provided by section 93.

It is during this stage that a new thread of reform was woven, that of the school as a major locus of authority. This orientation was developed in a policy paper, *The Québec School: A Responsible Force in the Community* (MEQ, 1982). However, the idea of a significant increase in school

autonomy was an idea ahead of its time and it provoked far more controversy than consensus. As a result of all this conflict, no change in school board or school structures would occur for the next fifteen years,⁵ even when a new *Education Act* (Bill 107) adopted in 1988 provided for such change,⁶ and was sanctioned by the courts.⁷

The third thrust of reform foreseen by the Parent Commission was the participation of parents in the life of the school. Legislation mandating school committees and a parents' committee at the level of the school board was adopted in 1971.⁸ In 1979, the Government amended the *Education Act* to provide for the formation of a voluntary "orientation committee" for each school.⁹ It is interesting to note that the orientation committee did not attract enough interest to become widespread and in 1988 when the Government introduced a new *Education Act*, it transformed this committee into a mandatory structure.

While these strands of reform were unfolding, a significant change to the constitutional framework was enacted, namely the patriation of the Constitution to Canada and the entrenchment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the Constitution [*Canadian Charter*]. The *Canadian Charter* applies to both the legislation and government action of the Government of Canada and the provincial governments and provides for a wide variety of human rights and freedoms.¹⁰ Of particular interest for our purpose is the right to minority language education (section 23), which provides for English language education to eligible Anglophones in Québec and French language education to eligible Francophones in the rest of Canada.¹¹ To date, section 23 has been of primary interest to Francophones outside Québec but this may now change, given the current reform of education in Québec.

CURRENT REFORM OF GOVERNANCE

In 1995, the Government launched a massive "grass roots" consultation about the state of education under the direction of the Commission for the Estates General on Education. The Commission's final report (1996) recommended ten priority actions, including the creation of a non-denominational system unfettered by section 93, and the redistribution of powers to increase local decision making. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now say that the time had *finally* come to bring the foregoing strands of reform together.

The recommendations of the Estates General were taken up by the Minister and published in *A New Direction for Success: Policy Statement and Plan of Action* (MEQ, 1997). This led to a trilogy of legislative

action: a constitutional amendment; the implementation of linguistic school boards; and a new division of powers among the key stakeholders of the system.

Constitutional amendment

In the past, proposed school board restructuring had always assumed a "constitutional status quo" which meant that some type of denominational structures would have to be maintained in Montréal and Québec City, with the right to dissent provided elsewhere. The purpose of a constitutional amendment was to permit linguistic school board reform without the maintenance of such parallel denominational structures.

After some discussion, the National Assembly unanimously adopted the following resolution in support of the Constitutional amendment (unanimity having been secured by including a declaration in the preamble to the resolution affirming the rights of the English speaking minority in Québec): "Paragraphs (1) to (4) of section 93 do not apply to Québec" (*Constitutional Amendment, 1997 [Québec]*). However, as will be discussed below, consensus in the National Assembly did not mean consensus in the community. The enactment of the proposed amendment meant that section 23 would henceforth provide the sole constitutional framework for minority education in Québec. Accordingly, the provincial government's "exclusive authority" to pass legislation with respect to education under section 93 is now only constrained by provisions of the *Canadian Charter*, especially the minority language rights found in section 23.

Many Anglophone groups, especially the Anglo-Catholics, opposed the amendment but for diverse reasons. Some feared that section 23 of the *Canadian Charter* did not provide as strong protection to the minority group as did section 93 (albeit that the first referred to a linguistic minority while the latter envisaged a denominational minority). Some did not want to trade their denominational rights for the sake of linguistic boards which they felt could be implemented without constitutional change (Boudreau, 1999). Still others felt they could use the Government's desire to pass the amendment as leverage to secure the application of the section 23(1)(a) which provides for eligibility to minority language education on the basis of "first language learned and still understood" of the parent.¹²

In 1992, the Task Force on English Education recommended that "access to education in English be widened at least to include any child who was being educated in English or who has a parent from an English-speaking part of the world" (p. 7). Although the Government imple-

mented most of the recommendations put forward by the Task Force, it never responded to this request and no change in policy was forthcoming during the debate on the constitutional amendment. As we will see below regarding the election of commissioners to the new language-based school boards, any matter affecting, or even perceived to possibly affect, the protection of the French language is not a matter to be trifled with.

