

QUÉBEC TEACHERS: SUBMERGED IN A SEA OF REFORM

MICHAEL WIENER *Laurier Teachers Union*

ABSTRACT. Following a decade of top-down reform in which teachers were identified as the problem, rather than the solution, the current generation of Québec teachers has reacted with predictable skepticism and mistrust to the current wave of reforms. The success of government initiatives to revamp the curriculum and decentralize significant authority to schools hinges upon building a new working relationship with teacher organizations.

RÉSUMÉ. Après une dizaine d'années de réforme descendante où les enseignants étaient présentés comme le problème plutôt que comme la solution, la génération actuelle de enseignants du Québec a réagi avec une dose prévisible de scepticisme et de méfiance à l'égard de la nouvelle vague de réformes. Le succès des initiatives gouvernementales visant à remanier le cursus et à déléguer d'importants pouvoirs aux écoles dépend de l'établissement d'une nouvelle relation de travail avec les associations d'enseignants.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

It seems impossible to discuss contemporary education without debating calls for reform, change, transition, or even revolution. Such has been the case for several decades, and particularly in Québec, where pedagogy takes a back seat to structural and governance questions. It is often inferred that this obsession with change is the result of massive and ongoing public dissatisfaction with the public education system. In response, it has become an article of faith among Québec's teachers that their achievements have been neither recognized nor rewarded, while at the same time they are held accountable for all shortcomings, including those beyond their control. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that teachers have developed considerable suspicion, even cynicism, about

reform and reformers. How could it be otherwise, when reform is experienced as an unending, overlapping succession of dubious improvements generated by politicians and social critics, and only rarely by fellow classroom practitioners?

Teachers understand that we live in a knowledge-based economy whose growth is dependent upon the nurturing of human capital. Clearly it is the school system – not the family, the church, or private enterprise – that has inherited primary responsibility for the development of our youth into fully functioning, productive citizens, yet little honour, and less reward, is attached to this great responsibility. While all professions are in some way responsible for providing a public service, even when serving private clients, teaching is probably the most public profession in the sense of being exposed to societal scrutiny. The result is that educational change is externally driven to an extent that is qualitatively different from other professions such as law, engineering, medicine, or accounting, where the evolution of professional practices is more a function of research, expansion of professional knowledge, and the application of new technologies. For teachers to obtain the full professional recognition they deserve, the challenge will be to become the proprietors of reform, the agents of change dictated by collegial knowledge, rather than the applicators of imposed innovations.

Background

Schools are the interface between information and knowledge, technology and culture. The teacher is the mediator between change and continuity and is called upon to distinguish between what is ephemeral and what is essential, thereby preparing students to make such distinctions for themselves.

Being on a boundary that shifts from one day to the next is never comfortable and the lack of societal consensus about the role of the school and the values that it should transmit renders the teacher's task all the more difficult. In an effort to extract a consensus about what schools ought to be doing, the Estates General report (Commission of the Estates General, 1996) was reduced to the broadest generalization: students must learn to learn, learn to be, learn to do, and learn to live together.

Such an abstract declaration falls far short of a mission statement and does little to address the diverse expectations that are held by the public and their representatives. With those expectations come demands for accountability and transparency that now appear in provisions of the

Education Act regarding governing boards which, as public bodies, must now publish annual reports that cover the administrative, financial, and pedagogical aspects of the school's operation. The demand for local accountability is a reflection of a broader accountability that is fully understandable, given that expenditures on public education constitute the second largest portion of the provincial budget after health and social services. But the lack of consensus on what a school should do gives rise to the puzzle of how to judge the extent to which the school system is meeting its objectives. Do we rely on end-of-cycle tests? The success rate or the average grade on provincial secondary examinations? Is the dropout rate the key? The percentage of high school graduates who obtain university degrees? Are comparisons, based on standardized tests, of Québec students with their age cohorts in other provinces, or other countries, valid?

If, as a society, we cannot agree on desired outcomes or ways of measuring their attainment, how can we generate a consensus on the changes that are required to reach meaningful goals? We have endured two decades of nearly continuous reform and, therefore, continuous turmoil, leaving many educators to wonder if there exists, or if there ever existed, a coherent plan with clear objectives.

In this paper, written from the perspective of a public school teacher who has been mandated over many years to represent the opinions and expectations of his colleagues, I intend to examine contemporary reforms of the Québec education system including curriculum, teacher education and certification, and governance of public schools. I contend that this package of reforms is coherent in its orientation. In the Summary and Conclusion, the implications for classroom practice, the impact on the role of the teacher, and the consequences for teaching as a profession will be examined.