Ottawa clearly supported the proposed amendment but convoked the Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and Senate to hold public hearings, something Québec had refused to do. Upon the termination of the hearings, the Joint Committee concluded that despite some opinions to the contrary, overall, it appears that "there is a consensus in Quebec society supporting this change" (*Report of the Special Joint Committee*, 1997, p. 6). The Federal Government, anxious for a justification to move ahead, proceeded with the passage of the amendment, which received Royal assent in December 1997. Smith, Foster and Donahue (1999a) offer the following observation on the consensual basis for the constitutional amendment (p. 116):

Defining a consensus is never an easy task. It is not meant to signify unanimity, nor is it a simple majority of 50% plus one. It may signify agreement among key stakeholder groups - formally recognized associations - or it may signify convergence of opinion at the grass roots. Time will tell perhaps whether the consensus which the Special Joint Committee concluded existed was real or imagined and, if real, whether it was predicated on a continuance of denominational rights within the new linguistic school boards.

In any event, the Government of Québec was wasting no time debating the consensual basis of its action; even before the constitutional amendment was passed it had adopted new legislation to implement linguistic school boards.

Restructuring of school boards

The *Act to Amend the Education Act, the Act Respecting School Elections and Other Legislative Provisions [Linguistic School Boards Act]* (1997) eliminated all existing denominational school boards, including the four confessional boards in Montréal and Québec City, and the remaining dissentient school boards outside these cities, and replaced them with a new network of French-language and English-language school boards. The Act provided for the implementation of the new system as of July 1, 1998, just one year after it came into force. In the interim

period, provision was made for the establishment of "provisional councils" and the transfer and accreditation of staff. As a result of these changes the Québec school board map took on a completely new face as 60 French language school boards and 9 English language boards replaced the previous 156 denominational boards. This reorganization also accomplished a secondary aim of this reform, the consolidation of existing boards.

There was only one main point of contention in the *Linguistic School Boards Act* when it was introduced in the National Assembly, namely the definition of who qualified as an elector for an English-language school board. The original version of the Act restricted electoral qualification to persons who were qualified for admission to English schooling under the *Charter of the French Language* [Bill 101] or whose children so qualified. The Government defended these provisions as being consistent with the *Canadian Charter* (i.e., that electoral qualifications followed entitlement to minority language instruction).

After considerable opposition from the Anglophone community, the final version of the Act removed the Bill 101 criterion but the law still did not leave the two school systems on an equal footing. In brief, electors with children in school are inscribed on the electoral list for the language board in question. Everyone else can either vote for the Francophone or the Anglophone school board. However, all such electors are initially inscribed on the electoral list for the Francophone school board. This means that anyone who wishes to vote for the Anglophone school board must apply to be transferred from the Francophone list to the Anglophone list. Furthermore, the need to assure Francophone nationalists that Bill 101 was not affected led to the inclusion of a declaratory statement in section 1.1 of the *Act Respecting School Elections* to the effect that the above provision in no way modified the provisions of Bill 101.

With the exception of the electoral eligibility, this succinct and simple description of school board reform reflects the ease of transformation in some areas but masks the profundity of change in others. Prior to the transformation, many Catholic school boards provided only French instruction as several Protestant boards provided only English instruction. In these cases, the implementation of linguistic boards did not cause any outflow or inflow of students or staff, except to reflect any boundary changes arising from geographic consolidation. However, in other areas, especially on the Island of Montréal, the transformation

signaled significant changes in both student and staff populations. In many cases, the new linguistic school boards were created from several denominational boards, each with their policies on integration, French immersion, transportation and so on. Schools found themselves inside a new structure that to many was unfamiliar. Given that the former Catholic and Protestant school boards provided the territorial basis for the establishment of the new French and English language school boards, one can speculate that the French Protestants and the English Catholics faced greater obstacles in integrating into the new linguistic structures.

The ease of implementation of linguistic structures has been hampered to some extent by the continuation of the debate regarding the place of religion inside these non-denominational structures. Although some groups may have supported the constitutional amendment and the linguistic restructuring of school boards on the understanding that religion would remain an integral part of the school (if not the school board), this was not a shared understanding with the Government or other groups. The Minister made this explicit before the Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and Senate,¹³ and appointed a Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec, chaired by Jean-Pierre Proulx of the Université de Montréal to investigate this matter fully. The Task Force report (1999) has just been released and has already created quite a stir.

In brief, the authors have recommended the elimination of all denominational privilege heretofore granted only to Catholics and Protestants.¹⁴ Without going so far as to say that there is no place for religion in schools, the Task Force insists that any such place must be respectful of the rights of all members of the school community, not just Catholics and Protestants. The report is clearly grounded in a human rights perspective (Task Force, 1999, p. 71):

Our society is also based on human rights and freedoms. We will therefore have to choose between a continuation of the system in which the rights and privileges of the Catholic and Protestant tradition take precedence in the religious instruction dispensed in schools, over freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and the right to equality. It will be necessary to clarify, once and for all, the relationship between human rights and the right of parents to choose religious instruction for their children in keeping with their beliefs.

The report provides a reasoned, comprehensive and constructive treatment of a difficult policy issue. However, *reason* has never been even a

necessary, let alone sufficient, condition to guide policy action. Those groups that opposed the constitutional amendment as well as those that supported it on the basis of the denominational status quo in schools have denounced the report. In a recent address at McGill's Faculty of Education, former Minister of Education Claude Ryan (1999) severely criticized the report and questioned the apparent change in attitude of the Government.¹⁵ Those who supported the constitutional amendment in its own right have applauded it as the logical conclusion of the current reform of governance and organization. For the moment, the newly appointed Minister of Education has remained silent except to promise that hearings will be held and that no legislative action will take effect before September 2001.¹⁶

These problems are exacerbated in the English language school boards where declining enrolments and a plethora of small schools mean that many of the latter will face closure. It is understandable that small schools might feel threatened in this new environment, especially if they believe – rightly or wrongly – that they are being targeted for closure because of their denominational status. Many school boards have shown considerable sensitivity towards such apprehended problems but there is evidence of some schools feeling that they are being treated in a roughshod manner. Within individual schools, school staffs also know that as the assignment and transfer of school staff occurs, as a result of some programmatic but largely demographic changes, more upheaval is yet to come. It is in this context, in part, that schools learned that the very governance of schools was also about to change.

Division of powers

In the same year the *Linguistic School Boards Act* was passed, legislation with a similar name, *Act to Amend the Education Act and Various Legislative Provisions [Education Amendment Act]* (1997), but with a very different purpose, was also adopted. That purpose was articulated in the above mentioned policy paper (MEQ, 1997, p. 14):

One of the main levers in the process of ensuring that as many students as possible achieve success is the capacity of individual schools to adapt their services to the needs and characteristics of the populations they serve. If each institution is truly to be able to exercise its responsibilities, it must be able to make and act on pedagogical, administrative and budgetary decisions. This calls for a new division of responsibilities between schools, school boards and the MEQ. The Education Act will be amended accordingly.

However, contrary to the *Linguistic School Boards Act*, although the purpose of the *Education Amendment Act* is clear, it is much more difficult to summarize its provisions succinctly (for details, see Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999a). Although the overall governance framework remains the same with authority exercised at the central (MEQ), intermediate (school board) and local (school) levels, the exercise of authority at the school level changes significantly, as does the distribution of powers between school boards and schools.

The "school governing board" is the most visible symbol of the current reform in Québec. It replaces the former "orientation committee," a largely advisory school level body in the previous system (*Education Act*, ss. 42-73). The new governing board is composed mainly of parents and school staff in equal numbers, plus two non-voting community representatives and, at the senior secondary level, two non-voting student members. The parents are elected at an annual meeting of parents held in September, which is also charged with establishing, if it wishes, a "parent participation organization" (*Education Act*, ss. 96-96.4). The latter is meant to replace the former "school committee," another school level advisory body. Provision is also made for the formation of a "student committee" at the senior secondary level (*Education Act*, ss. 96.5-96.7). The latter two bodies exercise support roles by parents and students respectively, but the authority to govern the school is vested solely in the governing board, whose powers will be discussed below.