CURRICULUM REFORM

Courses of study and school organization

Drawing impetus from the Estates General (Commission of the Estates General, 1996) and the Task Force on Curriculum Reform (1997), Québec schools will be asked to implement sweeping changes based not only on new program content but on a new philosophy emphasizing the development of essential skills across diverse subjects and throughout the five cycles of elementary-secondary education (Ministère de l'Éducation [MEQ], 1997).

To accommodate this reform, teachers are expected to broaden their specialization so that at the elementary level, henceforth divided into three two-year cycles, it becomes the norm for a group of students to remain with the same homeroom teacher for two years. At the secondary level, teachers emerging from university are expected to specialize in at least two different areas and all teachers are to receive training in managing an inclusive classroom accommodating students with various types of physical challenges and learning disabilities.

At this point, the curriculum is still very much a "work in progress." Full implementation of the elementary program of studies is scheduled for 2002-2003. At the secondary level, full implementation is targeted for 2005-2006.

Thus, it is clearly impossible to comment on any content specifics. The underlying philosophy of leaving about 25% of the instructional time unallocated has a certain allure, at the same time that it imposes an additional responsibility – upon teachers both individually and collectively – to devise complementary programs of enrichment and adaptation. In practice, for the English school system, it is likely that much of this nominally unallocated time will be absorbed by some form of additional second language teaching, particularly at the elementary level, if history is any guide.

While it is encouraging that the existence of French Immersion is at long last acknowledged by the MEQ, the historical lack of Ministry focus on preparing students to successfully negotiate the transition from the world of school to the world of work is an ongoing concern. A number of Protestant school boards have indicated some interesting projects aimed at students deemed unlikely to continue formal academic studies after high school. Often, these programs have included work-study arrangements with local enterprises, conceived to increase the employability of these students. Similar comments could be made about initiatives to create alternative programs and schools catering to students who have either dropped out of regular schools or who were judged at imminent risk of doing so. There is little currently emanating from the MEQ that indicates a serious interest in consolidating or supporting these local innovations.

The new curriculum is conceived to be less prescriptive in its details than its predecessor. Objectives will be streamlined to allow schools to focus on learning outcomes that will be measured more frequently and rigorously. Generally, schools will have more flexibility, to be exercised

at the level of the governing board, to determine appropriate time allocations, to truncate some programs and to introduce others that are essentially local, or even school-specific, in character. What is clear, however, is that the challenge of developing these complementary programs and finding or creating attractive and technologically current teaching materials and resources will fall to teachers, individually or collectively. While the *Education Act* gives principals the responsibility to take pedagogical leadership in this regard, principals have not been adequately prepared to act in this capacity and the intensity of their involvement with governing boards will act as a major constraint in impeding their assumption of this responsibility.

Since teachers have often complained about the rigidity of the *Basic School Regulations* (or *régimes pédagogiques*, as they are popularly known)¹ and, particularly in the anglophone sector, the lack of appropriate materials, timely translations, and proper training, a more supple approach to curriculum would normally be welcomed without reservation. Teachers view positively MEQ promises to introduce programs only when new and appropriate materials are available in English, and to pilot curriculum changes prior to full-scale implementation. It has been announced that the MEQ has set aside a \$10 million budget to assist school boards with the implementation, and particularly for purposes of re-training teachers. Also encouraging was the decision of the Education Minister to delay the implementation of the first phase of the curriculum reform by one year in light of feedback received from school boards and provincial teacher federations this past winter. While it is always gratifying to see the consultative process work at some level, considerable skepticism remains from the top-down approach of earlier curriculum changes. English sector teachers vividly remember being summoned to training sessions conducted in French or being left to their own devices in implementing changes for which there had been totally inadequate preparation.

Concerns about the future relevance of the new curriculum are not assuaged by the knowledge that teachers generally constitute a majority within the curriculum-writing committees that are now at work. The identities of the teachers appointed to these committees are largely unknown to their colleagues, since they are selected by the MEQ based upon the recommendation of school boards. It is ironic, that while parents have the right to choose their own representatives for writing curriculum, teachers are denied this possibility. This continuing exclu-

sion reinforces fear: that the top-down, fix-the-teacher approach of the 1980s still enjoys a certain currency within the MEQ bureaucracy.

If this latest curriculum reform is to be more than superficial in its classroom impact, a number of conditions must be met. First, the content and the overall philosophical approach must be grounded in the culture and traditions of the English community – one that is increasingly diverse in composition. Second, teachers must willingly embrace the curriculum as their own and use it as a point of departure for planning their own classes. Within a school, working by level or by subject, teacher teams will wish to work out a common or consistent approach. Consistency implies finding the time to meet and to plan methods of presentation, acquisition of teaching materials, and coordination in the evaluative approach. The third condition is the creation of a consensus, first among the school's educators and then an enlarged consensus involving the parents, concerning the results to be expected, the quality and quantity of the services needed to attain the results, and the method of reporting – to parents and to the community at large – on the degree of success observed.

Even if all these conditions could be satisfied, some skepticism would remain about whether or not pedagogical interests would have programming priority. Curriculum decisions generate debates about teaching time allocations and these, in turn, translate into staffing needs. Fluctuating staffing needs can result in some teachers losing their jobs in spite of individual talent, seniority and experience.

It is becoming evident in this round of negotiations that there is a fundamental tension, if not contradiction, between investing powers that have serious staffing implications in school-based bodies when the school board, not the school, remains the employer. As the employer, the school board depends upon provincial subsidies to provide the level of teaching resources required by each school in accordance with its educational project. By way of illustration, some English schools have traditionally provided considerably more physical education than the minimum provided in the *Basic School Regulations*. If these schools decide to add time and enrich objectives in other subject areas by reducing "phys ed" instruction, the school board will find itself with contractual commitments to more physical education specialists than required and incur a further obligation to engage additional teachers with qualifications in the subject that the school project wishes to emphasize. Since the MEQ budget rules generate grants for teachers based on pupil-teacher ratios rather than program needs (MEQ, Direc-

tion générale du financement et des équipements [DGFE], 1998a, 1998b), the ability of the school board, as employer, to provide the resources needed for each school to realize its educational project is called into question. Ultimately, in a system that allows each school to modify its course of studies annually, guarantees of employment security at the level of the school board will be subject to attack as unduly constraining and costly.

Curriculum reform, taken in the broadest sense of what students learn, and when and how they learn it, cannot ignore the rights and needs of students with special needs, understanding that it is the teacher who has the fundamental responsibility of translating broadly defined objectives into daily classroom reality.

Serving students with special needs

Law and regulation guarantee Québec students an array of rights to ensure their access to a free public education appropriate to their needs at the school closest to their residence. The school board is also required to adapt and enrich the objectives of instructional programs to meet the needs of students, from pre-school to adult, and to provide day care services upon request. For youth-sector students who have been identified as requiring special services as a result of physical or mental handicaps and disabilities, behavioral problems, and so forth, the obligations of the school board are more specific. The first obligation is to create an "Individualized Educational Plan" that is articulated at the level of the school under the direction of the principal and in collaboration with teachers, other professionals, the parents and where appropriate, the student himself or herself. Reports on the progress of these students are updated on a monthly basis, and an *ad hoc* committee created at the school level has the responsibility for recommending appropriate services and program adaptations and reviewing its recommendations periodically in light of the student's progress, or lack thereof.

The continuing orientation of the Ministry has been to favor as much as possible the increased integration of special-needs students in regular classes. Within limits that have been challenged as empirically insufficient, the MEQ also provides additional grants to school boards based upon the identification of these students. It has been observed that funding is particularly inadequate when school boards take the pragmatic approach of partial integration, recognizing that it is not always in the best interest of all at-risk students – or other students – to place them in regular classes. Recent revisions to the *Education Act* acknowl-

edge this pragmatic imperative, but also permit school boards to set up specialized, non-neighborhood schools to deliver special education services on a more efficient, regionalized basis. As school boards attempt to stretch their teacher envelopes to cope with specific educational projects, there could be a growing temptation to segregate special needs students in dedicated institutions, if only for purposes of economy.

Given the trend towards eliminating professional and support personnel at the board level, an increased burden falls on special education teachers, particularly with regard to liaison with parents and with community agencies offering social and health services to these students and their families. In addition, with more and more special needs students integrated into regular classes, especially at the elementary level, increasing numbers of special education teachers are being transformed into so-called resource teachers. Their primary responsibility is not specialized instruction but support for receiving teachers who may not have specific training to provide for the individualized needs of students who in another era would have found themselves in smaller, self-contained classes.