The other critical feature of the new legislation is the role of the principal and the balancing of roles between the principal and the governing board (see *Education Act*, ss. 96.12-96.26 for the powers and functions of the principal & ss. 74-95 for those of the governing board). First of all, the Act provides for three modes of decision making for governing boards: one where the governing board "adopts" a proposal (e.g., the budget) but it is subject to the approval of the school board; a second where the governing board "approves" a proposal made by the principal (e.g., school rules) at the request of the governing board; and a third, under which the governing board makes decisions without the need of a proposal from the principal or for school board approval. Of the three modes, the second is the most common used in the Act. Under it, the governing board is only *empowered* to approve or reject the principal's proposal; it cannot amend it or substitute its own proposal. If the governing board does not choose to approve the principal's proposal, it must return the proposal to him or her for further consideration. It should also be noted, however, that if the principal fails to

make a proposal within 15 days of a request by the governing board, the latter may act without it.

In addition to serving as the "lead" for initiating, through the proposals referred to above, much of the substance of governing board decision making, the principal is assigned a number of matters for which he or she is responsible independent of the governing board (e.g., rules governing the placement of students) (see generally *Education Act*, s. 96.15). However, both when the principal is deciding matters within his or her authority and when he or she is forwarding proposals to the governing board for its consideration, the principal's decisions or proposals may only be made following consultation with teachers or the school staff, depending on the issue involved. Nevertheless, the principal is empowered to act contrary to the wishes of the teaching staff but must give reasons for such a decision; the principal may also act if the staff fail to participate in accordance with pre-established procedure.

The governing board is responsible for the development and implementation of the school's educational project, which it may be remembered, sets forth the specific aims and objectives of the school and can be viewed as that which gives a school a distinctive identity, character or ethos (*Education Act*, ss. 37 & 74). However, this power is circumscribed in several ways (Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999a, p. 148). The school board remains in charge of its entire physical plant and allocates buildings to schools to which it then issues annual "deeds of establishment." School boards play a key role in the attribution or withdrawal of official school "denominational status" (see discussion on the place of religion above). School boards, not schools, set school enrolment criteria, which are now generally limited to dealing with excess applications for a given number of places.¹⁷ Finally, school boards control the designation of the educational services which will be offered in each of their schools. It remains to be seen to what extent in practice these parameters restrict the desires of schools to set their own course.

In terms of course offerings, the governing board now determines the time to be allocated to each subject offered in the school, the "overall approach" to the enrichment or adaptation by teachers of programs of study, and the overall approach to the development of local courses of study (specific courses are approved by the principal). All of these powers are exercised within provincially set parameters which also set the framework for school organization (vertical and horizontal organization, school calendar, timetable, etc.).¹⁸ The governing board has

almost nothing to say about school organization; some formal discretionary power is vested in the school board; most discretion in practice is exercised by the principal. (See generally *Education Act*, ss. 84-89).

From within the authorized list of textbooks and instructional material authorized by the Minister, the school principal, upon the advice of teachers and after consulting the school governing board, is responsible for selecting the actual textbooks and materials to be used. The principal is likewise responsible for approving, upon the advice of the teachers, the criteria to be followed for the implementation of new instructional methods. In terms of student evaluation, the school has a major role to play in the evaluation of students, its major constraints being ministry exams, automatic promotion at the elementary level, and ministry standards for secondary certification. This school level responsibility is vested in the principal and the teaching staff, with the school governing board having no formal role to play. (See generally *Education Act*, ss. 96.12-96-18).

The school has been delegated almost no responsibility for human resources. All major human resource parameters are set provincially in regulations and negotiated agreements between the provincial employer group and the various unions. These regulations and agreements contain salary scales, major benefits and working conditions. The school board is the employer of *all* school board and school personnel and some collective bargaining does occur at this level. School board personnel, including principals, perform their functions under the authority of the director general but principals have various responsibilities delegated by law respecting the management of school staff. The only human resource function specifically assigned to the school governing board is the right to be consulted by the school board on the criteria for the selection of the principal (*Education Act*, s. 79). However, the school does have the right, subject to certain conditions, to contract for goods and services "in the name of the school board" for a wide range of purposes, but not educational services required by the regulations (*Education Act*, ss. 90-93).