Although many teachers are loath to acknowledge philosophical opposition to integrating most special needs students, even ardent integrationists are vociferous in their complaints about inadequate support provided to the students and to themselves in regular class situations. Their discomfort is bound to increase as the government continues to reduce funding for the engagement of aides and technicians to accompany students with serious impediments and behavior problems throughout the school day. In some English school boards, the rate of identification of special-needs children approaches 20% (the provincial average for English schools is 15.5%, according to data appended to the draft policy on special education entitled *Adapting Our Schools to the Needs of All Students* [MEQ, 1999]). Depending on the model chosen for delivery of services, one may conclude that the typical integrated classroom will contain four or five students whose presence makes particular demands on the attention, expertise, and energy of the classroom teacher.

Although the content of this March 1999 policy draft is neither novel nor particularly controversial (perhaps because of its vagueness), it has elicited a rather hostile response from teacher organizations, whose current demand in provincial negotiations for increasing the resources provided by the government for special education has not been treated seriously either in the draft policy or at the negotiating table.

Since Michel Pagé's flamboyant stint as Minister of Education, public discourse has focused on the dropout rate as the key indicator of the health of the public secondary school sector. The second key indicator, at least for editorialists, is the comparison between the success rate in provincial examinations of public high schools and their private school counterparts, which enjoy the luxury of selecting their clientele. The appropriateness and fairness of such benchmarks is challenged by teacher organizations, and the statistical tables accompanying the draft policy on special education add substance to teachers' critiques. For example, between 1990-91 and 1997-98, the percentage of secondary students in regular classes diagnosed with severe learning disabilities increased by 71.4%. The comparable figures for those with behavioral difficulties show a 31.7% increase, and for those with mild intellectual impairments, a threefold increase! No matter how programs and methodologies are adapted to such students, not many will be able to pass standardized provincial exams in which the pass rate has itself been elevated from 50 to 60 per cent (MEQ, 1999). Such an observation does not attempt to take into account the disruptive impact resulting from the inclusion in regular high school classes of nearly 40% of the student population diagnosed with behavioral difficulties.

While not everyone will agree with the boycott of discussions of special education policy recently instituted by teacher organizations, this action must be understood as a response to a government that is far more generous in extending rights and heightening expectations of what schools can accomplish than it is in providing schools with the resources needed to translate expectations into reality.

GOVERNANCE

School-based reform

It must be admitted that the government has delivered on its promise of significant decentralization, to an extent that has surprised skeptics. The scope and significance of the powers that governing boards may exercise has been ably explained elsewhere in this issue (Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999). The powers granted to governing boards have not come at the expense of the Ministry's authority in matters of determining compulsory subjects, minimum time allocations, certification of teachers, criteria for issuing diplomas, developing a list of appropriate texts and, of course, the power to tax and to spend. Most of the new powers acquired by the governing board have been at the expense of

school boards. Their role becomes essentially administrative. The pedagogical aspect is retained primarily in the sense of monitoring and approving the initiatives taken at school level and attempting to manage its personnel.

It is too early to say if governing boards will actually exercise the full range of powers conferred upon them, given that most school boards have utilized their authority to defer the delegation of powers relating to curriculum to the 1999-2000 school year.

The answer to the question of how successful governing boards have been in utilizing their current powers varies considerably from institution to institution. Generally, it appears that the possibility of serving on a school governing board has elicited a positive response from parents and, in most cases that I have observed, elections were required. The level of teacher interest has also been considerable even though governing boards generally meet at least once per month at night and offer no perquisites or even reimbursement of basic expenses, such as travel.

Some governing boards have functioned in relative harmony from the outset, while others hosted rancorous debate about the correct application of the *Education Act* in order to determine whether certain topics were within their mandate. Many governing boards have become bogged down in administrative detail, seemingly unable to appreciate their role as a "board of directors" establishing overall orientations for the school. In these cases, principals, who might otherwise believe that their role has been enhanced by the importance accorded to them in the curriculum reform as pedagogical leaders, are complaining that governing boards are attempting to usurp their authority to direct the day-to-day operation of the school.

Some of the confusion over the role and responsibilities of the governing board can be attributed to the inadequate training of parent representatives on governing boards who are assuming these responsibilities for the first time. From the teacher perspective, local efforts to prepare teacher representatives for their new responsibilities were effectively supported by our provincial association (Québec Provincial Association of Teachers [QPAT]), which assigned a team from its professional staff to provide training to teachers in a multiple workshop format within the nine anglophone school boards. These formal sessions were supplemented by extensive documentation, timely updates on specific topics, and a consultation service by which any teacher elected to a

governing board could receive interpretations and practical tips on any issues that arose.

Regrettably, parents seem not to have had access to this same level of training and ongoing support. Although the MEQ and the provincial body representing parents have made some efforts, these initiatives were not systematically complemented by equivalent training and support from English school boards. This training disparity has not gone unnoticed, and it is expected that QPAT will respond positively to parental requests for comparable training to supplement the informal sharing of documentation by teacher representatives that has already taken place.

For these bodies to succeed, there will have to be continuity of representation, particularly that of staff, whose mandates are annual ones. It remains to be seen to what extent teachers, in particular, not all of whom have had a positive experience in this first year, are willing to continue their participation in 1999-2000. In provincial negotiations, the unions have asked that there be some contractual recognition of the commitment of time and effort required to function effectively as teacher representatives at the governing board but, so far, there has been no employer response. Many of these teacher representatives also assume additional leadership responsibilities at the level of the school, their union, and at the school board and, despite perceiving the inter-relatedness of these multiple tasks, find it difficult to sustain the effort and find the time required by these activities.

Just what are these additional teacher responsibilities? At the level of the school, the law and the collective agreement provide for a teacher consultative body that generally takes the form of a school council whose members, typically numbering from four to twelve, depending upon the size and level of the school, (according to the applicable local agreement) are elected annually and meet at least once per month. Depending upon the nature of the topic, the school council is either consulted on a matter to be proposed by the principal to the governing board or is expected to generate proposals for approval by the principal. In addition, the school council, under the collective agreement, has been given additional responsibilities quite diverse in nature.

Teachers also represent their collective interests at the level of the school board where parity committees have been established to review educational policies, to devise recommendations specific to meeting

the specific needs of students with handicaps and disabilities, to consider difficulties arising from the application of the provincial and local agreements, and to create policies and to make joint decisions concerning the expenditure of grants received for the professional improvement of teachers. In addition to these permanent committees, *ad hoc* committees are frequently established to involve teachers in the design of report cards, the application of information technology, and the overall objectives of the program of studies at the elementary and the secondary level.

School boards are under increasing pressure and scrutiny to downsize the scope of their operations, if only to liberate more discretionary funds for schools. As board services are pared down, teachers will increasingly be called upon to fill any gaps with their expertise. For example, some English boards are choosing to minimize the number of curriculum consultants or to eliminate them entirely. It is expected that some of their duties will ultimately be assumed by teachers who are either occasionally released from their teaching responsibilities or who could receive a reduced teaching workload for this purpose.

An analysis of the employer position with respect to teacher workload and qualifications reveals an excessive decentralizing zeal. Left unchecked, the result could be a loosely-linked network of schools rather than a local school system that is coherent in approach and equitable in its allocation of resources. Although an educational project, according to the *Education Act*, is meant to reflect a consensus of the entire school community, in reality, such a project may be imposed by a single parental vote against the will of a majority of the teachers. In the employer offer, the teaching staff would be required under the new collective agreement to agree in writing to adhere to the alternative character of the school as established by the governing board. As for teacher workload norms, the employer offer reveals a comprehensive quest for virtually unlimited flexibility. Some teachers could find themselves teaching as little as 20% of the time and being assigned other unspecified duties for the duration, while colleagues could be required to fill the gap in classroom hours by teaching longer than was previously possible. Class size maxima could be ignored without financial penalty if that is the type of school organization model required by the educational project.

It should be underlined that this hard-line employer stance followed a union overture that took into account the need for greater flexibility in determining teacher workloads in order to make decentralization mean-

ingful. The unions' approach is to permit local agreements with the school board – which is, after all, the employer – to derogate from provincial norms. Instead, the employer offer places this considerable power almost exclusively in the hands of the governing board. In the employer model, the professional influence of teachers, acting collectively or collegially, is diluted, and the role of the school board as the local educational authority is minimized. Such an eventuality takes on an additional importance when viewed through the prism of the commission studying local funding of municipalities – and by extension local funding of education (Commission nationale sur les finances et la fiscalité locales, 1999), wherein the local educational authority would be subsumed in new municipal structures responsible for a whole range of services beyond education. Moreover, by making the school the locus of significant decision-making that affects job security and working conditions, unions are diminished in importance, setting the stage for a renewed push by the government to create a professional corporation for teachers as an alternative collective voice.

TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM

Throughout the preceding sections, one of the motifs has been how changes in what is taught and in how schools are managed imply new responsibilities for teachers. But have teachers been adequately prepared to meet this new set of challenges? Beginning in the 1993-1994 school year, the MEQ began preparing a set of teacher education reforms that appear to mesh remarkably well with subsequent reforms (see MEQ, 1992).