School responsibility for financial resources is quite another matter (see generally *Education Act*, ss. 66, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96.24, 275). Following consultation of the parents' committee, the school board must make public the *objectives*, *principles* and *criteria* respecting: (1) the allocation of *revenues to schools* – grants, taxation proceeds and other revenues; and (2) the amount kept for the *school board's own uses*. The school

board must then distribute to its schools, *all operating funds*, except the amount retained for its own needs and those of its committees. This must be done "in an equitable manner and in consideration of social and economic disparities and of the needs expressed by the [schools]."

The school sets its own budget which must be approved by the school board. The school board only has the authority to approve or disapprove the budget, it does not have authority to make any changes to it. The school is allowed to raise funds but these must be deposited in an account maintained by the school board which acts as a banker for itself and its schools. In terminating this section, it is important to note the nexus between the budgetary and staffing processes (Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999b, p. 16):

While the budgetary process is unfolding, the staffing process is likewise proceeding, in accordance with the provisions of applicable collective agreements. This latter process is a complex one, especially if declining student enrolment and/or changing program requirements result in a number of "surplus" teachers.... School budgetary choices must take account of school board obligations to teachers and other personnel. Nevertheless, the latter's obligations cannot simply be used as an excuse to deny schools the budgetary authority they have been granted by law.

As suggested by this statement, staffing *requirements* drive budgets but *available* resources drive staffing. Collaboration is obviously essential when different stakeholders have been given responsibility for each half of this symbiotic relationship.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to analyze, with the aid of a brief historical backdrop, the current and future directions of the governance reform of education in Québec. The historical overview permitted us to situate the current reform in context. In particular, we have seen how some of the current reforms completed some reforms begun thirty years ago, some complemented older reforms and others are best viewed as new strands in the ongoing history of reform.

The current reform of governance and organization completes the school board reorganization process that emerged – but differed – from the Parent commission during the Quiet Revolution. Whereas the Parent Commission envisaged unified school boards, the elusive consensus that emerged was for language-based structures. However, it has

taken thirty years for that consensus to become solid enough to permit reform to proceed. Section 93 denominational rights, the symbol of resistance to reform, have been removed. However, reactions to the publication of the recent Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec (1999) have revealed the fragility of that consensus. Ironically, it is not the linguistic school board structures that will be subject to re-examination or, *in extremis*, reversal; it is the school that potentially will be subject to renewed battles fought on the basis of religion.

The devolution of powers to schools picks up on the threads of parental involvement from the 1970s and the school-based focus of the early 1980s. However, this reform is also very much a creature of the contemporary education scene, and its world wide combination of school-based autonomy and accountability for increased educational performance of both institutions (schools) and individuals (students and staff). Of all the various strands of the current reform, this one is arguably the most profound – if it “sticks.” Fuller and Snyder (1992, p. 235) describe the difficulty of change penetrating the school as a problem of the “sticky school institution” – it is difficult for change to penetrate, but once it does, it sticks for years to come. It is too early to tell how well this reform is sticking and the first probable indicator of success will be the rates of participation of parents and staff in September 1999 for the second general elections of members of school governing boards. In the meantime, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the lack of support provided to date for these fledgling structures has already placed them at risk.

The necessary and sufficient conditions of support for reform concern not only the reform of governance discussed above but also the reform of curriculum discussed by Henchey in this issue and other aspects of reform in progress. It is not possible within the scope of this paper to even outline what must take place in order to support the reform of governance and these other elements. Suffice it to say that a “multiple-level perspective” and “integrative implementation strategies” are essential, especially when one is seeking internal (school) acceptance and adaptation of external (ministry) policy. The former refers to combining top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. The latter recognizes that “the school is embedded in an educational system that has to work collaboratively or symbiotically if the highest degrees of quality are to be achieved” (Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993, p. 42).