The reform of initial teacher training was based upon the premise that the existing three year bachelor's degree was too narrow in its focus and did not permit an adequate and closely supervised classroom internship. This conclusion is supported anecdotally by new teachers. They frequently maintain that their real initiation into teaching was of the "hit-and-miss" variety and did not really begin until they were thrown into a classroom situation for which they were incompletely prepared. Further, they report that their personal growth as professionals seemed to be of little concern to administrators and their own colleagues. It remains true today that newly hired teachers are often called upon to fill holes left in the school's master teaching schedule. This means that they have diverse preparations in several subjects or levels, often outside their university concentration. Despite MEQ probation regulations that require ongoing supervision and feedback from school administra-

tors regarding their teaching practices over a period of at least two and sometimes three years, the overwhelming impression of beginning teachers is that they are left to sink or swim. In the end, virtually all "succeed" in their probation and shortly thereafter receive their permanent teaching licenses along with security of employment (tenure).

It is fair to say that the new teacher training programs were introduced after extensive consultation and dialogue with the provincial teacher federations, the universities and the school boards. The English universities were the most reticent partner, and delayed the implementation of the new training programs by several years. The Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers [PAPT] (now QPAT) found much to commend in the proposals but criticized initial plans by the MEQ for teachers to develop in as many as three specialties. The PAPT accepted the addition of a fourth year of almost purely practical teaching activities but expressed concern over the elimination of the alternative program that allowed a student with a Bachelor's Degree to take a one-year diploma course to prepare for a teaching career. Also gratifying was the recognition promised by the MEQ for teachers assisting in the professional development, certification, and ultimately, integration of new members into the profession. It was promised that classroom teachers who met suggested criteria would receive training in supervising interns and also benefit from a lighter workload (MEQ 1994). This generally positive teacher response was tinged with some apprehension over the notion of multiple qualifications or specializations, for at least two reasons. At the secondary level, "polyvalence" was perceived as a move away from the teacher-as-scholar paradigm: a pedagogue with a deep knowledge and infectious enthusiasm for a particular discipline. Instead, the model offered was that of a generalist skilled in teaching techniques but with a somewhat superficial knowledge of the discipline.

Moreover, there was a long-term concern about the effect that multiple specializations might have on the system of workload organization and job security that is very much based upon fields or categories of teaching, with the notion that the ideal is to specialize in one discipline. Within that discipline, relative seniority determines who is transferred or not re-hired when the number of teachers exceeds the needs, as when enrolment declines.

In the French Catholic sector, the reform of teacher education and certification aroused enthusiasm among grassroots teachers who registered their interest to act as assisting teachers with their employers and the universities in impressive proportions. The French universities, in

contrast to their English counterparts, quickly brought forth new programs that were swiftly approved by the MEQ. Supporting this initiative, the MEQ provided subsidies to school boards at the rate of \$1200 per student teacher accepted under the new four-year program and \$300 per trainee under the old programs that were being phased out at varying rates. (The introduction of some of the specialty programs was delayed.) Many local unions affiliated with the Central de l'enseignement du Québec [CEQ] and school boards were able to reach agreements that set forth the rules for the selection of assisting teachers and defined the conditions attached to their new responsibilities. Following suggestions contained in MEQ policy documents on teacher training, Catholic school boards typically designated board officials whose job was to coordinate the placement of student teachers and to administer the funds provided by the MEQ for this purpose, often jointly with the local union. Some compensatory released time and honoraria were provided, and universities were able to offer on-site training and orientation programs to those assisting teachers who preferred not to attend the specialized training courses offered on campus. Ultimately, the notion of compensation and recognition was included in an appendix to the CEQ provincial *Entente*,² and was added to the list of teacher obligations found in the *Education Act* (s. 22(6.1)).

Over the next four years, MEQ subsidies were cut back dramatically to \$1000, then to \$600, then to \$540 per trainee. Under current MEQ funding rules, the *per capita* allocation is not established until the end of the year in which the training takes place, making planning problematic. The universities joined the teachers in resisting these cutbacks, and the CEQ unions used the threat of a boycott to slow the pace of the cuts, but could not in the end block the elimination of these earmarked grants.

Throughout this period, the English sector lagged far behind for several reasons. First, was the slow pace of implementation on the part of the English universities, which continued to churn out graduates under the old three-year baccalaureate. At the Protestant negotiating table, school boards were reluctant to accept the notion of compensation for assisting teachers, insisting instead upon *recognition*. By that time, the subsidies were disappearing and the Protestant, and now English school boards, uniformly dragged their feet in establishing ententes with their local unions to create a framework for the implementation of the new supervision model. Even where agreements had been reached, they were not implemented and in some cases, were disavowed by the successor lin-

guistic school board. English boards have continued the tradition of allowing individual schools to make their own contacts with the universities to set up internships on a strictly ad hoc basis. It is not clear if their refusal to comply with MEQ suggestions to appoint a school board official to coordinate training at the board level was a matter of ideology, a reflection of a scarcity of personnel, or simply, a manifest lack of interest.

Whatever the causes, the result has been that the reality of initial teacher-training activities in English school boards has changed very little, as has teachers' perception of their professional responsibilities. In my opinion, a great opportunity for teacher empowerment has been missed and the mistake is likely to reassert itself in curriculum development. Teachers who have been denied professional empowerment will not readily accept leadership responsibilities for shaping the curriculum at the level of the school.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Implications for classroom practice

The continual reform of education has focused intense public attention on how teachers perform and how their work should be recognized and rewarded. Each set of reforms has served to heighten expectations about what schools can accomplish, ironically during a twenty-year period of declining investment by the Québec government in its school system. What has largely been ignored is how the role of the teacher has been expanded and rendered more complex by successive reforms, to the point where it has been repeatedly demonstrated that less than half of the time that teachers work is actually comprised of what is commonly understood to be teaching: that is, classroom contact with students. As programs become more demanding, in terms of learning outcomes that will be rigorously evaluated, teachers have to devote more time both to preparation and to updating their qualifications, frequently at their own initiative. As classrooms grow in heterogeneity, both in terms of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and in terms of students with various handicaps and disabilities, teachers have to modify their approaches to suit disparate needs. As support services are reduced and textbooks (particularly in English schools) are in short supply, teachers must find and create their own didactic materials, taking care not to violate copyright law. As parents and community representatives become increasingly responsible for shaping the individual character and mission

of the local school, teachers must find the time to build effective working partnerships and to act as the essential pedagogical resource at the school level. Finally, as the profession renews itself and older teachers retire in significant numbers, teachers are asked to assume training and mentoring responsibilities.

Although this additional and more intensive training is government-mandated, it is inadequately supported. As a final ironic twist, funding for professional improvement, after being reduced in recent years by 50%, is only now returning to the level established at the beginning of this decade. The only sustained and comprehensive effort to stimulate the interest of all anglophone teachers in their professional growth originates with their provincial association, which organizes an annual convention, attended by about 3000 members in Montréal each November, on diverse pedagogical themes – without government or school board subsidy.

Implications for policy making

The basic theme of all these policy changes and reforms has been to make the school the pivot of the educational system, while casting the Ministry of Education and the school boards as supporting players. If this new organizational model is to succeed – where success is defined as bringing about measurable positive outcomes in the learning of children – teachers will have to be more than supportive and collaborative. They will have to embrace wholeheartedly their new role and the multiplicity of the complex responsibilities that have been described throughout this article.

At this juncture, policy makers need to confront the reality that the typical classroom teacher has only a partial understanding of the implications of the torrent of current reforms, coupled with a deep suspicion of the government's intentions. Could it be otherwise, given the history of years of compounding cutbacks and the top-down reforms of the 80s, during which teachers were treated as the problem, not the solution? The only time that teachers were seen as the solution was when the government called upon them to agree to cut the benefits of their collective agreement in order to reduce the deficit.

Conclusion

In my judgment, despite the considerable intrinsic merit of the reforms currently underway or under development, the existing adversarial relationship between the provincial teacher federations and the gov-

ernment is too deep-rooted and too intense for much progress to be made in the current context. While holding the Estates General on Education in 1996 had a certain utility, it failed to generate an improved atmosphere and more productive relationships among the educational partners. A better working relationship between teacher organizations and the government remains as vital as it is elusive if a reform of this magnitude is to achieve its objectives.

Recognizing the enormity of this obstacle, there appears to be a renewed interest within the MEQ to establish a professional corporation of teachers to serve as a pedagogical interlocutor. At an abstract level, one can recognize the advantages of separating professional interests from union ones. Obviously, it is easier to reach agreement on curriculum changes if one does not have to discuss a potential loss of jobs that could flow from these changes. The reality, however, is that entertaining the possibility of imposing a professional corporation – a move that would meet with fierce resistance – compounds the problem of mistrust. Teachers appear to have confidence in their unions to promote the full spectrum of their interests, including *the defence of their professional autonomy*. On the other hand, teachers have not held the expectation that their unions will act as vehicles for bringing about changes in professional practices. Thus, Québec teacher unions have been placed in the role of defenders of the status quo in the face of demands for reform that originated from outside the ranks of teachers, as pointed out at the beginning of this article.