Recent work by Caldwell and Hayward (1998), Hopkins (1996), Levin and Riffel (1997), Mortimore (1998), Stoll and Meyers (1998) and others provide guidance for the kind of support which schools need to implement and sustain change, especially in light of the new school-based governance structures. The ministry policy documents published to date do not reflect a commitment to supporting systemic change. As noted in our earlier submission on the draft legislation preceding the *Education Amendment Act* (Foster & Smith, 1997, pp. 11-12):

Support for school boards and schools must be forthcoming from the MEQ, which itself must undergo a transformation in order both to model and provide leadership for the broader process of change. The MEQ also has a crucial role to play in facilitating partnerships. No one can hope to bring about significant change working in isolation. Building positive and practical links among different members of the educational community is an essential step in promoting change.

The debate on any aspect of reform, such as governance, must also consider context and purpose. As Scharf and Langlois (1995) remind us: "The debates often ignore the philosophical, educational and historical contexts within which change is being contemplated" (p. 85). So much intended reform has failed because policy makers have assumed that because an innovation has merit (at least in their eyes) it can simply be implemented *deus ex machina* in a given milieu without further ado. Similarly, there is often a failure to ask ourselves *why* we are effecting a given reform and what *results* do we expect to gain from it.

If we fail in this regard, we risk detaching the debate on governance from the purpose of education. Thus, for example, if education is meant to promote local community development and foster democratic values, then both the parameters and practice of governance should support these aims. In short: "We need to ask ourselves how school board structures can support school success and what criteria we will use to judge if our efforts are likely to have any positive impact on teaching and learning" (Smith & Lusthaus, 1994, p. 2). As suggested at the beginning of this article, if we are going to reform education, we should pay attention to what is worth reforming, or, as Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) put it, keep focussed on "what's worth fighting for."

NOTES

¹ At that time, there were Catholic and Protestant school boards in Montréal and Québec City, boards that are commonly referred to as "confessional boards." Outside these two cities, the province was divided into school municipalities, each containing a common

school board, that is, one whose schools were open to all students - Catholics and Protestants and others alike. Common school boards were legally non-denominational, even though they were often denominational in character reflecting the population they served. The law provided for the right for the religious minority - Protestant or Catholic - in a given municipality to dissent and form their own school district.

² The "Quiet Revolution" is the term given to the period of rapid modernization in Québec society in the 1960s.

³ The Parent Commission is the name usually given to the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education, after its chairperson, Monseigneur Alphonse-Marie Parent. The Commission report (1963-66) remains the most influential document in the modern history of Québec education reform.

⁴ Regionalization refers to the creation of regional school boards responsible for secondary education, while leaving local boards to look after elementary education. Consolidation refers to the reduction in the number of existing school boards from approximately 1600 in the 1960s to 256 in the year preceding the current reform.

⁵ In 1983, the Government introduced Bill 40 but it died on the order paper. In 1984, the Government adopted an *Act Respecting Public Elementary and Secondary Education* but it was successfully challenged in court for not sufficiently respecting the denominational rights provided for in section 93 (*Québec Association of Protestant School Boards v. Québec* (A.G.), 1985).

⁶ The Act provided for the transformation of common denominational school boards into linguistic ones but maintained the "confessional" boards in Montréal and Québec City, and the right to form "dissentient" boards outside these cities. All of the provisions relevant to this transformation had been left in abeyance until the courts ruled on the constitutionality of the law.

⁷ In *Reference Re Education Act of Québec* (1993), the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed the constitutionality of the Act. However, despite this ruling, nothing changed. The maintenance of "confessional" and "dissentient" boards in the Act created a parallel structure of old and new boards, with overlapping jurisdictions, which was viewed as especially problematic on the Island of Montréal. Consequently, school board reform, although sanctioned by the courts, did not proceed.

⁸ The purpose of the school committee was to encourage parental and community involvement in the school with a view to improving the educational services provided. The parents' committee was to represent the views of parents at the level of the school board.

⁹ This committee, composed of both staff and parents, together with the principal, was given various responsibilities for the implementation of the school's "educational project" and, thereby, a role in shaping the direction or *orientation* of the school. The amendment defined the "educational project" of a school as "a procedure by which a school defines its specific objectives, drafts and carries out a plan of action and revises the plan periodically with the participation of the pupils, the parents, and the staff of the school and of the school board" (*Education Act*, s. 1(30)).

¹⁰ The entrenchment of *Canadian Charter* rights conflicted with the protection of Catholic and Protestant rights under section 93, essentially because such rights were denied to members of other faiths. Accordingly, section 29 of the *Canadian Charter* states that section 93 rights are maintained notwithstanding the provisions of the *Canadian Charter*.

¹¹ Eligibility under section 23 is generally granted to the children of Canadian citizens under one of two circumstances: (a) the "first language learned and still understood" of the parent is the minority language in question; or (b) the parent was educated at the elementary level in Canada in the minority language in question. The first of these two

bases does not have any application in Québec at the present time. By virtue of section 59 of the *Canadian Charter* this right will not come into force in Québec until the Government of Québec gives its consent.

¹² See above, note 11.

¹³ See statement cited in Special Joint Committee report, 1997, p. 37.

¹⁴ Denominational privilege included both those which flowed from section 93 and those included in the *Education Act* by virtue of government policy. The latter (e.g., Catholic and Protestant denominational status accorded to schools but denied to other faiths) were shielded from constitutional challenge by the use of the “notwithstanding” clause (s. 33) of the *Canadian Charter* (see Smith & Foster, 1999).

¹⁵ Ryan compares a ministerial statement made in March 1997 (cited in Task Force report [1999, pp. 251-253]) which can be read as advocating a cautious incremental approach to change, and the mandate of the Task Force (reproduced on p. 255) which is open-ended, in support of his claim that there has been a change in ministerial orientation. While we would agree with Ryan that the former statement is much more circumspect in its language, it does not, we assert, make any commitment for the long-term maintenance of the status quo. If there is a promise in the statement it concerns parental choice regarding religious instruction in accordance with section 41 of the *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (see Smith & Foster, 1999).

¹⁶ The Minister has also stated that the use of the “notwithstanding” clause in the *Canadian Charter*, that in the past has been used to protect denominational privilege from a *Canadian Charter* attack, will be renewed for two years to allow the current debate to be concluded.

¹⁷ “Specific project” schools wishing to control admission of its clientele must have ministerial approval before the school board can adopt such criteria.

¹⁸ Vertical organization refers to organization of instruction across grades, i.e., grade levels, cycles of instruction etc.; horizontal organization refers to instructional arrangements at a given grade/age level, i.e., class size, streaming, etc.

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WILLIAM J. SMITH is the Director of the Office of Research on Educational Policy (OREP) and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Studies, McGill University, Montréal, Canada.

WILLIAM F. FOSTER is the Sir William Macdonald Professor of Law in the Faculty of Law and the Senior Research Associate of OREP, McGill University, Montréal, Canada.

HELEN DONAHUE is a teacher with the English Montreal School Board and a Research Associate of the OREP.

WILLIAM J. SMITH est directeur du Bureau de recherche sur la politique scolaire (OREP) et professeur adjoint au département d'études éducationnelles à l'Université McGill, Montréal, Canada.

WILLIAM F. FOSTER est titulaire de la chaire Sir William Macdonald de droit à la faculté de droit et associé de recherche senior à l'OREP, Université McGill, Montréal, Canada.

HELEN DONAHUE est enseignante au sein de la Commission scolaire anglophone de Montréal et associé de recherche à l'OREP.

WHAT IS TAUGHT, WHAT IS LEARNED – THE CORE OF EDUCATION REFORM

The core of any systemic reform of education is – or ought to be – curriculum, what is *taught* in the classrooms throughout the system, and even more importantly, what is *learned* in those classrooms. In the current restructuring of education in Québec, curriculum reform is being guided by a ministry policy paper that was largely inspired by the Task Force on Curriculum Reform chaired by Paul Inchauspée:*

More than ever, daily life now requires that all members of society have the intellectual skills needed to use technology and various media and to deal with organizations.

The economic vitality and prosperity of a country are no longer contingent on whether or not it possesses raw materials. With the advent of international competition, knowledge, along with scientific and technological expertise, has become the key to wealth and power.

The exponential growth in knowledge, the speed at which knowledge is renewed and the explosive rate of technological innovation have led to the emergence of the "knowledge based society." To feel at ease in this society, every individual needs to master more knowledge and to be able to assimilate new knowledge on an ongoing basis.

* Task Force on Curriculum Reform, *Reaffirming the mission of our schools* (Report to the Minister of Education) (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1997) , pp. 13-14.