The reforms described in this article are coherent and comprehensive. Their breadth and the pace of implementation almost justifies talking about a revolution in Québec education – at least on paper. Whether the promise of this revolution can be fulfilled hinges upon the ability of teachers and the government to transcend a history of conflict and mistrust and build a very different working relationship over the next several years.

NOTES

¹ *Basic School Regulation for Preschool and Elementary School Education; Basic School Regulation for Secondary School Education.*

² See *Entente Between the Employer Bargaining Committee for Catholic School Boards (CPNCC) and the Central de l'enseignement du Québec (CEQ)*, 1996.

REFERENCES

Basic School Regulation for Preschool and Elementary School Education, O.C. 73-90, 24 January 1990, G.O.Q. 1990.II.435, as subsequently amended.

Basic School Regulation for Secondary School Education, O.C. 74-90, 24 January 1990, G.O.Q. 1990.II.440, as subsequently amended

Education Act, R.S.Q. c. I-13.3.

Commission for the Estates General on Education. (1996). *Renewing our education system: Ten priority actions*. (Final report of the Commission for the Estates General on Education). Québec: Author.

Commission nationale sur les finances et la fiscalité locales. (1999). *Pact 2000*. Québec: Government of Québec.

Entente Between the Employer Bargaining Committee for Catholic School Boards (CPNCC) and the Central de l'enseignement du Québec (CEQ), 1 July 1995 to 30 June 1999 (including subsequent amendments).

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. (1992). *The challenge of teaching today and tomorrow*. Québec: Author.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. (1994). *Teacher training: The practicum*. Québec: Author.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. (1997). *Québec schools on course: Educational policy statement*. Québec: Author.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. (1999). *Adapting our schools to the needs of all students* (Draft policy on special education). Québec: Author.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Direction générale du financement et des équipements. (1998a). *Règles budgétaires pour l'année scolaire 1998-99: Commissions scolaires*. Québec: Author.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Direction générale du financement et des équipements. (1998b). *Règles budgétaires pour l'année scolaire 1998-1999: Commissions scolaires: Document complémentaire sur la méthode de calcul des paramètres d'allocation*. Québec: Author.

Smith, W.J., Foster, W.F. & Donahue, M.H. (1999). The transformation of educational governance in Québec: A reform whose time has finally come. *McGill Journal of Education*, 34, 207-226.

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

MICHAEL WIENER is the President of the Laurier Teachers Union.

MICHAEL WIENER est président du syndicat des enseignantes et enseignants Laurier.

INDICATORS AND "CAN OPENERS" – MEASURING SCHOOL QUALITY

Indicators are meant to tell us something useful about a school's performance, often for purposes of accountability. MacBeath expands this traditional perspective that indicators are simply a means for calling schools to account:*

While indicators are, for accountability purposes, seen as measures, for development purposes they are more useful as can openers. In the latter capacity they allow teachers (or parents, students or school boards) to move to more concise, critical and shared definitions of "success," "achievement" and "performance." It supports that most significant of paradigm shifts – from teaching to learning. . . . The most important outcome has been the embedding of a self-evaluation approach within the day-to-day life of the school. The ritual justification – "that's just the way we do things around here" – is replaced by the question – "how are we doing?" – a question to which people seek an answer as a matter of routine.

However, as promising as self-assessment may be, it is not an easy process:**

School self-evaluation is complex. Formal and informal data collection is an important and vital part of the school development planning process, and yet, as we have noted, gut reaction is still often used to determine areas of need and evaluate the success of goal-setting endeavours. Ongoing monitoring of implementation of goal strategies needs to be stressed to ensure that the process works well and that it achieves its intended outcomes. . . . There is a danger, if priorities are not properly evaluated, that the school will just move on to another priority with no systems in place to ensure that the current priority is embedded into the general work of the school and receives the necessary maintenance support.

* MacBeath, J., *Using school performance indicators in school self-evaluation* (Paper presented at a seminar sponsored by the Office of Research on Educational Policy, McGill University, 1996), p. 1.

** Stoll, L. & Fink, D., *Changing our schools: Linking school effectiveness and school improvement* (Buckingham UK: Open University Press, 1996), p. 72.